Students' learning outcomes from being a mentor in the Nightingale Mentoring Programme for Adult Refugees in Norway

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aimed to identify and describe how mentoring influences the mentor, by operationalising and specifying learning outcomes involved in mentoring.

Design/methodology/approach – This study used an action research approach, by uniting theory and practice to explore new ways of learning and evolve the field of practice in education. Thematic analysis was used to identify and organise patterns or themes that emerged from the data.

Findings – The results showed that mentoring changed the mentors' perspectives towards improved understanding, more flexibility and approval of other cultures. It seems that mentoring expanded the mentors' search for values, wishes and resources, including an awareness that our values, wishes and needs are more similar than different. Mentoring also seems to have improved the ability to reformulate, be flexible, strive to optimise user engagement and engage with people as they are, based on their own prerequisites.

Research limitations/implications – The low number of participants means the results cannot be generalised, and voluntary participation may have led to more motivated involvement and positive results.

Practical implications – This study shows that mentoring has had an impact on students' development of intercultural competence and cultural sensitivity through regular meetings with individuals from a different cultural background. Mentoring seems to have revealed insights into underlying prejudices and changed perspectives towards better understanding, thus increased acceptance of other cultures.

Originality/value – Search for similar studies shows a lack of research that operationalises and specifies the learning outcomes that mentors gain from being a mentor.

Keywords Mentoring, Higher education, Learning outcomes, Intercultural communication, Intercultural competence, Cultural sensitivity, Professional identity

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Globalisation entails a rapidly growing focus on internationalisation in education to prepare students for a future where local and global issues are connected. This requires competence to

better understand and respect people from different cultures in a diverse and multicultural society (Crowther *et al.*, 2000).

Professional studies in Norway are encouraged in order to initiate methods that promote development of knowledge and require increased innovation in learning practices (Kårstein and Caspersen, 2014; Ministry of Education and Research, 2012; The Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions, 2016). Furthermore, national regulations for education of social workers emphasise the importance of learning outcomes that promote knowledge about diversity, inclusion, equal opportunities, non-discrimination, relations and communication skills (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017), which are necessary skills in a multicultural professional practice. Yet, development of intercultural competence is not necessarily a process that has to take place far away but can be evolved into local community-based activities (Prieto-Flores *et al.*, 2016).

This article analyses how work and welfare students experience development of intercultural competence, cultural sensitivity, intercultural communication and professional identity through participating in the community-based Nightingale Mentoring Programme for Adult Refugees. The study investigates mentoring as a learning arena and aims to specify learning outcomes that students achieve through mentoring. A key characteristic of the Nightingale Mentoring Programme is to create a mutual learning context, by facilitating meetings between mentors (students) and mentees (refugees), where they can interact, get to know each other and gain insights into the world of their counterpart (Sild Lönroth, 2007).

Ørmen and Simensen (2016) suggest that mentoring as a method complements lectures to promote development of professional competence for students. Also, Grander and Sild Lönroth (2011) claim that mentoring gives students a competence they could not possibly acquire through traditional lectures alone. This study attempts to concretise the learning outcomes by using action research and thematic analysis (TA) to convey the mentors' own experiences.

Purpose of study

Most studies on mentoring refer to the benefits of *having* a mentor, whereas the benefits of *being* a mentor have been ignored (Allen, 2007; Allen *et al.*, 2008; Caldarella *et al.*, 2010; Ghosh and Reio, 2013). Some empirical research studies suggest that mentoring has a positive impact on mentors (Evans, 2005; Karcher, 2009), and Allen *et al.* (1997) point to learning as one of the most marked findings in their study on mentoring. However, Allen (2007) calls for studies that identify and specify the learning outcomes, as many studies on mentoring focus on individual variables such as age, gender and motivation to become mentors but lack focus on what mentors gain in terms of knowledge and skills (Allen, 2007; Allen *et al.*, 2008; Janssen *et al.*, 2014; Norwegian Knowledge Centre for the Health Services, 2012).

During the preliminary research on literature about mentoring as an arena for learning, we found nothing that matched our specific approach; thus, a research librarian was hired to lead the search for similar studies and map previous research on the subject. The search was conducted in Academic Search Premier, PubMed and Eric, limited to peer-reviewed articles in English or the Nordic languages. The search was based on keywords such as "mentoring in education", "student mentor", "peer mentoring program/programme", combined with "professional development", "professional identity", "professional outcome", "self-efficacy", "personal outcome", "learning outcome", "role modelling", "self-regulated learning", "ethnic groups", "minorities", "immigrants" and "refugees". The results showed numerous articles on peer mentoring among students and teacher/student mentoring. However, there was a gap in research on how mentoring in education can promote learning for the person who holds the mentor role and, accordingly, an operationalization and specification of the learning outcomes involved. Therefore, it seems necessary to explore the learning outcomes for mentors from being a mentor.

The study addressed the research question: "What are the students' learning outcomes from being a mentor in the Nightingale Mentoring Programme for Adult Refugees in Norway?"

Mentoring as a learning arena

Mentoring as a learning arena can be organised and formalised to a varying degree. Informal mentoring relates to casual meetings where mentor relationships arise, while formalised mentoring is more structured and organised (Mathisen, 2008). This mentor programme is based on Parsloe and Wray's (2000) definition, where the purpose of mentoring is "to help and support people to manage their own learning in order that they may maximise their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance, and enable them to become the person they want to be" (p. 22).

Mentoring is contextual, and our understanding of the concept is seen in conjunction with the context in which the mentor relationship evolves. Grander and Sild Lönroth (2011) claim that mentoring can be an educational measure that promotes involvement, attentiveness and trust, and helps students to be more action oriented. Ørmen and Simensen (2016) describe mentor meetings as practice-based teaching that facilitates in-depth learning, and Pettersen (2005) claims that a practice-based context may help elaborate knowledge and increase the quality of learning outcomes.

The Nightingale mentoring programme

The original Nightingale Mentoring Programme was founded at Malmö University, Sweden, in 1997, as a formalised community-based mentoring programme with structured guidelines for recruitment, mentor meetings, monthly reports, and supervision of the mentors (cf. The Nightingale Manual, 2008–2009). Here, university students apply to become mentors for children of migrant backgrounds, where mentoring takes place in one-on-one meetings on a weekly basis over a given period. The twofold aim is, on the one hand, to strengthen the children's linguistic skills, school motivation and self-confidence through new experiences and knowledge in relationship with the student and, on the other hand, to strengthen the students' cultural sensitivity and multicultural competence through being a role model in relationship with the child, and thereby increase knowledge, understanding and empathy for different life conditions (Sild Lönroth, 2007). Research and reports about the Nightingale Mentoring Programme in childcare studies show that this mentor programme contains the necessary tools and potential to safeguard the interests of both mentors and mentees (Bakketeig *et al.*, 2011; Jessen *et al.*, 2018; Ørmen and Simensen, 2016; Sánchez-Aragón *et al.*, 2020; Sild Lönroth, 2007; The Nightingale Manual, 2008–2009) and can easily be adjusted to encompass adults.

The Nightingale Mentoring Programme for Adult Refugees

The Nightingale Mentoring Programme for Adult Refugees was established in 2016 in close cooperation with an introduction programme for refugees in a community nearby. It follows the same manual as the original international Nightingale programme, with necessary adjustments for our target group (cf. The Nightingale Manual, 2008–2009).

Establishment of the Nightingale Mentoring Programme for Adult Refugees is based on a combination of three factors. First, it is based on the national regulations for a common curriculum in health and social care education in Norway, which highlights the importance of learning outcomes on diversity and inclusion, equal opportunity, non-discrimination, relationship, communication and supervisory skills (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). Second, it is a stated political goal that refugees with residence permits in Norway as

far as possible should be integrated into the labour market (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2016) even though many refugees experience challenges related to language, competence, networking and knowledge about social and cultural codes, which often lead to discrimination in the labour market. Third, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2016) claims that integration of immigrants is a reciprocal process that requires openness and cultural sensitivity on the part of the majority population.

The overall goals for this mentor programme are centred on the development of mutual understanding of each other's cultural framework to promote inclusion, aiming to:

(1) Strengthen the self-esteem of both mentors and mentees through meeting people from different cultural backgrounds and increasing a mutual cultural understanding;

(2) Help the mentees gain insight and knowledge about the Norwegian education system and labour market, thus reducing the time it takes to get into education or work;

(3) Help the mentors gain a greater understanding of the obstacles that make the mentees' access to education and the labour market difficult, thus inspiring the mentors to facilitate this access in their future professional role.

Mentor meetings
The mentor meetings were conducted in groups of two mentors and four mentees, with meetings taking place three hours each week from the beginning of November to the end of March (excluding public holidays). The rationale for mentor *groups* was that in our student groups, young women constitute the majority, as opposed to the group of refugees where young men often constitute the majority. Thus, to avoid unfavourable situations, group meetings were our solution to ensure both mentors and mentees. The first meeting was conducted as a joint gathering, with two assistant professors in charge of the mentoring programme and employees from the introduction programme present, all combined with a free lunch. The purpose was to make all those involved during the start-up meeting feel secure and the situation as comfortable as possible.

Activities in the mentor meetings were intended to be linked to the overall goals and focus on subjects such as how to create a CV and job application, practising and preparing for job interviews, participating in relevant lectures and conferences at the university, and practising and expanding the mentees' vocabulary in the Norwegian language. Expectations were that each mentor group would plan activities based on the mentees' interests and needs, with minimal interference from the lecturers in charge. The mentors were responsible for identifying the mentees' wishes, needs, and goals and to plan and carry out activities in line with the intentions and goals of the Nightingale Mentoring Programme, as well as evaluating and changing the course if necessary. Our role was to facilitate the activities they wanted to undertake within a regulatory framework and budget and to ensure that the activities were linked to the goals of the programme.

Method
Action research
The action research approach in this article unites theory and practice to try out new ways to learn professional skills and to evolve the field of practice in education. Feldman and Minstrell (2000) talk about action research as developmental, with two main purposes. One is to improve student learning by improving teaching practice, and the second is to seek an improved understanding of the educational situations where they teach, to become part of knowledge-based teaching and learning. McNiff (2017) claims that educational action research is seen as a method for real-world social change. In this study, action research was

found to be suitable for investigating whether mentoring could be a new way to provide meaningful learning outcomes for our students.

Action research also may contain a reciprocal collaboration between an inside and an outside team (McNiff, 2017); in this study, we collaborated with a team at an introduction programme in a community close by. However, our respondents were students; thus, as inside researchers, we followed their process throughout the programme by collecting data and searching for learning outcomes in the monthly reports, supervision sessions and the SurveyMonkey at the end of the programme.

Data collection through individual and group supervision, where the mentors are supervised by the researchers, is a reciprocal relationship between researchers and respondents which, according to Postholm (2007), is a collective term for action research and action learning. The basis for a mutual relationship between researchers and respondents is that the research question can arise from the mentors as well as from the researchers (Postholm, 2007).

Recruitment and selection
Second-year students from the Bachelor programme in work and welfare were invited to an information meeting and presented the purpose of the Nightingale Mentoring Programme for Adult Refugees. They were informed about the meeting frequency, length of weekly meetings and the mentoring programme in total, what was expected according to monthly reports, and mandatory participation in supervision sessions. The students who volunteered committed to invest three hours every week, on top of their studies and other obligations, with no other benefits attached than to develop and practise important skills as future professionals.

The students had to apply to become a mentor, using a customised version of the application form from The Nightingale Manual (2008–2009). Thereafter, they were interviewed based on a formalised interview guide, and they went through a background check to be approved as mentors. If for any reason a student was found not to be suitable as a mentor, they would not be included in the mentor programme, which was not an issue in this group. Otherwise, there was no inclusion/exclusion criteria defined in the recruitment process. The recruitment resulted in 12 mentors (and 24 mentees) who were matched in mentor groups consisting of two mentors and four mentees in each group.

Monthly report
The mentors agreed to deliver monthly reports, with a submission deadline each month. The reports were manual based and demanded a description of activities in the meetings, reflections about their experiences, and an evaluation of each meeting (cf. The Nightingale Manual, 2008–2009). This encouraged the mentors to linger a bit on how they experienced the meetings and to reflect on their own performance and how they could improve their skills for future meetings.

Supervision
The mentors agreed to participate in two individual supervisions and three group supervisions where all 12 mentors were gathered. The supervisions were carried out by the two assistant professors in charge of the programme, and they were supervised by a colleague with eight years of experience from the original Nightingale Mentoring Programme for children from minority families.

The Nightingale Manual (2008–2009) contains a list of themes for the supervisions, such as goals, experiences, challenges in building relations, language, cultural differences, mentor role, moral dilemmas, planning and implementation of activities, group matching, and overall

expectations. At this point, we chose to deviate from the manual and keep the themes as a backup in case the mentors did not bring up themes by themselves. We wanted the mentors to speak freely and bring up the themes that were most important to them at that moment, without limitations. Every group session was preceded by encouraging each mentor to describe the most essential topics to them at that moment; then, the group agreed on what topics they wanted to discuss in plenary. Also, the individual sessions were led by the mentors' own needs for supervision.

Data collection
The data material comprises audio recordings from the three group supervision sessions, transcripts of the recordings, the supervisors' own notes from the individual supervision sessions, and the mentors' monthly reports. The final evaluation was conducted by a questionnaire (SurveyMonkey), where the mentors graded different statements on a scale from 1 to 7. The statements aimed to survey the mentors' subjective experiences of learning outcomes due to increased consciousness and knowledge about subjects such as relations, communication, social rules, culture, and traditions. The questionnaire also gave an opportunity to freely reflect on relevant topics such as communication, culture, and the immigrants' situations. All the data material was reviewed during the TA.

Ethical approval
The data material of this study was collected before the new GDPR regulations were put into effect on 25 May 2018 (General Data Protection Regulation, n.d.) and complied with the ethical guidelines found in the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD, n.d.). As this study did not contain any sensitive information about the respondents, registration in the NSD database was not required.

Nevertheless, it appears that our data collection was in compliance with GDPR, as all respondents signed a consent form and freely gave specific written, informed and unambiguous consent before participating in this study. The consent form informed participants who was responsible for the study, the purpose, what data material we planned to use, who would have access to the data material, and how it would be stored. The written consent also pointed out that participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without justification. The data material was read only by the research group, and the respondents were anonymised and treated confidentially.

Thematic analysis
TA was chosen as a method to identify patterns and to analyse, organise and describe the themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In our quest to uncover learning outcomes as experienced by the mentors, we found TA useful to examine the respondents' perspectives, highlight similarities and differences, and generate unanticipated insights (King, 2004). Braun and Clark (2012) claim that when we search for shared meaning and experiences, TA can identify how respondents talk about a topic and give meaning to common features in the data. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that categorisation of data involves value-laden assumptions and interpretation of what the data really means and makes coding a part of the analysis.

Identifying themes within the data material in TA can primarily be conducted inductively ("bottom up") or deductively ("top down") (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this study, it was important that the themes were strongly linked to the data itself and driven by what the material conveyed, as in the inductive approach. Braun and Clarke (2012) claim that being purely inductive is impossible as we always bring some of our theoretical and epistemological commitments into the analysing process. In this study, we strove to conduct an analysis

without trying to make the data fit into pre-existing code frames, as our goal was to explore and "give voice" to the students.

Limitations of the study
The study has a low number of participants, so the results cannot be generalised, although the findings are promising and may enable other researchers to delve into the topic. Also, voluntary participation may have led to a more motivated involvement and thereby contribute to more positive results.

We are also aware that two of the researchers hold multiple roles – as leaders of the mentoring programme, supervisors and lecturers in the BA programme – which may promote self-serving biases. To maintain objectivity, one of the researchers was not associated with the mentor programme, supervision or data collection. Yet, familiarity with the mentoring programme and data collection can benefit contextualisation of the data and identify richer themes in ways not possible from an outside perspective.

Another issue is that action research appears to be a local and highly contextualised form of research, which gives reason to question the trustworthiness of the results. Are they highly biased and therefore difficult to generalise. Furthermore, as the goal of action research is greater understanding that can be linked to improved practice, it could be seen as an interpretive rather than an explanatory form of research (Feldman and Minstrell, 2000).

Finally, TA is criticised because of deficient substantial literature on the method (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, the flexibility of the method can lead to inconsistency and a lack of coherence in developing themes from the dataset (Holloway and Todres, 2003). On the other hand, developing specific guidelines for analysis can be challenging and potentially paralysing when trying to decide which aspects of the data to focus on (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Findings and discussion
Mentors' development of intercultural competence and cultural sensitivity
In this context, mentor meetings provided new knowledge about differences in cultures and traditions between immigrants from different countries, as well as differences and *similarities* in relation to Norwegian culture and traditions. One mentor stated, "to be honest, I have to admit I didn't believe Muslims celebrated Christmas . . . I was surprised . . . in a good way" (Carina). When mentors were encouraged to reflect on what they had learned about other cultures, one mentor expressed a newly acquired insight: "All cultures actually have the same values; we just learn them in different ways" (Katrine). Two other mentors agreed that we have more similarities than differences, that we have a lot in common and that we all have something to learn from each other. It seems like the mentor meetings changed the perception of "us" and "them" among the mentors.

When we encouraged the mentors to reflect on immigrants' situation in Norway, they described an extended awareness of challenges related to language and unpleasant situations caused by having a different skin colour or wearing different clothes. One mentor said this new insight in differences between cultures made her more tolerant, another claimed becoming more conscious of the underlying prejudices we carry to a greater extent than we are aware, and a third mentor described, "It's amazing to realise how limited my insight into other cultures actually is, even though I used to believe otherwise" (Sander). A shared experience among the mentors was how the mentees sincerely wanted to get to know Norwegians, find work, and participate actively in Norwegian society, and how they strove to gain access into the labour market despite the prejudice and stigma. One mentor felt that the

mentees came from societies that are more open and inclusive than Norway, which made her reflect more thoroughly on what it must be like to face all the new challenges in a new culture. In sum, the mentors described an expanded understanding of immigrants' situation in Norway, which corresponds with the aim of increasing mutual understanding.

As time passed, the mentor meetings were more characterised by mutual learning than the mentors originally expected. One mentor said,

> My experience is that I've learned a lot from them as well . . . I've learned so much from them . . . I started with the attitude that now I'm going to teach them, but it's been a little reversed . . . that was a very positive experience. (Katrine)

According to Byram *et al.* (2017), "Intercultural experience takes place when people from different social groups with different cultures (values, beliefs and behaviours) meet" (p. xxiv). Intercultural competence should be seen as a process rather than a product, as a "process" reflects a commitment to learn, value, and interact in more effective ways, and one fundamental step in building cultural competence is to develop a practice of continuously seeking and processing information about the experiences of others (Suh and Dagley, 2014). Martin and Nakayama (2004) argue that we tend to learn a lot about ourselves by learning about other cultures and cultural practices. In this study, the interaction between mentors and mentees led to new knowledge about variations within different ethnic groups related to traditions, rituals, family structures, education systems, political systems and religious and cultural preferences, which can counteract stereotypical perceptions of ethnic minorities (Qureshi, 2005). According to the findings, this new knowledge appears to have changed what Gullestad (2002) describes as our perception of "the Norwegian" and "non-Norwegian", where "the Norwegian" is viewed as common and normal, whereas the rest is exotic, ethnic, or alien. Statements from the mentors suggest that differences between "them" and "us", where "the Norwegian" is similar to each other and the "non-Norwegian" must be similar to other "non-Norwegian", are being erased (Gullestad, 2002). Qureshi (2009) broadens the perspective by claiming that cultural sensitivity is about becoming aware of your own life history, attitudes, and norms, by learning about the background of the person you meet. Knowledge and understanding about other cultures does not mean that we must accept all differences in values or actions just because they are different. Cultural sensitivity is about asking questions while at the same time being able to distinguish between what is specific to the culture in question, what is general, and what is unique (Qureshi, 2009). Our findings show that the mentors had their perceptions and prejudices challenged and that participating in the mentor programme may have increased their ability to change perspective and be more flexible in meetings with others (Dybedahl and Bøhn, 2017).

In this context, mentoring can be seen, in what Kochan and Pascarelli (2012) present, as a transitional and transformational cultural framework. Within the transitional cultural framework, mentors and mentees grow together as changing agents, where both contribute to cultural roles and expectations that are changing over time. This type of mentoring means that the mentor's role is not limited to merely transmitting knowledge, but it includes continuous evolvement of both parties' beliefs, norms, and practices, where both the mentor and mentee experience uneasiness, ambiguity, confusion, and questioning. Within a transformational cultural framework, both mentors and mentees work together to facilitate cultural change, where the roles are fluid and focused on change and growth for both parties (Kochan and Pascarelli, 2012). The Nightingale Mentoring Programme contains elements of both a transitional and transformational framework, as the overall goals were to strengthen the self-esteem of both mentors and mentees through mutual development of insight, knowledge, and understanding of each other's cultural framework.

Mentors' development of intercultural communication
The mentors found that communication with the mentees was more difficult than expected because the mentees lacked the necessary language skills needed for the planned educational and work-related activities. The mentor meetings became a continuous and mutual exercise in interpreting and understanding the content of both verbal and written communication and thus became a predominant topic in our data material. The experienced lack of shared understanding occasionally led to powerlessness for the mentors. In retrospect, we see the importance of integrating this disclosure in the continuation so that training of mentors focuses more strongly on raising awareness of the power aspect in communication.

The outlined themes for the mentor meetings were replaced with language training and challenged the mentors to practise user involvement to meet the mentees' needs there and then. Language practice was generated through board games, such as Alias, to increase the mentees' vocabulary and understanding of the language. One mentor described it:

> I don't think we should underestimate the two hours of language training where you simply speak Norwegian . . . a few of them [mentees] tell me that they have tuition . . . then they group up with people with the same native language as themselves, later they come home, and no one speaks Norwegian there either . . . so I think it's more valuable than we imagine. (Christian)

The mentors also created Facebook groups to communicate and share information within each mentor group between the meetings. In some groups, this forum became challenging and partly demotivating for the mentors as the mentees abstained from responding to posts or confirming appointments. The lack of response made the mentors unsure whether the mentees had received and understood the messages, planned to attend the next meeting, were dissatisfied with the content of the meetings, or if there were other reasons why they refrained from responding. Another challenge that arose when planning the content of the mentor meetings was that the mentees agreed with all suggestions without objecting or making any proposals themselves. However, this changed over time as the mentors experienced a more trusting relationship, which led to more direct communication from the mentees where they gradually started to convey their wishes and needs.

All our mentors described different forms of increased awareness in communication, such as awareness of their own and others' body language, the importance of eye contact, and how to explore common understanding when topics were discussed or information given. This indicates more conscious behaviour in how language is used, through attempting to express themselves more clearly by using simpler words and avoiding abbreviations and dialect words, the importance of halting the conversation to confirm whether everyone understands, and not take for granted that everybody perceives the content. The mentors also discovered challenges in explaining the meaning of certain words and expressions used in their everyday language as some words and expressions are difficult to translate into other languages.

Qureshi (2005) argues that all interpersonal interaction relies on communication and that language has different communicative functions, such as communicating information or attempts to influence others' perceptions, behaviours, emotions, opinions, and attitudes. Furthermore, power and powerlessness are aspects of intercultural communication, where someone's views, values and norms reflect the predominantly symbolic environment. In this sense, real intercultural dialogue is something more than just understanding and interpreting each other's symbols, signals, culture and language. Communication requires awareness that in a dialogue is an implicit condition that one party's perceptions require subordination to the others. Lack of knowledge and awareness of the power aspect in intercultural communication, often defined by the dominant culture, may cause challenges (Qureshi, 2005). This corresponds to challenges that arose during mentor meetings, where communication became a joint exercise in subordination to the other's norms, values, and perceptions through alternating attempts to dominate the communication. An additional dimension is when one

party masters the majority language and the other does not; then, the majority's awareness of their power in the relation becomes even more important. The mentees' linguistic level also forced the mentors to lower their ambitions of the content in the mentor meetings on behalf of the mentor group, which gave them an opportunity to adapt, find solutions that suited the mentees' needs and implement real user involvement (Eide and Eide, 2017).

The mentors' challenges related to communication both via Facebook and in person may also rely on what Dahl (2013) describes as different communication models, where one is a linear model based on a logical, linear train of thought and the other is a loop model characterised by metaphors and poetry. In the western world, it is common to be direct, brief, and concise and to stick to the facts. In Arabic speech, it is common to start with a topic that is not directly related to what you really want to discuss, then touch on the topic very cautiously, then leave it again, continuing in this way until you gradually approach the goal of conversation. In the loop model, "yes" could mean "perhaps", or "Insha'Allah" and "maybe" could mean "no" (Dahl, 2013). The lack of involvement and suggestions from the mentees when planning activities for the upcoming mentor meetings may be about cultural differences in how people relate to "authorities" combined with a culture of politeness, where it is rude or unacceptable to argue or disagree with the "leaders" (Djuve *et al.*, 2015). Variations of direct and indirect language styles can be challenging in meetings when one party believes in asking a clear question and the other party believes in giving a clear response, according to their subjective communication styles (Dahl, 2013).

Kim (2017) explains how individualistic and collectivistic cultures place varying levels of importance on the five universal conversational constraints: clarity, minimising imposition, being considerate of others, risking negative evaluation by the hearer, and effectiveness. While individualists seem to be concerned with clarity, collectivists are concerned about hurting other people's feelings and minimising imposition. However, concerns for effectiveness and avoidance of negative evaluation by others seem to be universally important (Kim, 2017; Martin and Nakayama, 2004). It appears that participation in this mentor programme exposed the mentors to all these constraints. It made them more conscious about recognising obstacles and being more understanding and proactive in intercultural communication.

Mentors' development of professional identity
The mentor role resembles many different roles, such as teacher, coach, counsellor, therapist, and friend. All these different roles challenged the mentors' idea of professionalism, and the balance between being professional, private and personal was a recurring topic in supervision. The mentors reflected on boundaries between being a mentor and a friend, and how to politely decline invitations to visit the mentees' homes, friend requests on Facebook, contact made via chat, and requests to exchange phone numbers. This was a demanding exercise, and the mentors' emphasised the supervision sessions as an important means to feel more comfortable in the mentor role. One mentor claimed to be "way out of my comfort zone" (Christian) during the first weeks of mentoring and found it hard to define what the mentor role entailed but built confidence by reading about mentoring and discussing the challenges with the other mentors and the supervisors.

The seamless transitions between the mentors' different roles also seemed to make the mentees unsure about what to expect from their mentors. Some mentors found that the mentees' expectations changed as they became better acquainted and used the supervision to reflect on this. One mentor said,

> In the beginning, it was mostly culture and language and so on . . . but our mentees gradually became more and more interested in work . . . we were even expected to find jobs for them . . . so they [the mentees] have gradually become more confident and expect more and more. (Sander)

The relational challenges may depend on unclear expectations of roles, but they are also a result of roles changing over time. One potential pitfall in a mentor relationship is the risk of mentees becoming dependent instead of, as intended, more independent and self-reliant after participating in the mentor programme.

In this study, mentors were forced to reformulate their expectations, being flexible in planning mentor meetings to match the mentees' needs and prerequisites even though they originally had higher ambitions on behalf of the mentor group and the content of activities. One of the mentors summarises her experience like this:

> I'd say it's been a very steep learning curve in relation to personal development, in relation to everything, in relation to the people we're dealing with, in relation to planning, in relation to the people we are mentoring, in relation to lots of things. I think it will be very valuable in working life . . . because you will face challenges like this. Things that don't go according to plan, so you have to think fast and at the same time be controlled and restrained when you actually want to scream . . . All in all, although there've been a lot of ups and downs and so on, this has been a really valuable experience. (Alexandra)

Some mentors also found it challenging to have in the same mentor group both mentees who were illiterate and mentees with university degrees from their countries of origin. Their solution was to maintain an academic level high enough to accommodate the mentees who were familiar with studying to acquire new knowledge and repeat the topics frequently, so everybody could acquire the same knowledge over time. On two occasions, the mentor groups attended local conferences at the campus about integration and work inclusion, where the mentors realised how difficult it was for the mentees to follow and understand the content of the posts. This required adjustment from the mentors, where they chose to use the breaks to sum up and convey the essence in simpler words. At one of the conferences, two of the mentees presented the Nightingale Mentoring Programme to almost 200 participants. One mentor describes the experience:

> I was so incredibly proud, and so impressed by how confident Samira and Armin seemed to be while talking about their experience with the mentoring programme in front of almost 200 people. Absolutely fantastic! Imagine, they have been in Norway for less than three years; they still have some language problems, and Samira is just 18 years old!! And they stand there in front of a big audience like it was the most natural thing in the world? I take my hat off to them. (Sander)

Some mentors also used mentoring as an arena to explore and develop their cooperation skills in relation to their co–mentor. One group comprised a mentor who automatically took the leading role, while the other was more reclusive. They challenged themselves by switching roles so that one had to take more responsibility while the other had to take a step back and leave more responsibility to his co–mentor. Both found it useful to become aware of their own behaviour and challenge the cooperative relationship according to their different personalities.

In the final evaluation, 10 of the 12 mentors claimed that mentoring had led to a more positive view of immigrants. This does not mean they had negative attitudes towards immigrants beforehand; rather, it means that mentoring may have contributed to more insight and knowledge of what it is like to be an immigrant. The evaluation also shows that eight out of 10 had "become more motivated to work with immigrants in the future", and nine out of 10 had "become more motivated to employ immigrants in my workplace if I have the opportunity in my future job". One final statement was that "you get to know people in a completely different and positive way. It cannot be described; you must experience it" (anonymously from SurveyMonkey).

Developing a professional identity is enhanced by authentic practical experiences, manifested in the link between personal and professional values (Trede *et al.*, 2012), and being a mentor seems to have both contributed to the practical experience and challenged the

mentors to develop their personal and professional values. According to DuBois and Karacher (2005), the mentor role means being a supervisor one day, a coach the next day, and a confidante who offers emotional support in a crisis on the third day. Colley (2003) claims that making a personal connection is a condition for mentoring. All these sliding transitions between roles made mentoring demanding for many of our mentors, but also great practice to become a professional practitioner. The complexity of the mentor role and the resemblance to many other roles, where aspects of all these roles can be incorporated, depends on the context in which mentoring takes place (Goldner and Mayseless, 2009; Miller, 2002). In this context, being a mentor seems to have developed what Dybedahl and Bøhn (2017) describe as intercultural awareness, which is about being capable of continuously analysing and adjusting one's own thoughts and communication in encounters with others, where mentor meetings become an exercise in meeting people where they are.

Our findings show a change among the mentors towards a better understanding and awareness of their own attitudes and prejudices. Rafiqi and Frølund Thomsen (2014) confirm that positive contact with immigrants weakens the majority population's negative stereotypes of ethnic minorities, leading to increased empathy and reduced anxiety when meeting the immigrant population. Furthermore, Kunst *et al.* (2015) claim that a sense of common identity with immigrants relates directly to how positive the majority population are to integration. Their study claims that modern racism is about the extent to which the majority believe that immigrants deserve to have access to the same resources as themselves and whether they should have the possibility of achieving the same positions (Kunst *et al.*, 2015).

The results in this study indicate that the mentors, to a greater or lesser extent, evolved their values, attitudes, mindsets, and behaviours and developed new and highly relevant competence that is important in future professional practice (Skau, 2011).

Practical implications
The study shows that mentoring impacted students' development of intercultural competence and cultural sensitivity through regular meetings with individuals from a different cultural background. Mentoring seems to have revealed insights into underlying prejudices and changed perspectives towards better understanding, thus increasing the acceptance of other cultures.

More general professional skills obtained from mentoring include the ability to think fast, reformulate, and adjust, to be flexible, to strive to optimise user engagement, and to engage with people where they are based on their own prerequisites. Furthermore, our mentors seem to have increased their search for people's values, wishes, and resources, which turned out to be not so far from our own, as we sometimes tend to believe. The mentors seem to have gained a greater understanding of obstacles that make access to education and the labour market difficult for many of our immigrants. Mentoring seems to have had a positive effect on mentors' values, attitudes, and mindsets towards the mentees. This insight has potential to have a huge impact on integration if mentoring was implemented on a larger scale.

Conclusion
Good integration requires development of societies that can offer suitable services to immigrants with challenges related to language, competence, networks, and social and cultural codes. This corresponds to the objectives of the Nightingale Mentoring Programme, in addition to political and societal goals. Mentoring can be part of the solution, and a win–win situation for students, educational institutions, the employment market and society. Seeing that our values, desires, and needs are more similar than different can increase tolerance and help us erase the division of ethnic groups, thus inspiring the mentors to attitudinal work that

facilitates easier access to education and work for refugees. Schedin and Hassan (2013) argue that students struggle to apply theoretical knowledge in a practical context. Accordingly, this study shows that mentoring can contribute to increased understanding of the professional role and improve integration of theoretical knowledge into professional practices.

Finally, the results of this study show significant implications for a small but interesting range of learning outcomes that students achieve through mentoring as a learning arena. The mentors' cultural knowledge is significantly deepened, and the study shows interesting benefits of expanding learning activities to include mentoring. Future research is needed to examine a broader view of the possibilities inherent in the implementation of mentoring as a learning arena in higher education.

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