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Teacher Mentoring: Histories, Translations, and Reforms in Romania and the Republic of Moldova

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Abstract

This paper re-examines the historiography of teacher mentoring in Romania and the Republic of Moldova through the lens of Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT). In ANT, an actor-network refers to a material-semiotic assemblage in which agency emerges through associations among human and non-human elements. Rather than treating mentoring as a fixed institutional practice, the analysis conceptualises it as a contingent effect of these shifting assemblages of interactions among heterogeneous elements, including legislation, examination systems, mentor registries, school inspectorates, international organisations, professional discourses, material conditions and classrooms. These assemblages enrol and translate one another, producing temporary alignments that give mentoring its shifting historical forms. The study reveals that these configurations generate complex temporalities, where past arrangements persist and continue to influence current practices. In Romania, teacher mentoring has been predominantly framed as supervision, closely tied to examination practices and a centralised approach to teacher recruitment and validation of professional status. In the Republic of Moldova, it has often been conceptualised as professional support, aligning with Europeanisation discourses yet still marked by Soviet-era legacies. Notably, international agencies and geopolitical pressures emerge as powerful non-human actors, sometimes reinforcing and at other times destabilizing national practices. The paper argues that sustainable reform requires reconfiguring these actor-networks with attention to material conditions, temporal continuities, and geopolitical contexts. It proposes a research agenda informed by ANT that foregrounds translation, instability, and historical recurrence.

Keywords: teacher mentoring, teacher induction, Actor-Network Theory, Romania, Republic of Moldova.

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1. Introduction

Teacher mentoring and teacher induction remain significant concerns within education systems worldwide. Research across Europe and beyond indicates that mentoring enhances teachers' reflective practice (Attard-Tonna et al., 2017; Attard-Tonna, 2019), fosters collegial relationships (Betteney et al., 2018; Tynjälä et al., 2021), and promotes sustained professional growth (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015). However, the meanings and enactments of mentoring vary sharply across cultural and historical contexts. Romania and the Republic of Moldova (hereafter Moldova) illustrate these divergences: although both formally recognise mentoring in legislation, Romania tends to enact it as supervision linked to career progression, while Moldova frames it as collegial support. These differences signal the need for analytical approaches that take seriously the historical, institutional, and geopolitical dynamics shaping mentoring, tracing not only policies and pedagogies, but also the heterogeneous arrangements of material-semiotic assemblages in which mentoring emerges from associations among legal, institutional, discursive, and other human and non-human elements.

To address this, an Actor-Network Theory (ANT) approach it is proposed to argue that teacher mentoring is best understood as an outcome of complex, heterogeneous assemblages of human and non-human actors—such as teachers, mentors, inspectorates, examinations, policy documents, international reports, and material infrastructures—interacting to create what appear as stable practices. ANT challenges the idea that mentoring is a stable policy-defined practice and instead emphasises how it becomes stabilised through contingent alignments and recursions. Its non-linear conception of temporality (Latour, 1993) is particularly useful for examining how older arrangements persist or reappear in contemporary reforms. History involves recognising the relationships and combinations that lead to historical events, rather than unearthing a static past (Latour, 2005; Law, 2009, p. 141). Within this perspective, time is not seen as a linear journey from the past through the present and into the future but is instead characterised by multiple directions. Older arrangements become inscribed and reemerge, influencing current practices; conceptualisations and enactments of teacher mentoring are shaped by the connections between actors (human and non-human alike), creating a sense of temporality tied to the school environment and its history.

Geopolitical dynamics transport templates across borders, while projects and reforms continually appear, dissolve, and reappear in modified forms. Thus, past, present, and future coexist in turbulent flows rather than in orderly sequences. For example, Romania's nineteenth-century Europeanisation projects resurface in contemporary reforms (Mitescu-Manea, 2023); communist-era surveillance practices persist in post-2011 and post-2021 educational legislation on teacher mentoring in Romania (Mitescu-Manea et al, 2025); and Soviet legacies are evident in Moldovan discursive homogeneity (Kalimullin & Valeeva, 2023; Mitescu-Manea et al, 2025). ANT provides a framework for

interpreting these phenomena as outcomes of actor-networks that reconfigure temporalities.

Two central research questions guide the analysis:

1. In what ways do heterogeneous actor-networks—comprising legal texts, international reports, inspection systems, mentor registries, professional discourses, classrooms, and the material conditions that shape educational work—assemble distinct mentoring practices in Romania and Moldova?

2. How do these actor-networks generate complex, multidirectional temporalities, and how do geopolitical actors and transnational circulations mediate these temporalities?

The analysis is structured in five sections. The first situates the discussion within the broader literature on mentoring and induction, emphasising the unique contributions of an Actor-Network Theory perspective. The second section outlines the ANT theoretical framework, focusing on key concepts such as translation, enrolment, inscription, immutable mobiles, black-boxing, obligatory passage points, and turbulent temporality. The third section examines Romania as a case where mentoring for teacher induction has been institutionalised as supervision (Mitescu-Manea et al., 2025), highlighting the roles of historical imaginaries, examination systems, and school inspectorate oversight. The fourth section analyses the Republic of Moldova as a context where mentoring has been institutionalised as support (Mitescu-Manea et al., 2025), with particular attention to Europeanization discourses, Soviet legacies, and geopolitical factors. The fifth section presents a comparative analysis, demonstrating how temporality and geopolitics distinctly influence mentoring in each context. The conclusion discusses implications for policy and research, contending that mentoring should be reconceptualised to account for heterogeneous networks, multiple temporalities, and geopolitical complexities.

2. Situating teacher mentoring and induction in the literature

Research on teacher induction and mentoring has expanded significantly. European studies consistently emphasise mentoring as a valuable support for beginning teachers (Helms-Lorenz et al., 2016; Aarts et al., 2020; Shanks et al., 2022; Keese et al., 2023), often describing it as a reflective, dialogical process situated within professional learning communities (Heikkinen et al., 2012). Yet mentoring lacks a single, fixed definition; its meaning shifts across cultural, socio-political, and material contexts (Kemmis et al., 2014). At the same time, these meanings are not simply descriptive but are actively produced within institutions and policy systems that privilege particular practices and norms. Scholars increasingly note that mentoring is never a neutral or purely supportive practice; it is shaped by institutional expectations, policy pressures, and implicit hierarchies (Hobson & Malderez, 2013). These dynamics influence how mentors perform their roles and how mentees negotiate their emerging professional identities.

Policy discourses have reinforced the understanding of mentoring as one of the most effective support strategies for the professional induction of teachers. The OECD's

Teachers Matter report (OECD, 2005) and subsequent reviews (OECD, 2014, 2019, 2020) highlight mentoring as a crucial factor in enhancing teachers' knowledge and skills. European Commission documents (European Commission, 2010, 2018, 2021) position induction and mentoring as integral to the European Teacher Competence Framework, emphasizing professional learning, reflective practice, and supportive guidance. In practice, this is evident in classroom experiences, where teachers report increased confidence and competency after participating in structured mentoring programs. UNESCO (2015) has similarly underlined the role of mentoring in supporting teachers in low-resource and transitional contexts. However, these policy framings tend to present mentoring as uniformly benevolent, leaving less visible the power relations embedded in mentor–mentee interactions and the ways mentoring can operate simultaneously as support and as surveillance. This policy optimism also tends to obscure the institutional and political interests that shape mentoring systems, privileging particular forms of professional behaviour and tacitly reproducing existing hierarchies.

Research in teacher education has long highlighted these complexities. Sundli (2007) describes mentoring as a “practice of supervision,” noting that mentors often act as agents of institutional control. Wang and Odell (2002) argue that mentoring tends to socialise novices into existing pedagogical cultures, privileging established norms and potentially constraining alternative forms of practice. Orland-Barak (2010) shows that the mentoring conversation itself is structured by subtle asymmetries, in which institutional and discursive expectations shape whose knowledge counts, how problems are framed, and what constitutes “good teaching.” Across these studies, power is understood not only as overt authority but also as embedded in everyday language, routines, expectations, and material artefacts. Nevertheless, much international scholarship continues to assume stable institutional environments and linear professional trajectories, presenting mentoring as a predictable career stage rather than a relational and context-dependent practice shaped by shifting policy, organisational pressures, and material conditions.

These dynamics can be further intensified in Central and Eastern Europe, where educational systems carry histories of bureaucratic oversight, surveillance, and centralised control (Cantir & Kenedy, 2015; Kalimullin & Valeeva, 2023; Mitescu-Manea et al., 2025). The historical and geopolitical complexities of education systems in Central and Eastern Europe are often backgrounded, and when acknowledged, they are frequently framed in deficit terms—systems “lagging” behind Western models (Silova, 2010). Such assumptions downplay how mentoring can reproduce institutional norms, reinforce evaluative hierarchies, or position beginning teachers as subjects to be corrected or aligned with dominant expectations. The history of teacher mentoring in Romania and in the Republic of Moldova complicates this Western-centred narrative. In Romania, teacher mentoring is tied to exams and probation, shaped by 1800s Europeanisation trends and communist-era surveillance and centralised control practices (Bădescu, 2011; Gallagher, 2005). In the Republic of Moldova, mentoring, unlike

in Western and Scandinavian models, is presented as collegial support but remains connected to Soviet-era uniformity (Cretu, 2014). In both systems, mentoring practices are intertwined with long-standing authority structures, bureaucratic procedures, and geopolitical influences, making power relations an integral part of how mentoring is enacted and understood. These examples underline that mentoring is deeply embedded in wider social and political histories, and that seemingly supportive arrangements often coexist with supervisory logics that shape how teachers enter and navigate the profession.

Taken together, this body of research suggests that mentoring is best understood as a socially and materially embedded practice shaped by organisational structures, historical legacies, geopolitical orientations, and circulating professional norms. It cannot be reduced to a set of supportive interactions; rather, it is a site where institutional power, teacher identity, and pedagogical expectations intersect. This framing highlights the need for analytical approaches that move beyond individual intentions or policy prescriptions to examine how power is produced, negotiated, and sustained through relationships among people, texts, technologies, procedures, and material infrastructures. Actor–Network Theory (ANT) offers such a perspective by conceptualising mentoring as an emergent effect of heterogeneous actor-networks, rather than an intrinsic or uniformly defined practice. ANT shifts attention from mentoring as a policy-designed intervention to mentoring as something assembled through translations, enrolments, inscriptions, and circulating artefacts. By tracing these relational processes, ANT reveals how certain mentoring practices become stabilised, how others remain fragile, and how institutional authority is performed and distributed across human and non-human actors. This allows for a more nuanced reading of mentoring as a relational and power-laden practice—one shaped by administrative histories, professional norms, international policy templates, and the material conditions of educational work.

An ANT reading makes several contributions to the literature. First, it treats mentoring as an achievement of translations, not an intrinsic practice. Second, it foregrounds temporality as turbulent, showing how past arrangements persist and return. Third, it highlights geopolitics as constitutive, rather than contextual: EU directives, OECD reports, donor projects, and Russian influence are viewed as actors within networks whose interactions shape the power-laden configurations through which mentoring is stabilised or destabilised.

Although ANT has informed numerous studies of teacher education, professional learning, and classroom practice (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Mulcahy, 2010; Guerrettaz, 2021), its application to teacher mentoring remains rare. The present analysis therefore fills an important empirical and conceptual gap. By examining mentoring in Romania and Moldova as an effect of translations, inscriptions, and assemblages involving legal texts, examinations, international reports, and material infrastructures, the study extends ANT into an area of teacher education research where its potential remains largely

unexplored, while also deepening existing sociomaterial understandings of mentoring (Sundli, 2007; Orland-Barak, 2010).

3. Methodology

Data

The data set consists of 129 documents, including 81 from Romania and 48 from Moldova. These materials are classified as policy documents, research studies, conference proceedings, nationally implemented donor projects, and international reports addressing teacher mentoring within the two national contexts. The analysis focuses on the period from 2011 to 2024 for Romania and from 2014 onward for Moldova, aligning with the formal recognition of teacher induction and mentoring in national education laws and heightened attention following the COVID-19 pandemic. The selection of documents for our data basis followed the Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) protocol (Moher et al., 2015), guiding the identification and selection of relevant articles from databases such as Web of Science, SCOPUS, and CEEOL, EBSCO, Proquest, Google Scholar. The data search was performed between January and June of 2023. Given the scarcity of relevant entries in the major citation databases, the search was extended to the Moldovan national bibliometric index (<https://ibn.idsi.md/>) to avoid linguistic overlap and increase contextual coverage.

Search terms included combinations of “teacher mentoring,” “teacher induction,” “professional insertion,” “beginning teachers,” “Romania,” and “Republic of Moldova”, in English and in Romanian. Documents were screened for (1) accessibility, (2) thematic relevance, and (3) explicit reference to mentoring, induction, or teacher professional development. Duplicate items identified across databases were removed manually. A list of document types included in the analysis is provided in Annex 1.

To complement the documentary analysis, interviews with beginning teachers from earlier studies (Mitescu-Lupu, 2012; Mitescu, 2014) were re-examined. Given the temporal distance between these interviews and the present study, they were treated not as primary empirical material, but as contextualising data that illuminate the lived experiences of mentoring within the period when mentoring frameworks were first formalised. Their function was to attune the analysis to how mentoring practices—and the policy developments shaping them—were being enacted and negotiated within the unfolding time-space of the interviews, refining the interpretation of mentoring instantiations as they emerged in the time-space of the interviews, rather than to serve as a source of up-to-date accounts.

Analytical Framework: Actor-Network Theory and Turbulent Temporality

Six key concepts structure the analysis. At the heart of ANT is *translation* (Callon, 1986), the continual negotiation through which actors redefine one another’s interests. In both countries, translation is visible when Romanian ministries reinterpret European Union

quality discourses as forms of probationary supervision, while Moldovan schools recraft legal mandates into practices of collegial support.

As translation unfolds, actors become drawn into particular arrangements through *enrolment*, a process in which roles are negotiated and stabilised rather than simply assigned. Thus, mentor registries in Romania do not merely designate teachers as mentors but help configure them as supervisors, while inspectorates emerge as gatekeepers of professional status.

These emerging arrangements leave behind *inscriptions*, the durable traces that give mentoring its solidity. Rather than functioning as a static list, these inscriptions accumulate through legal reforms enacted in 2011 and 2021 in Romania and in 2014 in Moldova, as well as through evaluation charts, examination protocols, portfolios, and donor project reports, each contributing to the stabilisation of particular mentoring models.

Some inscriptions travel widely. ANT calls these *immutable mobiles* (Latour, 1987): models that circulate while preserving their form. OECD and World Bank reports function as such mobile templates, shaping policy debates and reform trajectories in both Romania and Moldova.

Over time, these circulating and sedimented elements become taken for granted. Through *black-boxing* (Latour, 1999), networks solidify to the point where their origins are obscured. Mentoring as supervision in Romania and mentoring as support in Moldova thus come to appear natural, masking the contingent work that produced them.

Within these stabilised configurations lie *obligatory passage points*, the critical junctures through which actors must pass. Romania's *Titularizare* and *Definitivare* exams serve not only as evaluation mechanisms but as structuring gateways that align novices, mentors, and inspectorates. In Romania, *Titularizare* and *Definitivare* are two key national examinations that structure the early stages of a teacher's career. *Titularizare* is the national recruitment exam. It determines whether a candidate can obtain a permanent teaching position within the public system. A high score allows a teacher to become *titular* (permanently appointed), while lower scores restrict access to only temporary or substitute positions. It therefore functions as a major gatekeeping mechanism for entry into the profession. *Definitivare* is the professional confirmation exam, typically taken after several years of teaching. It certifies that a teacher has achieved a recognised level of professional competence and allows progression to higher career stages. Passing the exam is required to remain in the profession long term and to access further professional development pathways. Together, the two exams regulate who enters, who remains, and how teachers advance within the Romanian education system, making them central obligatory passage points in both recruitment and professional development.

ANT also provides a distinctive approach to temporality. Rather than treating time as linear and singular, it highlights turbulence, recursion, and return. Reforms materialise as layered temporal flows, where older inscriptions persist and intersect with new actors.

Romania's reliance on supervisory exams revives earlier nineteenth-century and communist-era logics, while Soviet legacies of uniformity continue disrupting Moldova's more recent emphasis on support. In this sense, time becomes a field of whirlpools and rapids (Latour, 2005), in which multiple temporalities coexist and shape practice.

Taken together, these concepts offer a narrative lens through which to reinterpret the historiographies of mentoring in Romania and Moldova, foregrounding how networks assemble and disassemble, how temporal patterns recur, and how geopolitical alignments inflect mentoring practices.

Analytical process

The analysis unfolded in an iterative, multi-step process that combined inductive and deductive strategies. All documents were read multiple times and coded manually using a scheme that integrated ANT-informed categories—such as translation, enrolment, inscription, immutable mobiles, black-boxing, and obligatory passage points—with themes that emerged directly from the material. Coding proceeded through constant comparison within and across the Romanian and Moldovan datasets, enabling the identification of recurring patterns, contradictions, and country-specific dynamics. Actor-networks were then reconstructed by mapping key human and non-human actors, the inscriptions that stabilised their roles, and the relationships linking them. Interview transcripts from earlier studies were analysed separately, with attention to how they illuminated or complicated the documentary evidence given their temporal distance from the current policy landscape. Throughout the process, analytical decisions were documented through reflexive notes, and credibility was strengthened through triangulation across legislation, policy documents, donor-project materials, international reports, and research studies. The researcher's professional experience within the Romanian teacher education system, voluntary involvement as a mentor for graduates of one initial teacher education programme, and fluency as a native speaker of Romanian (the national language in both Romania and the Republic of Moldova) informed both data selection and interpretation, facilitating access to documents, sensitivity to contextual nuances, and awareness of historically embedded practices while maintaining critical reflexivity. Evidence presented in the findings reflects elements that appeared consistently across sources, played a central role within actor-networks, and were corroborated across multiple document types.

4. Findings

Romania: Mentoring as Supervision and the Return of Probationary Logics

Following the formal adoption of the notions of professional induction and mentoring for beginning teachers in the 2011 Education Law, mentoring was legally recognized in Romania's educational system. However, this inscription—while promising at the semantic level—did not materialise into stable practices. In ANT terms, the 2011 law

acted as an inscription that sought to enrol a network of mentors, schools, inspectorates, and policymakers, but the translation into practice faltered. The obligatory passage points of *Titularizare* and *Definitivare* exams, historically associated with supervision, became dominant actants, shaping how mentoring was enacted. These exams redefined mentoring not as a form of support, as intended in the normative text, but as a supervisory mechanism ensuring teachers' passage through bureaucratic thresholds. To illustrate, an excerpt from the Ministry Order 5485/2011 reads: "The trainee teacher benefits from support provided by the mentor teacher until obtaining the *definitivare* certification and the title of teacher with the right to practice in pre-university education, in accordance with the provisions of Article 241, paragraphs (4) and (5) of Law no. 1/2011" [excerpt from Art 23 (3) of MO 5485/2011]. The denominator for beginning teacher in the normative text is "trainee teacher", indicative of the type of enrollment intended for induction as an initial, school-based stage in the continuing professional development of the beginning teacher.

Empirical data from the policy reports (RO-55; RO-09) show that while legislation guaranteed every novice teacher a mentor, the enrolment of mentors into functioning networks remained uneven. Beginning teachers frequently reported not having an assigned mentor or having one in name only. As one teacher noted, "I was told who my mentor was after several months, but we never met" (RO-37). This underscores how the legal inscription lacked the material and relational infrastructures required for stabilisation, revealing mentoring as a fragile network effect rather than an implemented practice. The network thus remained fragile: the legal text existed as an immutable mobile circulating across ministries and inspectorates, but its translation at the school level faltered.

Between 2011 and 2016, the failure to implement mentor selection criteria (RO-09) further exposed this gap between inscription and enrolment. A report by OECD from 2017 (RO-48) reads: "*Mentorship, however, is not yet a fully functional induction support. A number of new teachers who participated in interviews with the OECD Review Team either had not been assigned a mentor or had only been assigned one "in theory". A policy setting out selection criteria and training for mentors has been released but not yet applied (Stingu et al., 2016). The Review Team found evidence that at least one County School Inspectorate (CSI) is conducting mentorship training, but this function has not been formally assigned to CSIs nationally.*" [Excerpt from policy report RO-48]. ANT helps reveal that this gap reflects competing translations rather than mere implementation failure: while the law used European policy vocabulary, the system defaulted to existing bureaucratic logics in the absence of clear role definitions, incentives, or training infrastructures. OECD and World Bank reports (RO-48; RO-49) served as immutable mobiles, traveling across borders and legitimizing reforms by invoking European norms. These reports did not simply convey best practices; they acted as powerful non-human actors that re-inscribed particular visions of modernity, positioning Romanian mentoring within a deficit frame relative to external models.

Historically, Romania's educational policy has relied on European arguments as sources of legitimacy, often without reference to indigenous evidence (Mitescu-Manea, 2023). In Latourian terms, "Europe" itself acts as a powerful actant, enrolling national actors through the promise of modernisation. Since the first Law of Education in 1864, Romanian reformers have drawn on European discourses to justify domestic change, using them as inscriptions of progress. Yet this orientation has often produced a 'deficit' translation: indigenous practices are frequently represented as less developed or outdated, whereas external models are elevated as exemplary and authoritative. After 2011, mentoring remained embedded in this deficit logic, stabilised not by demonstrated effectiveness but by the legitimacy of external inscriptions circulating as authoritative templates.

Throughout history, however, this almost constant reference to the European argument has not been matched by systematic use of evidence-informed or research-based arguments in the articulation of policy discourses. When research is mobilised, thematic analyses are scarce and often overshadowed by transnational comparative reports, which further amplify the prominence of external templates. This contributes to a policy tendency to frame innovation in teachers' professional development as a corrective response to perceived deficits in indigenous practices rather than an inquiry-driven exploration of local professional learning. For example, the policy document *Memorandum Educated Romania* (2021) reads: "According to Eurostat data and the *Education and Training Monitor*, Romania did not meet several important education targets set for 2020 [...]. Consequently, Romania is obliged to undertake a profound reform of its education system [...]. Therefore, taking into account both the need to continue and intensify national efforts to develop Romania's education system and the European recommendations, it is necessary to [...] Improving the quality of pre-university education in Romania through: [...] and training teachers to centre the teaching-assessment process on the needs of the pupil" [Excerpt from RO-75].

After 2021, the post-pandemic period introduced a new cycle of translations. Policies framed mentoring as a tool for professional development throughout the teaching career, linking it causally to improved educational outcomes and reduced dropout rates. In ANT terms, this expansion sought to redefine the network by enrolling new actors—ministries, universities, and EU-funded projects—into a broader system. Project PROF, for instance, trained over 28,000 teachers, producing new inscriptions in the form of certification documents and digital registries. Yet these new inscriptions reproduced earlier ambiguities: the 2022 National Record of Teacher Mentors lists over 4,000 mentors without specifying mentoring roles or competencies, creating confusion about responsibilities and professional expectations. To illustrate, the Ministry of Education Order 6173/2022 (RO-73) reads: ""Art. 4 – (1) Teachers who hold the status of mentor teacher coordinate the organisation and conduct of the pedagogical practicum within initial teacher education and/or the pedagogical practicum required for occupying a

teaching position, in schools designated as training schools or in school consortia coordinated by such schools” [Excerpt from RO-73].

The PROF-related policy documents also illustrate how centralisation and conceptual overlap shape mentoring practices. For instance, the proposed “collaborative learning communities” are operationalised as regional teacher gatherings resembling traditional Pedagogical Gatherings (transl. Ro. “*Cercuri Pedagogice*”). Simultaneously, mentoring is positioned as a vehicle for blended-learning implementation, suggesting a biased conceptualisation of learning communities as online information-sharing spaces rather than relational, dialogical environments. Such formulations reinforce transmission-oriented pedagogical traditions rather than supporting mentoring-as-learning. For example, Project PROF proposes as one of its’ strategic goals to: “A5.1. Create the framework necessary for operationalising the institutional mechanism of career mentoring for the teaching profession in pre-university education, within the National Centre for Career Mentoring.” (RO-57). On paragraph “5.1.2. Establishing the logistical framework at the level of the National Centre for Career Mentoring” it reads: “*The development and implementation of the support/infrastructure required for conducting distance-based teacher mentoring activities through multimedia tools is aligned with the European context of using modern learning methods. Distance learning within teacher mentoring, supported by technology, will enable teachers to acquire and develop the competencies needed in the broader global context of digitalisation. Implementing mentoring activities through technological means will develop, strengthen, and interconnect learning communities and the component entities of the teacher mentoring institution*” [Excerpt from RO-57, Structure of Project PROF]. The symbolic elevation of mentoring—as a prestigious, career-wide role—contrasts sharply with its limited functional enactment since its legal introduction in 2011, further revealing the political work done by policy inscriptions.

This expansion illustrates how ANT clarifies network turbulence. Each new actor—policy document, training centre, funding agency—attempts to stabilise mentoring but simultaneously multiplies contradictions. Universities and Teacher Training Centres were proposed as new infrastructural nodes; yet, their responsibilities overlap with those of inspectorates, creating contested zones of enrolment.

The persistence of hierarchical accountability in Article 72(4) of the Ministry of Education Order 4183/2022 demonstrates a form of black-boxing, as mentoring is equated with evaluation and compliance. The committees mandated to oversee mentoring replicate earlier surveillance logics rather than facilitating dialogical learning communities: “(4) *The responsibilities of the committee for teacher mentoring and career development are as follows: a) ensuring, at the level of the school unit, the planning, organisation, and implementation of activities related to teacher career development; b) carrying out the continuous training needs assessment at the level of the school unit; c) ensuring the evaluation of the extent to which teaching staff have met the training requirements and validating, after evaluation, the fulfilment of these requirements through*

the accumulation of the legally mandated number of transferable professional credits, including through the recognition and equivalence of credits obtained from participation in programmes for continuous professional development and career advancement; d) monitoring the impact of teacher training on the quality of the teaching–learning–assessment process and on pupils’ educational progress; e) organising continuous professional development activities specific to the school unit—demonstration lessons, experience exchanges, etc.; f) implementing the training standards associated with the professional profile of teachers; g) providing guidance to teachers in the teaching–learning–assessment process, including in blended-learning or online systems; h) preparing the schedule of pedagogical practicum activities and monitoring the work of mentor teachers, in cases where the school unit functions as a training school; i) ensuring the organisation and implementation of mentoring activities specific to beginning teachers, in order to support them in taking the national definitivare exam required for practising in pre-university education.” [Excerpt from Art. 72 (4) of Ministry of Education’s Order 4183/2022 , RO-77]. In this process, the relational and reflective potential of mentoring is obscured under managerial language. Mentoring becomes a black box—a stable artefact whose complexity is hidden by bureaucratic form.

Despite these challenges, post-2021 discourses attempt to expand the semantic field of mentoring to include coaching, tutoring, and collegial learning. Some teachers describe informal collaborations that resemble mentoring-as-support, aligning with Kemmis et al.’s (2014) notion of mentoring as a form of collaborative self-development. Yet these forms remain marginal and under-recognised, often excluded from official inscriptions. The discursive ambiguity—where “mentoring,” “coaching,” and “training” circulate interchangeably—reflects unstable enrolments and incomplete translations.

Empirical examples underscore these tensions. Novice teachers in disadvantaged schools report being “assigned mentors on paper only” (RO-55), while mentors themselves highlight “lack of time or clear expectations” (RO-48). These examples illustrate failed enrolments: actors are named but not connected. When new national projects, such as PROF, are introduced, they enrol thousands into certification schemes but do not alter the structural conditions that shape the enactment of mentoring. Taken together, these patterns demonstrate how human actors (inspectors, policymakers, mentors, school leaders) and non-human actors (laws, exams, reports, certification registries, procedural templates) interact to assemble mentoring predominantly as supervision within a probationary logic. The resulting assemblage is fragmented, multi-temporal, and unstable—where supervisory, accountability-driven, symbolic, and emergent supportive logics coexist without consolidating into a coherent mentoring system.

Moldova: Mentoring as Support and Post-Soviet Translations

Mentoring in the Republic of Moldova is conceptualised around the relationship between an experienced teacher and a novice colleague. This relationship is consistently described

in policy and practitioner discourse as supportive, voluntary, and collegial. ANT enables us to interpret this network not as a stable institution but as a dynamic set of translations among mentors, mentees, policy documents, and geopolitical influences. The Education Code of 2014 serves as the primary inscription defining mentoring as a voluntary, service-oriented activity grounded in professional altruism (Article 4, MD-43). This inscription enrolls teachers through moral rather than bureaucratic means, appealing to professional ethos rather than hierarchical authority. In practice, as several excerpts indicate, mentoring involves a combination of guidance, counselling, and observation: “Mentoring is a special relationship between someone with experience, willing and capable of offering support to a newcomer to the organisation” (Primary teacher, MD-25); “Training mentors implies knowing what is specific to the learning and development of adults and being thoroughly prepared to expand the mentoring relationship” (Researcher, MD-14). These voices exemplify how mentoring as support becomes a locally translated practice, enacted through interpersonal relations and reflective activities such as journaling and lesson analysis.

At the same time, ANT reveals that mentoring in Moldova operates through fragile enrolments. Although the law guarantees every new teacher a mentor, the OECD & UNICEF (2021) and European Training Foundation (2020) report that only a small proportion of schools systematically provide this support (MD-38, MD-36). The Education Code serves as an inscription that travels as an immutable mobile, appearing in donor reports and international analyses; yet, its local enactment remains uneven. Mentoring in Moldova thus materialises as a semi-stable network of promises, documents, and aspirations. Reports and practitioner accounts indicate that mentoring meetings often depend on individual initiative rather than systemic obligation, suggesting that while these practices can be relationally rich, they frequently lack institutional durability.

Historically, the Soviet legacy of uniformity and collective supervision shapes current translations. During the Soviet era, induction emphasised conformity, loyalty, and the collective ethos. Post-1991, Moldova attempted to translate mentoring into a European framework of reflective practice. However, Soviet inscriptions—procedural documentation, control-oriented evaluation—continue to circulate, influencing expectations of formality and compliance. ANT’s focus on temporality clarifies how these older inscriptions persist and combine with new European scripts, creating what Latour calls “turbulent time.” Mentoring simultaneously embodies continuity with Soviet pedagogical hierarchies and discontinuity through the discourse of Europeanisation.

The data also show how geopolitical alignments act as powerful actants within the network. Moldova’s participation in OECD and UNESCO projects enrolls international agencies as mediators shaping mentoring discourses. These organisations function as immutable mobiles, standardising terminology and procedures. Meanwhile, Russian commentaries position Moldova’s educational reforms as destabilising the post-Soviet order (MD-08; MD-09; MD-10; MD-11; MD-12), introducing counter-narratives that

contest European influence (MD-09; MD-12). This geopolitical tension translates into practical ambiguities: while policy documents invoke EU standards (MD-43; MD-44), local schools often operate with hybrid practices that combine Romanian and Moldovan resources (MD-30; MD-35). Here, ANT captures the entanglement of local and international actants producing hybrid mentoring enactments.

Moldovan academic discourse further reflects discursive translations. Analyses frequently invoke mythological tropes, such as Telemachus and Mentor, to legitimise the concept both historically and culturally. This recurrent invocation functions as a symbolic inscription, stabilising the meaning of mentoring through a shared cultural reference, yet also constraining innovation by perpetuating formulaic narratives. Between 2014 and 2023, research outputs included in our dataset followed a consistent algorithmic pattern: referencing Greek mythology, citing the Moldavian Education Code, and aligning with Romanian and/or Western sources. ANT exposes this as a network of citations that constructs authority through repetition rather than critical reflection. The lack of indigenous research acts as a missing node in the network, weakening its local durability.

From an ANT perspective, Moldova's mentoring operates through multiple translations: from Soviet supervision to European support, from state control to donor-driven projects, from legal codification to moral obligation. The absence of a strong infrastructural framework reflects incomplete enrolment: mentors, schools, and inspectorates remain loosely connected. Following 2021, national recovery policies reiterated the importance of mentoring but retained its supportive rather than evaluative function, unlike Romania's supervision-oriented model. This difference demonstrates how distinct assemblages of actors—laws, reports, donors, cultural symbols—produce divergent mentoring enactments.

In summary, Moldova's mentoring network exemplifies a complex intersection of semantic, physical, and social arrangements. Its inscriptions—laws, mythological discourses, donor templates—circulate as immutable mobiles that enrol teachers into reflective but fragile practices. Soviet and European temporalities coexist, producing hybrid enactments. Through ANT, we observe that mentoring in Moldova is not merely a supportive practice, but a continually negotiated network shaped by goodwill, geopolitics, and the lingering turbulence of post-Soviet transformation.

5. Comparative Discussion: Turbulent Temporalities and Geopolitical Actors

Juxtaposing Romania and Moldova through an ANT lens reveals how different actor-networks stabilise divergent enactments of mentoring while being subject to shared geopolitical pressures and turbulent temporalities. This comparative pattern aligns with a substantial body of research showing that mentoring is not a neutral or uniformly supportive practice but a socially and institutionally mediated activity (Hobson & Malderez, 2013; Wang & Odell, 2002; Orland-Barak, 2010). In Romania, exams and inspectorates serve as obligatory passage points that enrol novices, mentors, and school administrators into networks of supervision. This reflects broader findings that

mentoring often operates as a mechanism of evaluation and control in systems marked by bureaucratic legacies (Sundli, 2007). In Moldova, by contrast, reduced workloads and collegial practices act as inscriptions that translate mentoring into support for adjustment and professional growth. These differences underscore the heterogeneity of mentoring: it is not a single practice but a contingent effect of the assemblages that give it shape. However, both cases illustrate what ANT and sociomaterial studies describe as the fragility of enrolment and the incompleteness of translation (Latour, 2005; Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Laws circulate as immutable mobiles in both contexts, yet local enactments remain uneven and sometimes symbolic.

Temporality, in both cases, appears as turbulent rather than linear. Romania's present-day exam-centred mentoring black-boxes supervisory logics can be traced back to nineteenth-century Europeanisation and communist surveillance. Moldova's emphasis on support reflects a political will towards Europeanisation but is continually disrupted by the return of Soviet patterns of conformity and uniformity. Both cases exemplify Latour's notion that time is a flux of whirlpools and rapids, in which old inscriptions persist and re-emerge alongside new ones. These findings resonate with ANT-informed analyses that conceptualise temporality as recursive and layered rather than sequential (Law, 2009), and contribute empirical grounding to this theoretical claim.

Geopolitical alignments further shape these networks. Romania's EU integration, and its reliance on OECD and World Bank benchmarks, has embedded mentoring in a quality-assurance narrative, echoing research on how transnational governance reshapes national teacher policy frameworks (Grek, 2020). Moldova, positioned between European and Russian spheres, navigates competing translations: Europeanisation projects enrol it into reflective mentoring paradigms, while Russian commentaries resist and reframe these as destabilising. Thus, mentoring becomes an arena of geopolitical mediation, where international templates, donor funding, and national identity struggles shape local educational practices.

Material constraints cut across both contexts. In Romania, examination systems and registries create an illusion of comprehensive mentoring networks while concealing limited enactment in schools. In Moldova, donor-funded initiatives promote support but rarely achieve sustainable infrastructures. ANT highlights these failures not as simple policy gaps but as moments of disrupted enrolment and unstable translation, underscoring the inherent instability of these networks.

In summary, this comparison suggests that mentoring in Romania and Moldova extends beyond policy formulation. It involves complex negotiations among actors, as well as inscriptions and translations, across temporal and geopolitical contexts. Consequently, mentoring emerges not as a linear and unified reform, but as an unstable configuration within dynamic networks, where historical legacies and external influences continuously reshape local practices. Material constraints, too, exert a common influence. Romania's registries and exam systems create an impression of completeness, yet the absence of resources and training reveals how limited enactment can be. Moldova's

donor-supported initiatives advance mentoring rhetorically but struggle to sustain it structurally. ANT interprets these challenges not simply as failures of policy but as moments when enrolments collapse and inscriptions lose durability. Each national system survives through negotiated configurations rather than through enduring institutional reform.

Ultimately, mentoring in both countries exemplifies Latour's notion of turbulent temporality—simultaneously oriented toward progress and haunted by returning pasts. The assemblages that sustain mentoring—legal texts, bureaucracies, reports, and international frameworks—move more like shifting currents than along a fixed, linear path. In this sense, mentoring becomes a living process of negotiation among history, geopolitics, and educational reform.

6. Conclusions: Policy and Research Implications

The comparative analysis of Romania and Moldova, conducted through the lens of Actor-Network Theory, yields several key conclusions that are relevant to both policy and research. First, mentoring should be understood not as a linear or unitary solution, but as the contingent outcome of heterogeneous networks of actors—ministries, inspectorates, mentors, novices, laws, exams, donor projects, and international agencies. Any attempt at reform must therefore engage with these networks as dynamic, fragile, and historically layered.

From a policy perspective, three implications stand out:

1. **Attending to Network Complexity.** Effective reform requires acknowledging mentoring as a negotiated assemblage. Romania might rebalance its emphasis on exams and supervision to create space for mentoring as support. Moldova, conversely, needs stronger infrastructural commitments to transform goodwill-based mentoring into a sustainable system.

2. **Recognising Turbulent Temporalities.** Both cases demonstrate that returns of the past haunt mentoring reforms. Romania's supervisory logics draw upon nineteenth-century Europeanisation and communist surveillance, while Moldova's supportive practices remain entangled with Soviet legacies of conformity. Policy efforts should work with these continuities, fostering reflection on inherited practices instead of assuming that progress automatically erases them.

3. **Accounting for Geopolitical Entanglements.** Romania's EU integration anchors its reforms within European quality frameworks, while Moldova's position between the EU and Russian spheres exposes mentoring practices to competing translations. In both contexts, policies need to become more sensitive to geopolitical pressures, ensuring that external models are adapted thoughtfully rather than adopted uncritically.

For research, ANT encourages detailed, ethnographic attention to how mentoring is enacted in practice—how mentors, mentees, documents, and infrastructures interact over time. Studying moments of breakdown or instability can reveal how educational reforms actually take hold, transform, or dissipate. Comparative work across post-

socialist and Europeanising contexts could further expose how temporal turbulence and geopolitical positioning shape professional development.

Ultimately, mentoring in Romania and Moldova should not be viewed in terms of a binary of success or failure. It is better understood as a continuing negotiation—a historically layered, geopolitically entangled, and socially distributed achievement. Recognising this complexity invites more human, reflexive, and contextually grounded policymaking and scholarship, sensitive to the rhythms and recursions that characterise teachers' professional worlds.

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ANNEX1. General Description of entries in the data set: Romania (RO01-RO81) and Republic of Moldova (MD01-MD48)

Category	Romania	Republic of Moldova
Journal Articles & Conference Proceedia	47	35
International Reports	12	5
Policy papers	11	2
Donor projects	11	6