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## Definitions of Mentee Resistance to Mentoring: Experiences of International Teacher Mentors in Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools

Phillipa Schulleri\*

Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, KAZAKHSTAN

Bahaa Khairy Saleh

Technical and Vocational Education and Training Reform Programme, EGYPT

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**Abstract:** In Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, international teachers, who were in mentorship positions were interviewed for their experiences with mentee resistance to mentoring. In this paper, the authors investigate aspects of the perception of resistance to mentoring in the program for long-service teachers. It is the aim of this paper to explore the definitions that mentors attach to resistance, based on their experiences in one NIS School. The questions to be answered were how the mentors defined mentoring, and how the mentors experienced resistance from their mentees. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face. The mentor responses were captured on a dictaphone, and transcribed later. Eleven teachers participated in the interviews. The definitions of mentoring resistance were examined in seven categories as hesitation, stagnation, body language, fear, unavailability, and mistrust of the mentor. Stagnation was the largest category, displayed by unwillingness to try new things, unwillingness to see own limitations, close mindedness, unwillingness to see own weakness, and passivity in action.

**Keywords:** *Nazarbayev International Schools, Kazakhstan, mentoring, mentee resistance, educational reform.*

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### Introduction

Mentoring is a professional development strategy that is now used in many establishments for the improvement of skills and performance. According to Searby et al. (2015) mentoring is defined as "a process that enhances an individual's professional development" giving rise to "higher salaries, better promotions, and greater job satisfaction" (p. 99). Katsyuruba and Godden (2019) confirm the benefits of mentoring as "the dual aims of personal support and professional learning because the proteges are being helped to assimilate into new roles or responsibilities as well as to develop employment-related skills" (p. 230). All mentoring relationships record some degree of resistance (Bohn, 2020). Mentor-mentee relationships have been described as unidirectional and bidirectional (Schulleri, 2019). Mentee resistance is a well-researched phenomenon (Jacobs et al., 2020, Hudson, 2013, Tomozii & Lupu, 2015). Mentee resistance has been explained in terms of several factors, including a lack of understanding of the concepts, difficult suggestions, and time. Whether the mentee is in a uni- or bi-directional relationship, mentee resistance comes up very often in mentoring discussions. So also, in Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS), as the international subject expert teachers started their work, a number of issues ensued, some foreseen, and others unforeseen. One of the most glaring unforeseen was the resistance to change that came mostly from older long-service mentee teachers (Schulleri & Rinemhota, 2013). Identified in staff meetings and in discussions with management, it was the authors' observations that this resistance may not merely be resistance, but probably a call for something that was not in place, or a fear of the unknown, or lack of clarities in the process. This resistance manifested itself in different forms, and mentoring pairs devised different methods of dealing with it (Schulleri, 2019). However, internationally published research on mentee resistance in the context of NIS schools in Kazakhstan were not found. The purpose of this paper is to provide an initial discourse on the mentee resistance in NIS schools and to expound on the perceptions of the international teacher mentors.

\* Corresponding author:

Phillipa Schulleri, Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, Kazakhstan. ✉ [phillipa@schulleri.com](mailto:phillipa@schulleri.com)

*Background to Kazakhstan and the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools*

In Kazakhstan, with the drive for educational reform that should span half a century (Sanchez, 2018), teacher education was given priority in order that the teachers would take a crop of young Kazakhs to a higher level that was able to raise Kazakhstan to the few developed country status (Wilson et al., n.d.; Yekavets, 2015). Political will and resources mobilization into the education sector were spearheaded by the then president of the republic, his Excellency, Nursultan Nazarbayev, and implemented by the Ministry of Education with an internationalization objective (Zhumakulov & Ashirbekov, 2018). Teacher trainers were imported from all over the world into different positions within the Kazakh education system. Among them were mentors into presidential Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS) (Wilson et al., n.d.).

The NIS schools were built between 2009 and 2016. Twenty schools in all were build, with at least one in each city of Kazakhstan. They were to be centers of excellence to enroll gifted Kazakh students, who would then be provided with all the support necessary for them to acquire educational qualifications that would make them competitive on the international market (Wilson et al., n.d.; Yekavets, 2015) The NIS schools well-resourced and well supported, and enrolled talented students who would be given an elitist education. These students would in turn, be the crop to deliver Kazakhstan to its developed status, to be among the 50 top developed countries of the world by 2050 (Zhumakulov & Ashirbekov, 2018).

### Literature Review

Kutsyuruba and Godden (2019) stated that teachers are currently under immense pressure to perform, and to deal with multiple forces and demands of their work more than ever before. To help teachers deal with the demands, Kutsyuruba and Godden considered mentoring as a method to support and guide teachers while contributing to their well-being, in a place where and a time when they would be overwhelmed with the demands of their teacher roles.

There is limited research on mentors' perceptions of their mentees. However, van Ginkel et al. (2018) conducted a study to find what mentors thought of their mentees, in terms of practical observable traits in the classroom. Their findings provided a doorway into the mentor perceptions and how they could be harnessed to improve the mentoring relationship.

However, Bohn (2020) observed that all mentors experience resistance from their mentees. Mentee resistance is known to occur when a mentee displays behavior and attitude that are contrary to the one that enhances the mentoring process, when they display attributes contrary to the ones identified by Hudson (2013). Such behaviors and attitude are as discussed from mentors' answers in the foregoing sections. The behaviors present hurdles to the mentoring process, or block it altogether. Some of these behaviors are deliberately mounted, while others may be overt, and non-intended.

According to Tomozii and Lupu (2015) resistance to change was "maintaining a known behavior" (p. 243). Tomozii and Lupu posited that resistance to change could not be avoided, that it was an integral part of any change process. As such, resistance should be factored in whenever a change is forged. In Kazakhstan's NIS schools, where international teachers mentored local teachers, various factors were bound to play on the mentoring relationship. Hudson and Hudson (2014). detailed the effects of mentoring, and the characteristics of mentees that would enhance the mentoring process. In this article, the other side of the research of Hudson and Hudson (2014) will be documented, the attributes of mentees that disrupt the mentoring process.

Buller (2015) reminded that change is not about replacing, but developing what is existent. As a development, it should be more acceptable and less of the feared process. To take the fear out of change processes, the communication part of the process has to be considered and conducted well. If communication would be in place to take away pressure for the change, and to confirm the messages of the mentors from the management level, it may become easier for mentees to accept the change. Most times communication in organizations is done either hurriedly, or inadequately.

Studying a teacher training program in Kosovo, Walker and Epp (2010) recorded resistance to change as having been deep seated and coming not only from the teachers but also from political leaders. When it has political connections and connotations, resistance to change may make a difference between life and death. Supporting or accepting change that is regarded unfavorable by political rulers may be construed to mean insubordination. In the same way, if working at the teacher level to effect change, and the management of the school is not on board, the same problems may result.

From an attitudinal point of view, Bohn (2020) observed that people with a negative attitude (negative people) were the ones who resisted change more. The argument can be proffered that negative people do not see any positive in the present or the future. So trying to effect change will not bring any positivity, therefore why try at all? Another premise may be that negative people feeling low inside may resist, just so that they are not bothered, by participating in the change process or by those advocating for the change. Another possibility is that negative people do not see any good in what comes from other people's efforts. So, everything will fail, whether we try to change or not.

However, Jacobs et al. (2017) took a different view to the resisters, and encouraged mentors to look deeper into the reasons the mentees resist, and solve those problems first. According to Jacobs et al., mentees can benefit from trust

building between the mentor, the mentee and the management. From the NIS perspective, a student dimension would also need to be added.

Some published articles (as that of Adenle, 2011) have argued that resistance to change is healthy as it shows the onset of something new, and has set in motion the thought processes about the change. Adenle showed that resistance to change is natural and normal, and therefore should be expected and welcomed. Out of twelve reasons why mentees present resistance to change, Adenle highlighted lack of trust and bad communication as the most important factors. Jacobs et al. (2017) alluded to resistance to mentoring being dependent on age at work and age of individuals. Jacobs et al. added that the older and the longer a person has stayed at work, the more resistant they become to change, as they would have cultivated practices that have worked for a long time, have their profession figured out, and therefore may not need the change. Whereas, the younger are keen to try different things to search what works best, and are keen to perform maximally so as to secure their job and status.

### *Research Rationale*

The rationale for this research as to find out from international mentors how they defined mentee resistance to mentoring, from their experiential point of view. While there are mentoring opportunities in the NIS schools, there exists few published research articles on the experiences of mentors and mentees in the NIS schools. Conducting this research would provide crucial information for the NIS school in which the research was conducted first, then to all NIS schools, extending finally to the international contexts where mentoring is employed.

### *Research Goal*

The goal was to collect the definitions of mentee resistance from the international mentor teachers in Kazakhstan, based on their experiences in a NIS school.

## **Methodology**

This study was conducted qualitatively with a constructivist approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with international mentors in one NIS school. This method was chosen for its flexibility in allowing the respondents to explore their experiences, while keeping their answers focused onto a set of questions. According to Denis and Nys (2018), "combining a pre-determined set of open questions with the opportunity for the interviewer to explore a bit more particular themes or responses" (p. 6). The semi-structured interview is appropriate for qualitative studies in which researchers and respondents find meaning together. In this case, the researcher was part of the mentor team, giving the advantage that the mentors were able to explore their experiences in greater detail, as the follow-up questions were from an insightful point of view. The mentors also felt free and openly discuss the topic, knowing that they would be fully understood.

### *Sample and Data Collection*

The sample consisted of a group of was international mentor teachers (n=11) in a NIS school. The international teachers needed to have worked with a mentee for a minimum of three months, be it in the particular school or for a combined period of time with work in other NIS school in Kazakhstan. They had various backgrounds, most coming from the western world, and others from Africa and Asia. All of them had worked in NIS with a mentee for at least three months. This was necessary for them to be able to provide substantial experiential input to the interview questions. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted at the school. Each interview lasted a minimum of 45 minutes. Interview questions required mentors to describe if they had experienced mentor resistance and to describe instances they experienced as negatively affecting their willingness to mentor. Follow-up questions were posed depending on the responses.

To ensure trustworthiness, the research and research process were agreed to by the management of the school. Interview respondents were requested and allowed to make voluntary decisions to attend or not. The participants signed informed consent forms and agreed to confidentiality conditions stated at the beginning of the interviews. Information obtained from the interviews was captured on a dictaphone which the researcher guarded at all times, keeping it in a locked cabinet whenever she was not using it, and taking it home at the end of every working day. The research information was processed only on the researcher's private computer and the document protected by a password.

### *Analyzing of Data*

Interviews were captured on Dictaphone, and later transcribed using the voice-typing function in GoogleDocs. The transcriptions were done verbatim, as far as was possible. The responses were then coded into categories by words and phrases and sentences. Findings were analyzed using the content analysis approach, in keeping with the interpretivist approach (Cho, & Lee, 2014). From the coding, seven categories emerged. Each response was discussed in view of NIS

and in view of existing research. The responses under each category were discussed in view of the NIS school and the teachers' experiences

### Findings and Discussion

According to the findings, several definitions of resistance to mentoring were proffered. Definitions of mentee resistance to mentoring were clustered into seven categories as hesitation, stagnation, body language, fear, unavailability, and mistrust of the mentor. Category 2, stagnation, was found to be the largest, and to include: unwillingness to try new things, unwillingness to see own limitations, close mindedness, unwillingness to see own weakness, and passivity in action.

#### Category 1: Hesitation/ time

*"For me resistance is hesitation. They have a curriculum to finish, and the time is not enough. That is why they are resistant. Time length affecting the lesson time and the curriculum itself." Response a)*

*"If a teacher does not have time to plan the lesson, I would consider that a resistance to mentoring." Response b)*

*"With time, it can be an excuse, an argument." Response c)*

*"I have too much stuff to work on, I do not have time for you". Response d)*

*"Resistance manifests itself uh... in...kind of... dismissal, like ... I don't have time, let's do it later, uhm...waiting till the last minute to do something..." Response e)*

Hesitation, the act of pausing before taking a step, before making a saying or doing something (Google Dictionary) or before making a decision. When hesitation results later in a careful decision, the hesitation could have a positive effect on mentoring, because the mentee would take the suggestions of the mentor after careful consideration. However, if hesitation results in no action altogether, then hesitation becomes inaction.

Time constraints have been recorded by Barrett et al., (2017) and Adenle (2011) as resulting in mentee resistance to mentoring. Time constraints present a challenge where the mentees have a compact curriculum to complete, and the mentoring demands take time away from the curriculum. In that case mentees need to use the mentoring time to their advantage. The mentor can help fulfil the mentee requirements, while inserting mentor aspects into the process. The relationship needs to be synergistic rather than competitive. Barrett et al. (2017) put time as a prerequisite of successful mentoring.

From the responses, it is indicative that mentors experienced the time factor of mentee resistance to mentoring in different ways, with different degrees of resistance.

#### Category 2: Stagnation

##### a. Unwillingness to try new things

*"Umh, it (resistance) would be an unwillingness to try out new things. (They seem to) sort of just stick with what you know ... what I call doubling down. So basically, (they say) 'it hasn't been working so far, so let's try more of the same thing.' That's doubling down. Or just becoming, also sometimes, ... I have heard some unrealistic criticism. To try and bash new techniques. Rather than being fair and honest and assessing the impact on the class." Response a)*

*In planning already, if you suggest something, they will not take it, they will suggest something else." Response b)*

*"Refusing to do it simply because it is something new and I have no experience with it. Without arguments for your refusal." Response c)*

*"I would say resistance is stopping one from moving from where they are." Response d)*

Doubling down is applied when someone does not know better. It is about having no options. Or if the options are less attractive than the current methodologies, so then the mentees will stay with what they know, what they have, for the sake of familiarity. This is the doubling down meant in the response d). According to Pennanen et al. (2020) mentees prefer to use known methods and materials. Familiarity; with content, with teaching materials, with the method of presentation of the content are all good reasons for mentees to 'double down'.

Mentee criticism of mentor practice or suggestions is also common in mentoring. Since the mentor methods are new, foreign to the mentee, and maybe foreign to the students, the mentee usually has no foreknowledge of how they will be received by the class. In the case of NIS, since the mentee knows the culture, the social structures, and the requirements of the management, the students, and even the national situation better, it is to the mentors' ... to also trust the mentees' judgment and let the process take its time.

From response c) for some reason, there appeared to be a wide misunderstanding between mentors and mentees especially where communication was restricted or clipped. Much was not known of the mentees' circumstances. Some mentees claimed there were different instructions from mentors and from their management. Some mentees claimed they were more proficient at what they did without their mentors. Other mentees did not like the 'disturbance' of teaching with someone all the time. They felt like their freedom had been snatched away. And so, mentors were sometimes left in suspension, not knowing the details surrounding mentee behavior.

Another respondent made a simple definition:

From response d) this definition provides a visualization of a rock, sturdy, solid. Whatever one does it does not move, unless higher forces of cranes and explosives are applied. As such, mentees presenting stagnation make it hard for the mentoring process. Such mentees require skill and tact from the mentor to be able to move them (Pennanen, et al. 2020).

#### *b. Unwilling to see own limitations*

*"A lack of desire to want to see own limitations. I don't think any teacher would say they do not want to develop." Response a)*

*"It's ego. Some people would not want to drop that shield." Response b)*

Unwillingness by an individual to see their own limitations can also be regarded as an act of self-preservation. If accepting mentorship means losing face, losing credibility, then the mentee would resist it. However, that would indicate a lack of communication on the meaning of the mentorship even before it began. And since mentees were protecting mentors by not telling them 'bad things', the problem would not be resolved. Talking about it would have enabled the pair to seek clarification with management. But without a clear discussion where the problems lay, problems stay hidden. Response b) uses the phrase *"to drop that shield"*, which gives the resistance a protective function.

#### *c. Close-mindedness*

*"I would define resistance to ... eh ... change as rather ... eh ... what is the term, rather to be counter intuitive, to be counter-productive, and that a state of being close minded." Response a)*

*There could be ideas or new ways of doing things, and because the way that they did things were somehow ok with them ... or somehow brought satisfactory outputs or results to them so they stick to it ... and they wouldn't want to venture into the unknown, of the other things, and they seem to think that there is nothing better to what they know. ... so it becomes ... it makes them close-minded to what are some things that could be improved." Response b)*

Self-sufficiency and a belief in the self is what this response seems to allude to. The respondent sees self-sufficiency as leading to the feeling that there is no need for more anywhere. And in education, where learning for life is the motto, this attitude is self-defeating. But, if accepting inadequacy is not the norm, and leads to reprimand and punishment, as it did under the Soviet system of education (Mynbayeva & Pogosian, 2014), then the mentees are also preserving the self. It is a prevention from baring oneself in a society where keeping face is the norm. As such, an understanding of the cultural aspects of resistance is helpful for the mentor.

While "unwillingness to see own weakness" and "close-mindedness" would be considered very close in meaning, the latter simply denotes someone not seeing the issues at hand. The former implies the mentee knows what is at stake, but just won't let it get to them, and prefers to pretend they do not see it. The difference, which will not be known, is the point from which the mentee is acting regarding this.

#### *d. Unwillingness to identify own weakness*

*"Resistance is an unwillingness to identify one's weakness. The perception that their pedagogy is fine, and that their behavior management in class is fine." Response a)*

*Sort of defensiveness, in what they do; what they are currently doing." Response b)*

As in the previous category, this observation is well founded on self-preservation, and a need to stay within the familiar realm, what other authors call the comfort zone. Supporting the notion of passive resistance, of sending two opposing messages, one of acceptance and simultaneously a message of resistance, a mentor stated: From the observations made by Bohn (2020), it is normal for mentees to prefer known traditional methods of teaching, stemming from a feeling that change would require too much work.

By "sort of defense", the implication is that the mentee finds reasons to stay with what they are doing, in order to block the entry of new ideas or suggestions. From living in Kazakhstan, it was understood from interaction with local teachers that to show one's weakness was culturally

*e. Passivity in action*

*"Ummmh ... not active resistance. Occasionally it is passive resistance." Response a)*

*"Umm, when something is taken on board, verbally it is taken, but practically they do not implement it. I accept when they reject it. But to accept it, and then do nothing about it, for example they say 'yes, yes, yes,' but then nothing." Response b)*

Passive resistance as opposed to active, is where there is no clear demarcation that the mentee resists, or accepts, the mentor's suggestions. It is in this kind that the mentees accept things verbally, but do not put them into practice. Or if they come to meetings, they could be busy working on their laptops on other things. Or it could be that they take resource materials, but do not use them in the lesson. Whichever way, in any mentoring situation, there has to be a reason, something in the background, something in the experience, something in the expected outcomes, something in being unsure both ways between the mentor and the management and the students, and even the parents as well. So much that the mentee would be caught up in any one of Adenle's (2011) reasons for resisting mentoring.

Passive, just like active resistance, presents an obstacle to the mentoring that is supposed to be going on.

Verbal acceptance could be easier than practical. Stated differently, it may be easier for the mentees in Kazakhstan to verbally accept mentor suggestions than to dispute them or argue about them forthright. There could be factors underlying this behaviour, that may be linked to culture or a lack of assertiveness on the part of the mentee. Lack of assertiveness could easily result from fear, that Cranton and Wright (2008) discussed to some length, as taking away the confidence, the standing of a mentee in comparison to the mentor. If the mentor sees or perceives that to be the case, they may help the mentee by applying Hudson and Hudson's (2014) best mentor attributes of patience, belief in the mentor, encouragement, praise of hard work done, and a genuine desire to understand the mentee, among others.

Also as discussed under passive resistance and self-preservation, mentors would not know the full factors surrounding and pulling at their mentees. Furman (2020) offers insights into mentees who take things verbally, and suggests training the mentees in truth-telling.

In these two responses, it is interesting to know the hesitations, the "umhhs" in the respondents, representing difficulties in articulating the issues, or in formulating the answers. It might also have been the pain of remembering instances with mentees.

**Category 3: Fear**

*"Resistance to me is ... fear. It is fear ... of... I guess ... maybe I hurt their ego, maybe they don't wanna be told they need to change. But that's how I perceive it as. Sigh, Uhhhm eh! .... It goes back to the fear, maybe the fear of change, maybe the fear of, I need to change but ... It is really easy to get stuck in doing the same thing. If I could base it on one word it would just be fear." Response a)*

*"Ah well, people here are afraid of telling you that you are wrong. Response b)*

In delivering the response above, there was a significant expression of the pain of the feeling of helplessness on the part of the mentor. The sighs, the pauses, presented as the mentor searched for words, organised her thoughts, as she tried to put into words what she experienced in her mentor roles.

Perren (1996), and Cranton and Wright (2008) discussed the effects of fear on the mentoring venture. Fear can be of the mentor, or a fear to do wrong, or a fear to display a weakness, or a fear to embarrass oneself, or an intellectual fear, or even a professional fear. It could be a fear for the mentor, that if the mentee spoke up and things went bad for the mentor, who is a foreigner in their country, the mentor would suffer drastic emotional setbacks. According to Perren and Cranton, mentee fear comes from a perception of dislodgement, where the stability of the individual is shaken.

From response b) The fear referred to in Response b) is of the mentee telling the mentor, standing up, or even questioning things. This mentee fear, especially in the context of the Kazakh society which is hierarchical. Has a bearing on mentoring, especially where the bi-directional approach of mentoring is encouraged.

In any change context, people often consider the effects of the change on the self, and in most cases, the perception of the change is usually for the worse. Berube (undated), emphasised that any change is translated to a personal context, and this magnifies the fear of the unknown.

**Category 4: Unavailability**

*"Well, yah, uh, I see it being teachers who are not being available, or changing meeting times or simply not having the flexibility to talk through things. That's not being long winded, it's not having the... lack of understanding." Response a)*

*I find more often than not I get dismissed when I express the need to...do something..." Response b)*

*"Not coming to meetings..." Response c)*

In these responses, there are two aspects: the unavailability of the mentee, and the understanding of what is required of the mentee, perhaps.

Unavailability makes it difficult to plan together. The result of that is that the mentor and mentee do not know what the other is preparing or planning to present. It gives a disjointedness in the lessons that ensue. And it also touches on responsibility. If the mentor is responsible for mentoring a non-available mentee, how do they account for their time and their professionalism? On the other hand, since the mentee is an adult professional (in the case of NIS, some of the mentees had been in the professions for a very long time, and in the NIS schools since their inception) then there could be no repercussions in this case. According to Hudson (2013), mentee availability is a desirable aspect, desirable attribute for the mentoring relationship to work.

Responses b) and c) indicate hidden unavailability. If the mentee dismisses the mentor, it could be because they have no time, or they do not want the mentor around, or they are busy with other things. And when mentees do not come to scheduled meetings without forewarning the mentor, this was considered by the mentors as rude and not respecting mentor time.

### **Category 5: Body language**

*"I would define it (resistance) as a person who sits with their arms crossed. You can tell that they are resistant, that they are uncomfortable, because of lack of knowledge, and therefore they resist. This is not a question of yes and no. That is what I can think of now." Response a)*

*"It could be anything from subtle cues (body language), and in ... desire to ... the best thing would be someone to come and say I don't want to be mentored." Response b)*

Arms crossed in western cultures indicate a protection, a feeling of being vulnerable, therefore needing to protect oneself. According to Google.com, "Crossing arms across the chest is a classic gesture of defensiveness. This defensiveness usually manifests as uneasiness, shyness or insecurity. When a person feels threatened by a situation, they cross their arms over their chest, creating a barrier that helps them protect their vital organs- the lungs and the heart." (Apr 24, 2015). In other cultures, crossing arms indicates a respect that one is taking in what is coming, and wants to keep it in their heart. The meaning in this respondent's case is the former, of protection of the self. This agrees with Rosenbaum (1981) who stated that resistance to mentoring was a way of self-preservation. However, it was not clear if the crossed arms gesture means the same in the Kazakh context.

From response b) mentors might need to observe the subtle cues of the body language closely, in order to understand mentees' unspoken messages. This part of mentoring might need more attention and highlighting, especially in cultures who are not outspoken between social hierarchies.

### **Category 6: Lack of merging**

Lack of merging between mentor and mentee, and between the training received and practice was evident in mentors' responses.

*"Those who are used to teach(ing) on their own. Difficult to integrate with them because they want to do things their way. They may allow you to do something, but without merging. I would talk about resistance as unwillingness to change, to adopt new things." Response a)*

*"Maybe it's a cultural thing, maybe ah! Every culture has its own way, (they have) their own way of seeing things, of doing things, ..." Response b)*

*"Um, I don't know, oh, it is simply how willing a teacher is to listen or engage in ideas, and standard dialogue, it is not just to listen to you, what worked for you, because what worked for you may not work for that particular teacher." Response c)*

Here is another example of seniority at work, giving rise to resistance to mentoring. If they have been at work for a long time, they have developed foolproof methods that make their students score high marks in their exams. In that case, they would see mentoring as unnecessary. It is also possible they would feel rather 'insulted' at being given a mentor, as an indication that they may be a new teacher requiring support and help in their teaching, which they know to have already been excellent. So, there would be those two aspects to long-service mentees.

From response b) The notion of culture in mentoring was investigated by Peifer et al. (2016), who found out that in cross-cultural mentorship, mentors who are empathetic succeed in bringing out the mentees so they can overcome cultural differences and get the mentorship done. Louis (2015) concurred, stating that cross-cultural mentoring could benefit the mentoring profession.

From response c) while it is of great importance to note that what works for the mentor does not work for the mentee, it is important for the mentee to try what is suggested, and during reflection, discuss why it does not work for the mentee. In that case, both mentor and mentee will have a clear way forward on how to adjust the method, or the resources, or the presentation of the content.

**Category 7: Mistrust in the mentor**

*"...this young girl...what can she teach me...?" Response a)*

*Response b) "I perceive resistance because the mentee I am teaching is an older PhD holder. And I only have a Masters, and young. You see the issue now? Do you understand it now?"*

Response a) hinges on the age of the mentor. A reference to the age of the mentor compared to the mentee entails deep-seated beliefs that in teaching the seniority or the veteranism plays a crucial role in understanding the work. Where the mentee was young, in her twenties, mentoring an older teacher in his fifties, a disparity existed between mentee expectations and mentor realities. While the mentee was young, she had the modern pedagogy experiences that the NIS needed, despite the mentee not seeing it the same way.

In this relationship were also connotations of gender. "This young girl" gives an indication of derision, either for the age, or the gender, or both.

Response b) reinforces response a). The response a) was given by a female respondent while response b) was given by a male. So it would appear like it is not gender, but more the age and the qualification that affects trust in the mentor.

From the mentors' responses, it was possible to deduce the effects of mentee resistance to the mentoring objectives. For one, mentee resistance appeared to make the whole mentoring venture very difficult. Mentee resistance makes the mentors unwilling to mentor (Hansman, 2003).

While it is uncomfortable for the proponents of change, a look at resistance from the recipients' point of view may present a different view. In NIS resistance could be interpreted as a desperate form of self-preservation, a cry as if saying "please let us keep to what we know, where we are safe". It can be a desire to stay safe, within known parameters. In which case resistance needs to be looked at in a different way. Then it requires that the promoters of change understand the safety, and assure that the change does not take their safety away. In fact, the change promoters need to assure and show that the change does not take away, that the change is an addition to what they have, not a subtraction.

Other authors, for example Sikand (2009), alluded resistance to change as a desire to stay "backward" and refuse growth. This may be the general attitude of change agents, including mentors, for whom, what they are bringing is a natural state to them, a state that is better than what the recipients have. Choosing to stay "backward" is not a natural state of humans. Most want to progress, to learn something new. What then makes some mentees want to stay "backward"? It must be the fear of not knowing what the change will bring, as stated by one respondent. Bohn (2020) proffered four main categories of reasons what mentees resist mentoring change as: lack of confidence in the administration's help, lack of confidence in their teaching coupled with lack of ideas for improvement, preference of traditional methods, a perception of change requiring much time and energy, and a simple lack of desire and motivation to improve. (para.2).

The concept of resistance is common to all change processes. In-depth research articles on resistance to change show a wide variety of definitions and reasons for resistance (Bohn, 2020, Hudson, 2013, & Jacobs et al., 2020). In agreement, Reilly (2015) described resistance to change as a "natural tendency" (p. 43). Therefore, in every situation where change is proposed and brought in, resistance will always be a drawback. It is by deduction that mentoring in the context of educational and pedagogical transformation, especially those teachers who have been in the profession, as is the case at Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools brings about resistance.

From this research, seven categories of definitions of mentee resistance to mentoring were found to be: Hesitation, stagnation, body language, fear, unavailability, lack of merging, and mistrust of the mentor. Category 2 was the largest, with five sub-categories. Stagnation was found to include unwillingness to try new things, unwillingness to see own limitations, close mindedness, unwillingness to see own weakness, and passivity in action.

Bohn (2020) declared that all mentors have met with resistance at some time in their career. Resistance is ubiquitous among mentees. And resistance is a normal natural way of dealing with change. In mentoring, the mentor is calling for change, profound change, in the way things are done, but more at the personal level. To accept a new strategy means the mentee has to change themselves, their way of understanding, their way of doing things. The mentee needs to move from their state to the state of the mentor, at the same time, keeping the management and the performance of students in mind. According to Bohn, a mentor accepts to put their life on the line, when they accept a mentoring role. For that, they must be prepared to take in quite some pleasant and some not so pleasant experiences and responses. However, there are ways to overcome the hurdles that a mentee presents.

Most importantly is to create an atmosphere of trust and openness, to understand the mentee, and to acknowledge that they already do a wonderful job given the many aspects the mentee must juggle (Bohn, 2020).

Jacobs et al. (2017) acknowledged the existence of different forms of resistance to coaching, which included resistance to the program, resistance to time use in coaching, a (and resistance to feedback. According to Jacobs et al., although a mentor can do a lot in creating the necessary atmosphere for coaching, there will always be some mentees that fully or

partially resist the process. For such mentees, Jacobs et al. suggests different types of professional development, like group presentations and management-run programs. In addition, Jacobs stated three fundamental necessities before any mentoring can proceed: “the mentee needs to accept the need for change, the need to create mentoring time, and the need for change in the teaching to include mentor input” (p. 2)

Observing and being part of the process of change in a NIS school in Kazakhstan, resistance to change is considered as giving rise to positive tension, as proposed by Perren (1996) and Berube, (2014) within mentoring pairs. While Perren stated that resistance to change can be positive in regulating and stopping rash decisions which could be made to the detriment of the organization, Berube saw it as a back stopping mechanism, preventing the quick and thoughtless uptake of new regulations and mechanisms. This is because as tension manifests itself, methods to solve it are also sought. The solutions come from the mentoring pair itself, and sometimes with management help. As the pair works out its problems and finds solutions, their mentoring relationship becomes stronger, and intercultural exchanges and learning happen.

Desimone (2020) encourages mentors to employ mentoring activities that “interact” with the mentee. While it is unavoidable to find frustration with the mentee, Desimone went beyond to look at solutions. When mentor activities draw the attention of the mentee, then the mentee is willingly exploring them. However, to know what method, activity, and resource the mentee will interact with requires knowing and understanding the mentee in the first place. For that, the mentor needs to “step out” of their mentor role and “step in” to the role of the mentee and see the mentee as they see themselves. Therefore, mentors need to work on both sides of the divide. Since the mentee cannot step into the role of the mentor, the mentor can step into the mentee role. On the other hand, Smith and Johnson, (2017) encourage mentors, to challenge their mentees, to set high standards, and to push and dare their mentees.

van Ginkel et al. (2018), in studying mentor descriptions of their mentees, came up with two major categories: Disposition and historicism, as determining mentee ‘mentorability’. Disposition was the internal traits of a mentee, while historicism encompassed external influences and formative aspects that shaped mentee practice. In conclusion, Van Ginkel et al. stated that mentors could utilise these mentee traits to steer mentorship to success.

### Conclusion

While they can bring fulfillment and job satisfactions, mentor-mentee relationships can also bring hardships and frustrations. In NIS, mentee resistance was experienced by all mentors, at least at some point in their work. There were varying experiences with resistance, and mentors defined resistance according to these experiences. Mentee resistance to mentoring was categorized into seven categories: Hesitation, stagnation, body language, fear, unavailability, lack of merging, and mistrust of the mentor. Category 2, stagnation, was the largest, with five sub-categories. Stagnation was found to be displayed through unwillingness to try new things, unwillingness to see own limitations, close mindedness, unwillingness to see own weakness, and passivity in action.

Mentee resistance is a normal phenomenon, and should be an expected aspect of mentoring. The results of this study showed mentors putting the responsibility for the success of mentorship on the mentee, while most research recommendations concur that the mentor requires skills to go beyond mentee resistance. A few research articles have been found to put the responsibility on both mentor and mentee. The NIS model, however, would benefit more from a shared responsibility.

Mentoring experiences, although hard, can be successful if both mentor and mentee persist in it and communicate a lot in the process to build trust.

### Suggestions

In general, research recommends that mentors need to be prepared to identify, navigate, and overcome mentee resistance. Mentors need to be highly skillful at reading and understanding their mentees as adult learners, and as professional people, and as individuals. It is the duty of mentors to devise ways to overcome mentee resistance by carefully and patiently navigating the complex mentee labyrinths of influences that range from personal, to familial, social, professional, historical, and even futuristic goals, and bring the mentorship to a fruitful conclusion. Mentors themselves might need to be mentored before they are dispatched to their mentoring destinations. In addition, a research project with the mentees to find out their own experiences with the mentoring experiences would provide a balancing act.

### Limitations

This research was limited to one NIS school, in a place where there were twenty such schools. The research was limited to the international teacher mentors. Time limit also restricted this research to interviews. With more time, it would have been objective to observe some mentoring instances, and/or follow up with mentors with time, say over a year.

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