

Mentoring in School – Makes for Better Lessons

Three years ago, newly qualified teacher Gita was very enthusiastic at the prospect of starting work at a school in Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh Province. After training as a maths teacher at the Teacher Training Institute, she was adamant she would give her pupils a better future by ensuring they got good lessons.

But after just a few weeks, Gita recalls how disenchanted she was with reality. ‘The classroom is very small and there are a lot of pupils. Some of them learn quickly but with others, I have to go over everything several times before they remember it. These children won’t be able to learn how to do their sums if I explain everything to them just once or twice. I wasn’t prepared for these difficulties at all and really began to struggle.’

Gita became increasingly frustrated. But last year, Dari teacher Muhmena became Gita’s mentor. Muhmena is an experienced educator who has worked in the profession for ten years. Muhmena can totally relate to her young colleague’s frustration, as she also had to cope with similar difficulties when she first started teaching. So when her head teacher asked her to train as a mentor she accepted with pleasure. ‘I knew all about the concerns and needs that teachers have when they are first starting out. But my mentor training has taught me how to give these young people the guidance they need. For example, in training we talked about how important it is to build up trust with new teachers, to encourage them and be there for them,’ To date, more than 150 teachers have taken part in this five-day training course. Muhmena also learned how to talk about individual lessons with her young colleagues and to review their performance with them. When one of her mentees asks for her advice, she will often go and sit in on a lesson. Once the lesson is over, she reflects on it together with her mentee and discusses what went well and why other things did not work out as planned. An old hand at teaching, Muhmena states clearly that, ‘I don’t say something is right or wrong. Instead, we work through the weak points together. I think this approach allows me to pass on my experience and enables newcomers to become really good teachers in a short space of time

The German Government has been assisting Afghanistan to reform and improve basic education since 2005. The mentoring programme is part of this cooperation. Experienced teaching professionals are on hand to provide their young colleagues with competent assistance. Fresh out of teacher training, they lack practical experience. They do not really know how to prepare their lessons properly, how to deal with disruptive pupils or how to



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motivate the children they teach. ‘With us mentors, these young teachers have someone at their side they can trust. They don’t have the feeling they are utterly alone with a mountain of challenges stacked up against them. They can ask us anything and everything,’ says Muhmena. After her initial reticence, Gita now trusts Muhmena completely. This young teacher quickly learned that she is not the only one who does not know how the school’s administrative procedures work or what goes into proper lesson preparation and which educational methods are best suited to which context – a list that could go on forever. In Muhmena’s opinion, this is completely normal: ‘In training, it’s all pure theory. The way you observe and assess pupils and kindle their enthusiasm for learning are not things you learn in training. You need experience for that. That’s why I think it’s great that I can share my experience with young teachers.’

At least twice a week, Muhmena gets together with her four mentees for a chat – she mentors another three young teachers besides Gita. Here, the women share their experience, discuss the difficulties they are facing and search for a solution. Satisfied, Gita looks back over her recent months of mentoring on the programme. ‘Whenever I have any questions or difficulties, I can always go to Muhmena, even when we don’t have a meeting planned. To date, she’s always been able to help me. Another good thing about the programme is that I’ve got to know Muhmena’s other mentees really well. We’ve established great working relationships and often help each other out.’

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