Article

A Metaphorical Analysis of Mentoring for Education without Walls in Palestine and Finland with the OLIVE International Project as a Key Example

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Abstract: Nowadays, efforts are being made in Finland to develop education across borders through projects that seek to deal with global learning crises. Palestine, being engaged in high-intensity struggle and faced with emergencies in education, is one example of such an initiative. Both actual and virtual walls exist in the collaboration between Palestinian and Finnish universities. By using conceptual metaphor theory and Ricoeur's metaphor theory, this paper discusses and analyzes metaphors that emerge in the process of building education without walls in the OLIVE international project. Project activities support online teaching and learning methods. Drawing from the experience of first-stage implementation, the paper brings forward metaphors that emerge in developing mentoring. The study explores new perspectives on mentoring to conceptualize the metaphor by considering the need to decolonize engagement with learning through both intellectual and embodied–affective elements. This is done by providing a framework for immersive learning. As a result, one can conclude that mentoring is not only cognitive but also an embodied metaphor with affective elements and needs immersive learning environments. Mentoring is fluid, as the roles of mentors and mentees interchange and intertwine. Mentoring takes place in groups, between and among peers, students, teachers, and researchers both on-line and on-site.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, development education seems to provide the basis for international projects in Finland that draw from its theoretical basis to establish their working concepts. Development education happens in long-term collaborative exchanges through dialogue; aims for joint goal-setting, increased understanding, and co-creation of knowledge; and is a mutual learning task between universities, students, and teachers [1]. Development education is therefore linked with practices of developing learning. Collaborative exchanges and dialogue and the processes of joint goal-setting remain, however, under-researched and under-theorized. One way to get a deep understanding of how collaborative processes in international projects in higher education work is by looking into mentoring and the ways mentoring takes place.

Contemporary metaphors of mentoring bring forward the element of sociality and see mentoring as a collaborative, mutual, peer and group process [2–5]. Considering these, this paper aims to discuss and analyze the metaphors that emerge in OLIVE, an international project that brings together two universities in Palestine and two universities in Finland to build education without walls.

To meet this end, in this paper we will discuss the wider context of international projects in Finland with a focus on the Finnish–Palestinian collaboration, aiming for (higher) education without walls. Within this framework, education without walls will be analyzed as a visual and embodied metaphor and its possible significations in relation to mentoring practices taking place in the OLIVE project. OLIVE is an example case of an international project that brings together Finnish and Palestinian universities.

The following section will briefly discuss the context where OLIVE operates.

2. Background of the Study

2.1. International Higher Education Projects in Finland

In Finland, the Higher Education Institutions Institutional Cooperation Instrument (HEIICI) works under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA of Finland and the Finnish National Agency of Education (EDUFI) to implement the country's development policy and cooperation objectives aided by the UN-endorsed 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The core goal of Finland's development policy is to eradicate extreme poverty and to reduce poverty and inequality [6].

One way to achieve this goal is by supporting higher education institutions (HEIs) in educating students who will later be employed in leading positions in the public, private, or third sector. In this way, HEIs contribute to building the critical knowledge necessary for the social fabric of societies and, thus, serve "the interests of redressing inequality, enhancing participatory debate and deliberation." [7].

Towards this direction, international projects in higher education in Finland aim to develop education and learning at the intersection of institutional policies and practices at the local and cross-border levels, serving both export-oriented and pedagogical purposes. OLIVE is one such project in the Middle East, involving Palestinian and Finnish partner universities, aiming to digitize and update higher education curricula for education without walls with a focus on teacher training and comprehensive schoolteachers' training.

To achieve these aims, staff, teachers, researchers, and students are brought together from the Faculties of Education in Birzeit University (West Bank), Al-Azhar University (Gaza), the University of Eastern Finland, and the University of Helsinki.

The Palestinian context is diverse, with the West Bank and Gaza forming two distinct cases. So are the Finnish universities, in the sense that their histories and developmental processes vary [8]. This means that not only the geo-political turmoil across borders has an impact on project implementation. As well, the backgrounds, missions, and strategic plans of HEIs at the national level matter. Different opportunities, challenges and tensions arise, then, at the multiple intersection points, when aiming for educational change.

Given the complexity of the situation, this paper focuses on the collaboration of Birzeit and Helsinki University that targets the update and digitization of curricula.

One way toward curricular renewal in the OLIVE project is by re-visiting the concept and practices of mentoring. Initially, mentoring was conceptualized as a common ground for developing collaboration with Palestinian schools, involving in-service teachers and principals in the process.

However, the fact that, in OLIVE, mentoring practices also concern practicum student-teachers has made the organic link with higher education curricula updates visible. Furthermore, as Gaza and the West Bank are under occupation, a large number of mentoring-related activities take place online. The discussion and analysis of mentoring in the OLIVE project, therefore, will focus on practices taking place in hybrid modes, both on-line and on-site, in Finland and in Palestine.

2.2. The Palestinian Educational Context

Palestine is engaged in high-intensity struggle (i.e., urgent struggle to defend land, lives, and livelihoods from active threat [9]. As Tareq and Jarbawi [10] explain, Israeli policies did not serve the actual needs of the Palestinian economy and transformed the

Palestinian market into one that could not compete with the manufacturers of the industrialized countries of Europe and North America.

The policy of structural dependency led to the deterioration of Palestinian wellbeing and increased unemployment to unprecedented levels. In addition to deteriorating socioeconomic standards, blockades and the destruction of neighborhoods, educational and health facilities, and infrastructure have caused a humanitarian crisis. In Gaza, for instance, more than 70 percent of the population relies on humanitarian aid and the unemployment rate is the highest in the world at 43 percent, while over 72 percent of households live in food insecurity [10–13].

The impact on Palestinian education is grave when it comes to both attrition rates and the overall right to get educated. In the State of Palestine, while very few children of primary school age are excluded from education, by the age of 15, nearly 25 percent of boys and 7 percent of girls have dropped out. The right to education, as proposed in the framework set by UNESCO [11], seems to be overwhelmingly violated in Palestine.

The ongoing crisis with the COVID-19 pandemic has further emphasized the need for education that can operate with as well as without physical movement, when this is severely restricted by lockdowns, quarantines, closing of borders, curfews, and closing of schools and universities. During COVID-19, for example, Palestinian schools were to face multidimensional emergencies, since that was the first time Palestine moved to online learning at a large scale. In fact, serious challenges were encountered. Students, teachers, school principals, and parents were negatively affected. Parents reported that their schools and the ministry never communicated with them, unlike the contradictory shiny image published by the Ministry of Education. For example, the ministry claimed that the Palestine Educational TV Channel has helped all children, regardless of their abilities, access quality education [12]. However, as the findings of a study show, out of one hundred and thirty-one mothers, 98.5% reported that their children needed help while learning online and approximately 89% of them had no alternative internet connection when the main network got disconnected [13].

There are, therefore, different types of walls in the collaboration between Palestinian and Finnish HEIs, both actual and virtual, that need to be dealt with.

3. Education without Walls as Visual Embodied Metaphor

3.1. Metaphors about and for Education

Education without walls is a visual metaphor. In metaphor theory [14–18], metaphors occur when we talk about something by means of something else, and, therefore, a stretch or twist is required for sense-making.

In conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) [14,15], metaphors are cognitive tools that allow understanding abstract target domains in relation to the sources in the experiential embodied domain. For instance, education is understood in relation to the more concrete source wall, being a material entity in the education without walls metaphor. This movement, or metaphorical twist, from the source to the target, according to CMT, shapes our thinking and acting, and, therefore, our ways of 'seeing' the world. Seeing education, then, means experiencing it without walls. Without walls refers to a space for learning through socialization and, importantly, without judgement, in supportive environments. WITHOUT WALLS is where the metaphorical twist happens.

In addition to being visual, the metaphor is also embodied. Lakoff and Johnson [15] argue that the human body as a 'container' imposes the concept of barrier (or wall) onto the mind as a natural symbol of protection of its existence. Even where there is no natural physical boundary that can be viewed as defining a container, we impose boundaries marking off our territory so that it has an inside and a bounding surface, whether a wall, a fence, or an abstract line or plane, thus signifying a space of one's own, defended from an antagonistic 'other'.

'Wall' is therefore both an embodied and disembodied (or imagined) metaphor. As a disembodied political metaphor, a wall signifies division (e.g., the Berlin Wall) as well as

referring to the human desire for limited space as a secure (mainly urban) political locum for the self-identity of the ego [19]. At the same time, it points to the desire for breaking boundaries.

Further developments in the field of CMT integrate findings on the embodied nature of metaphor and cognition with the embeddedness of cognition in the socio-cultural context and its social-interactive nature [20].

In Palestine, for instance, a wall is a dominant visual and embodied metaphor signifying violence, military action, colonialism, and different types of othering. In all cases, seeing walls in Palestine also means experiencing actual and virtual (i.e., immaterial, disembodied, imagined) walls underlying high-intensity struggle situations.

Some examples include road obstacles, checkpoints, imprisonment, demolishing houses, and attacking and raiding of homes, stores, and residents by the Israeli settlers. Due to such events, schools, universities, and ministries usually announce general strikes as an act of mourning at least once a week. Strike due to the Israeli's violent actions becomes something common, repetitive, and part of Palestinian people's day-to-day realities, thus becoming another wall in the Palestinian heritage. As a result, practicum students cannot accomplish their practicum tasks at school. Schools themselves become less welcoming to student teachers, simply because their plans were also interrupted.

The Israeli occupation, the complicated Palestinian situation, and related emergencies are not the only examples of obstacles student teachers face. In fact, a lot of tasks are demanded from practicum students to be accomplished at their universities and at training schools during the same period of time. For example, student teachers, at Al-Najah University, Bethlehem University, and the College of Educational Sciences in Ramallah, have reported facing a lot of difficulties, especially those related to training at schools while enrolling in other university courses at the same time; transportation issues; having a gap between theoretical and practical knowledge; problems concerning supervision and mentoring; lack of training on advanced and unconventional methods and teaching strategies during training; time and management; having a big number of student teachers supervised by each academic supervisor; and, finally, issues related to hosting prospective teachers at schools [21].

Therefore, according to the Ministry of Education and the higher education framework, it becomes hard for students " . . . to develop in order to be recognized as ready to enter the teaching profession as well-qualified new teachers" consistent with the Palestinian Teacher Professional Development Index [22].

In this context, therefore, the metaphor is both ABOUT (i.e., to gain a better understanding of what it means) and FOR (i.e., to provide a framework for) education without walls. Education without walls, thus, requires a double metaphorical twist, as illustrated in the header image in the main page of the project website [23].

The visual (Figure 1) displays the wall boundary that separates the occupied territories of Palestine. By projecting the imposed boundary, the visual conveys to the viewer the need for education free from walls, whether these are actual, visual (embodied), or imagined (disembodied). What the visual actually does is contextualize the viewer's (the knower's) experience of interaction with the context (the known) that the visual is embedded in in time and place [24]. In this way, a living structure takes shape for the viewer/website user to make sense not only of the struggles of the Palestinian people but of the project aims as well. Viewed in a flat screen, however, the visual keeps the viewer/knower outside the contextual frame, thus retaining the distance between the knower and the known [25].

Figure 1. Israel's separation wall in the West Bank. Reprinted with permission from A. Ronkainen (2021) [23]. Copyright Year: 2021. Copyright Antti Ronkainen.

3.2. Education without Walls as Novel Metaphor

In international learning development projects like OLIVE, the double metaphorical twist of education without walls generates questions asking who updates higher education curricula in Palestine and whether this is a unidirectional or bidirectional process. The knower/known distance then is linked with the process of updating, those who update, those whose curricula are updated, and the ways these interrelate with one another. To capture the dynamic element of the process, a novel education without walls metaphor is needed to de-conventionalize the narrative [26].

A novel metaphor should relate to the organizing structures and patterns, such as that of integrated interaction, that constitute experience [27]. In other words, the metaphor (or the metaphorical twist) is not just 'about' education without walls as seen from a flat screen. Importantly, it is for learning "from other ways of thinking, being, feeling, sensing, desiring and relating without repeating harmful colonial patterns of engagement across difference: for different configurations of shared existence to grow" [28]. Stein et al. [9] argue that decolonizing engagement with learning requires seeing education otherwise by "gesturing towards horizons of hope", aiming to combat violent and unsustainable systems through narratives of relational rigor. In addition to aiming for sustainable systems, relational rigor is intertwined with the need to "bring the body back" [29].

This way of seeing education by recognizing violence through both intellectual means and embodied sensation aligns with the point made by Lakoff and Johnson [16]. that our bodies participate in the process of concept formation and not just in shaping perception through the senses. The body and our ways of interacting with the world, our tools, crafts, and technologies that further extend these is what shapes reason and abstract thought [24].

In this sense, relational rigor for education without walls is also a cognitive–embodied metaphor. Seeing education without walls does not involve our eyes only. As well, it involves the movement of our eyes and, as such, our active bodily engagement and sensorimotor interaction [30]. Following from this, education without walls is about seeing education not as a flat screen, but as an enacted, immersive experience.

One way toward this direction *for* education without walls is to re-visit the metaphor and practices of mentoring in education and teacher education.

4. Mentoring for Developing Learning in Palestine and Finland

4.1. Current Approaches to Mentoring and Practices of Mentoring

Metaphors of mentoring draw mainly from socio-constructivist theories of learning and bring forward the element of sociality as inherent in the process. These concern both

practices centered on a one-to-one formation of co-mentoring (collaborative, mutual, peer) and practices centered on group formations' (e.g., group mentoring, mentoring circles): potential to transform the workspace. Some other metaphors prioritize the importance of the role of the mentor, e.g., as coach, tutor, etc. [2–5], in supporting professional development. As Pennanen et al. [2] argue, the need to support the professional development of new teachers is a pressing challenge for education systems in many countries. In the research literature, the topic is often examined through a variety of lenses, mainly considering the need for 'mentoring' of newly qualified teachers or 'teacher induction'. Mentoring has become the most popular form of teacher induction, and this has influenced the synonymous use of mentoring and induction.

However, as Pennänen et al. [2] point out, mentoring is under-researched and under-theorized, which seems to explain the conceptual confusion in the literature. In addition, the focus of existing research is on induction, while other areas, such as the need for practicing teachers for mentoring, are neglected. Teacher professional development is, rather than a linear process of separate stages, a dynamic, interconnected process. It should therefore be seen as a continuum where the various developmental stages are interconnected. This is one dimension of the need to re-conceptualize mentoring.

Another dimension relates to the hierarchies implied in the original meaning of the term. Mentor dates back to Homer's time (Μέντωρ in ancient Greek). In the story of the Odyssey, the mentor seems to possess divine knowledge and superior wisdom.

The etymology of mentor actually goes beyond ancient Greek [2]. Mentor is an agent noun of mentos (intent, purpose, spirit and passion) descended from the Sanskrit man-tar, 'one who thinks', and the Latin mon-i-tor, 'one who admonishes'. This etymological background opens a different way of thinking about the meanings of mentor and mentoring. A person who is acting as a mentor is one who is thinking and reflecting, and this forms the basis of their advice. In addition, the notion includes the element of authority or superiority in the sense of 'one who admonishes'. Admonition is usually given by a person who has some power over another person, for instance, an officer admonishing a citizen, a parent admonishing a child, or a teacher admonishing a pupil.

In the Palestinian context, for example, practicing teachers/mentees can experience pressure and get overwhelmed by emotions of discomfort arising from the double role of mentors who are tasked not only to support but, as well, to evaluate and assess the work of mentees. Whether assessing or inspecting (as supervisors were called inspectors before 1994), the term signifies authority, bringing forward fear and anxiety that entail bodily reactions. For example, before 1994, instructional supervisors were called inspectors, and, in reality, they worked as mentor inspectors [31] who used to visit teachers suddenly, looking for mentees' mistakes only. The notion of mentors (supervisors) as inspectors still exists, despite the fact that they are now called supervisors and that their duties have changed to support teachers rather than to inspect them.

From a metaphorical point of view, a kind of wall is built up in the mentor/mentee relationship that interferes with the process of learning. Such mentoring practices normalize the element of authority and reproduce the view of linear transmission of knowledge as well as asymmetrical power relations between participants [2,32–34].

In the Finnish context, recent studies show that mentoring practices are seen as reciprocal practices. Mentoring, however, should be looked into as a whole and in relation to different stages of development. In addition, in teacher education, the mentor/mentee roles are still quite distinct in Finland, acknowledging the mentor as the knower almost exclusively. Moreover, the bulk of current research concerns the Finnish-speaking white population, while studies of mentoring on the basis of gender, race and ethnic background are lacking [35].

4.2. An New Outlook of Mentoring for Education without Walls

Considering current trends and practices of mentoring as discussed above, it becomes evident that mentoring is primarily viewed as a cognitive metaphor. This perspective

neglects the aspect of mentoring as enacted experience that involves embodied interaction and affective elements.

For education without walls, new perspectives are needed to recognize the fluid, dynamic character of mentoring, which entails cognitive, embodied, and affective elements. Looking into mentoring as a shared experience is one step in this direction.

Some new directions include group mentoring, co-mentoring, mentoring circles, collaborative mentoring, and mentoring communities [35,36], and all of its forms can also achieve myriad benefits such as mutual understanding and lifelong learning. In such arrangements such as, for example, group mentoring, the role of a mentor is different from in traditional mentoring: the mentor in traditional mentoring is considered as a skilled or expert professional, whereas the mentor is considered as a facilitator in peer-group mentoring [35].

Moreover, as Pennanen et al. [34] argue, a contemporary view of mentoring involves teachers sharing and reflecting on their experiences, discussing problems and challenges that they meet in their work, listening, encouraging one another, and, importantly, learning together and from each other [33]. This turn, that indicates a shift toward more collaborative and constructive forms, does not only change the roles of mentors and mentees.

In addition, it indicates that the roles of mentors and mentees are fluid, in the sense that they are intertwined and shifting. During the mentoring experience, an individual can be mentor and mentee, depending on the requirements of the process [34].

Mentors and mentees can be seen as equal partners whose roles are not fixed, since they exchange knowledge and experiences. This fluidity of roles and ways of relating is present in the OLIVE project, given that professionals from various domains and disciplines, including teachers, students, researchers, activists, and policymakers meet, exchange, and collaborate with one another.

5. Aims and Research Questions of the Study

Based on the above, this paper seeks to explore new perspectives on mentoring in order to reconceptualize the metaphor by taking into consideration the need to decolonize engagement with mentoring for learning through both intellectual means and embodied/affective elements. To achieve this aim, the study aims to provide a framework for mentoring through opportunities for immersive learning.

Considering this, the study will draw from the experience of first-stage project implementation (2021–2022) in order to bring forward metaphors that have emerged from the process of developing learning through mentoring in two universities, one in Palestine and one in Finland.

Following from this, the study will seek responses to the following research questions: *What metaphors of mentoring emerge in developing learning in OLIVE project? What learning environments are used for mentoring in OLIVE? In what ways do environments used for mentoring encourage immersion? What opportunities, challenges, and tensions arise in the process of developing mentoring practices in immersive learning environments in OLIVE?*

To seek responses to the research questions, this study will use metaphorical analysis as a method to approach metaphor from, rather than a linguistic, a conceptual point of view, based on the work of cognitive theorists [14–16], linguists (e.g., [18]) and the work of philosopher of language Paul Ricoeur [17,37] through a consideration of the fluidity of the mentor/mentee roles and the environments where mentoring practices are actualized.

6. Metaphorical Analysis of Mentoring and the Novelty in Immersion

In this theoretical study, metaphor is used to offer a novel conceptualization of mentoring for education without walls through the analysis of mentoring practices as these are experienced in the OLIVE international project as a key example. Within this framework, the need is brought up to raise issues about and for education without walls as a double metaphorical twist. To make sense of the metaphor, our thinking 'stretches', and a shift back and forth is necessary from the domain of 'education' to the domain of 'without

walls'. In this sense, the shift or twist is double. Metaphor thus concerns, rather than figures of speech, how the world is shaped, and the ways we think and act [14–18,37]. An understanding of metaphors is therefore essential to better understand reality.

Following from this, education without walls is a mega-metaphor, being the basic organizing structure and pattern for a constellation of other related metaphors that constitute the experience of engaging with the project activities. For example, as argued in [9], relational rigor is necessary to get rid of colonial patterns in education. This can be made possible by recognizing violence, inequalities, injustices, and existing hierarchies and by acknowledging the contribution of affective–emotional–bodily dimensions to the learning experience.

Relational rigor is, therefore, a metaphor that attributes a novel characteristic by linking education with the ways we relate with the material world and with one another. Relational rigor also indicates that, rather than double, multiple metaphorical twists are needed for a novel metaphor of mentoring.

According to Ricoeur [17,37], at some point in the historical process, the extended (i.e., well-elaborated literary expressions used in prose and poetry) meaning of a metaphor becomes part of our everyday lexicon through repetition. In this way, the polysemy of words increases, and everyday meanings are augmented. Some metaphors become conventional (e.g., the legs of the table) to the degree that they lose their metaphorical identity (i.e., we don't think of them as metaphors any longer). Metaphors, however, are not only supposed to tell us something we already know. They are also meant to tell us something new about reality.

Education without walls is hardly a new metaphor. Whether it is conventional or not, however, depends on the context of use. As discussed previously, in education, walls can be actual and virtual. Although we do not really have power over actual walls, (e.g., changing the rule of occupation in Palestine), we can be innovative in figuring out ways to lower virtual walls. Virtual walls can be traced in mentoring, whether the process takes place on-line (i.e., through technologies) or on-site (e.g., when mentoring causes anxiety, discomfort, and so on). The novelty of 'walls' lies in the ways relational rigor increases, for instance, how the embodied experience contributes, encourages, or constrains the learning process. When mentoring causes pressure, discomfort, or anxiety, it is not really mentoring. When it comes to walls, no matter whether actual or virtual, they are always real. On the contrary, mentoring is not always real, whether it takes place in actual or in virtual environments. Under pressure, inequalities, injustices and so on, relational rigor decreases and engagement in the process is disrupted.

To combat the disruption of engagement, novel mentoring for education without walls would entail building environments for engaged (or immersive) learning. The degree of novelty of the metaphor depends, therefore, on the ways mentoring, engagement (or immersion), and learning environments interrelate for education without walls.

Immersion is a notion that entails the activation of experiential and affective modes for deep engagement in learning [24,25,38,39]. In this sense, immersive learning is about, in addition to cognitive, embodied and affective elements in learning, and is, thus, in alignment with education without walls.

Immersive learning is linked with the use of augmented reality and virtual reality technologies for the teaching of subjects (e.g., history) in formal classroom settings or in heritage spaces (e.g., museums) to ensure deep engagement. Immersive learning happens in environments that provide the necessary technological setup for sensory immersion as well as a means of sophisticated content representation, which is capable of simulating or imitating real and imagined worlds [24,25,38,39]. However, immersive learning is tightly entangled with enactment. As ref. [38] argue, immersive learning relates to interaction and the freedom allowed to learners to control their learning. Other technologies can therefore offer possibilities for immersive learning.

Arrangements for learning environments are instrumental for immersive learning, as they both enable and constrain the way we act and relate with the material world (i.e.,

other human and non-human beings; and non-material entities; see e.g., [40,41]). This points to the need to include in our theoretical examination the parameters that influence mentoring in relation to the opportunities and challenges for immersive learning that these environments offer.

7. Analysis of Practices of Mentoring in the OLIVE Project's Implementation

To trace the ways that mentoring and engagement interrelate in learning environments, we will look into the types of practices that play out in the different configurations in the OLIVE project as a key example. To this end, the analysis and discussion will follow a discursive path to validate the insights gained from the lived experiences [42] of the authors–researchers by going back and forth from empirical work and practice to the relevant literature. The co-authors of this study are participants in the project and, thus, the mentoring process is part of their lived experience. In addition, as they have been witnessing, planning, and participating in mentoring tasks and activities and mentoring one another at different stages of the project, they are able to localize both the knowledge and practices of mentoring and discuss their evolving thinking [43,44] using metaphor analysis inductively.

In OLIVE, examples of mentoring for the development of learning include virtual mentoring that has been planned, tried out, and redeveloped during the various project activities. Mentoring tasks involve simultaneous translations from a mentor's language into the mentee's language. Mentor–mentee meetings are another example that have mutually been implemented for various participant groups, such as teachers, school principals, instructors, and students. All partners have exchanged and added fruitful experiences in an environmentally friendly situation.

Mentoring practices take place in both formal and informal learning environments. Formal training takes place mainly during the pandemic period, when lockdowns and public health measurements restrict movement and travel from place to place. Formal training follows Training of Trainers practice.

Training of Trainers (ToT) practice is often used in educational development projects. It is claimed to be effective, as a small number of trainers (experts) train large numbers of participants who then in turn train their target groups. The OLIVE project has adopted a different approach, as there has been a mutual interest in building reciprocal Finnish–Palestinian development teams based on shared understanding. Additionally, due to many context-related factors (e.g., traveling restrictions, the high-risk situation, etc.), large-scale ToT practices have not been possible to carry out.

The following section will further discuss mentoring practices in project implementation. These vary from more to less formal, where the degree of formality depends on the environments where the activities take place.

7.1. Combining Real-Life Classroom Learning with Online Conference-Based Exchanges

Formal mentoring practices take place in student-teacher practicums and during in-service training for schoolteachers and school principals in Palestine.

A practicum forms an important link between the universities and schools and puts student-teachers in a vital position to connect academia with school reality. Mentors in schools, those experienced teachers who guide student-teachers' teaching practice, have a key role in assisting student-teachers in the teaching profession. As the student-teacher brings new ideas to the school, the learning experience can be shared.

In OLIVE, in-service teacher and principal trainings, the mentoring process, and the trainings' contents have been planned jointly and implemented by both Finnish and Palestinian experts. This collaboration has combined live training sessions with in-between online activities (e.g., in the form of asynchronous tasks and discussions).

Formal mentoring, therefore, takes place in learning environments that are based on technological setups in combination with real-life interaction. As such, they are hybrid, online, and face-to-face.

7.1.1. Opportunities for Virtual Traveling and Real-Life Visits

In formal mentoring environments, hierarchical setups are evident, whereas in more informal environments there are more possibilities for collaboration and more equal sharing of expertise.

The informal modes of virtual peer mentoring that are implemented in OLIVE are many. Examples include virtual video and live-streaming tours, which have given online participants the ability to virtually walk in the laboratories and alleys of universities and the landscapes of university surroundings and get the feeling of travelling. In these moments, geographical, political, and institutional barriers and walls diminish, in the sense that the internet makes the online encounters possible and, thus, the 'walls' become invisible.

The lifting of restrictions on movement has given space to more lowering of walls in the post-COVID era, as traveling opportunities for Finnish and Palestinian partners have opened up. Visiting one another's actual space adds to virtual, technologically enhanced interactions and mentoring practices and enriches the partners' encounters and exchanges.

Visiting makes it possible for the pedagogical team and other members of the project to meet in real-life environments and come up against both actual (e.g., separation walls) and virtual (e.g., pressure, discomfort, violence) walls. In this way, cognitive and affective–bodily elements are involved into a more fully experienced process.

7.1.2. Pedagogical Collaboration and Role-Collapse

The pedagogical team of OLIVE is one configuration of the project where roles collapse. The team is comprised of experts from partner universities, who meet and discuss relevant topics (e.g., technological use and its potential for teaching and learning, assessment, etc.) in the project's pedagogical morning cafés online on a regular basis (6–8 times) during the academic year. Interested colleagues and other parties, associations, NGOs (e.g., the Arab Centre for the Development of Social Media, Teachers Without Borders), and so on, from outside academia or OLIVE, can join the team and the cafés and offer their own perspectives on the topic under discussion.

The cafés widen their publicity by inviting their faculties, the wider university community, teachers, staff, researchers, and students. As in academia, in the third sector, different age groups and a multiplicity of interests intersect; roles collapse when knowledge gaps are filled in a non-hierarchical, non-domain-specific way.

In addition to the fluidity of roles, this configuration of the project introduces a merge of narratives with the transfer of overviews and key points of pedagogical discussions in the form of posts/short essays to the blog of the project. The blog offers the possibility for those not able to join the event synchronously to participate asynchronously, by, for instance, adding posts or comments to existing posts. One example is a post about the phenomena of discrimination and Palestinian rights violations on the internet [45], following relevant discussion on these themes, as introduced by a Palestinian activist and member of the Arab Centre.

Other examples include blog posts following real-life visits, for instance, to the West Bank and Ramallah [46,47]. In addition to giving accounts of the exchange, these writings are enriched with audio-visual material. In this way, by documenting and sharing experience, OLIVE grows epistemologically, as the ethnographic element is introduced to the development project. The ethnographic account is informed not only by cognitive elements, but, importantly, by affective–bodily elements as well. In this way, the authenticity of the development process increases, with multiple dimensions and directions coming along. As a result, relational rigor increases when real life and virtual elements blend in multimodal experiences where distances decrease and time, space, and roles collapse.

Other configurations of the project include Tuesday meetings and quarterly blended workshops. These have been organized mainly for project administration purposes to provide a possibility for the project partners to share and reflect on their current work. In addition, participants learn from one another, exchange experiences, stay in touch, and keep the momentum when real-life encounters are not possible.

"Walking along with scholars" is another way to form close collegial partnerships to discuss content and subject-specific matters. Some examples include figuring out how to teach together in multilingual situations, finding ways to share methods for teaching, and sharing perspectives on knowledge construction and pedagogical practices.

The events and activities of the project have led to shared conference presentations and co-authoring of research papers and are expected to outlive the duration of the project.

8. Discussion: Mentoring for Immersive Learning in Virtual and Real-Life Setups

Following from the analysis above, mentoring practices in OLIVE take place in a number of configurations, with more and less hierarchical orientations, mainly in peer-to-peer and group formations in hybrid, online and real-life environments. As mentoring practices are associated with learning experiences, learning environments entail a degree of engagement (or immersion) in the activities and events of the project. In the sections below, we will discuss mentoring and engagement in relation to the research questions of the study.

8.1. Emergent Metaphors of Mentoring in Developing Learning in the OLIVE Project

The study reveals that visual and embodied metaphors emerge in mentoring practices in OLIVE and are associated with education without walls. As it forms the organizing structure of the project's activities and events for mentoring, education without walls is a mega-metaphor and entails a double metaphorical twist, about and for education, without actual or virtual walls. For a novel education without walls, however, multiple metaphorical twists are required to create links with the relational rigor necessary to decolonize education from, for instance, over-reliance on patterns that ignore the significance of affective–bodily elements in the learning process. Pressure, discomfort, and inequalities are bound with the realities where learning is taking place. Their presence disrupts immersion in learning and, in essence, cancels mentoring. Even so, the ways inequalities relate to affective and bodily elements go overwhelmingly unnoticed. Such situations lack relational rigor and perpetuate the fixedness of mentor/mentee roles. Moreover, they generate a flat screen effect by not only retaining hierarchies and distances but placing the learning experience outside its contextual frame as well.

As a result, a variety of arrangements and environments is crucial to balance relational rigor and increase the possibilities for mentoring to become an immersive learning experience.

8.2. A Multiplicity of Learning Environments for Mentoring

Indeed, mentoring in OLIVE takes place in a multiplicity of hybrid, online, and real-life environments. Some are more formal (especially hybrid ones) and mainly address cognitive faculties, with technological setups that offer limited opportunities for enactment. Enactment is an essential feature to encourage increased presence (i.e., a feeling of being there) and agency through emotion and the use of the body [38].

Immersive learning is therefore embodied experience. Thus, in formal mentoring practices where, for instance, presentation slides are used as the main mode of delivery through web conferencing platforms, the distance between the knower and the known remains. In these situations, the mentor/mentee roles are fixed, and the mentees are spectators rather than engaged actors, in the same way as happens with the flat screen effect. Again, the level of relational rigor is low.

For increased relational rigor, an integrated use of multiple technological configurations is necessary. Nowadays, technologies are integrated in concert into teaching and learning experiences. The degree of immersion depends on the overall context and the purposes that multiple modalities and technologies are meant to serve. In addition, immersion relates to emotional engagement, interaction, and a focus on the lived experience of individuals. As argued in [24,25], such engagement is a manifestation of the potential of technologies to collapse time and space and blur the boundaries of proximity and distance.

In this way, through an integrated use of technology, moving away from the flat screen effect will be possible and more opportunities for immersive learning will open up.

8.3. Learning Environments for Mentoring with Varying Degrees of Immersion

An integrated use of technology adds fluidity to the process and creates possibilities for role exchange and time–place collapse. Virtual traveling in OLIVE is one example of integrated technology using, among other things, live action cameras and live streaming. Blending technologies and modalities for virtual traveling reduce the flat screen effect by making room for questions to arise, exchange of ideas, and constructive dialogue, thus making it possible to get to know aspects of, and engage with, one another's realities.

In this way, participants in these activities become less strange to one another. Andreotti et al. [8] use the metaphor of tourism to discuss different levels of disengagement from the strangeness of the 'other'. The notion is also traced in Hanna Arendt's work [48] along with the metaphor of visiting to provide a conceptualization of qualitatively distinctive ways of engaging with cultural otherness and difference. Tourism and visiting are forms of engagement and can therefore be seen as enactments of different conceptions of immersion.

When it comes to learning environments for mentoring in OLIVE, virtual traveling opens up opportunities for multisensory exchanges. Although this offers opportunities for increased relational rigor, virtual traveling is not without challenges.

8.4. Opportunities, Challenges and Tensions in Immersive Learning Environments

Like traveling for tourism, virtual traveling offers an opportunity for encounters that can broaden the mind when certain conditions are met. As argued in [49], traveling allows contact among different groups, which can reduce prejudices and enhance mutual understanding. This view has been challenged by Andreotti et al. [8] on the basis that the degree of engagement with the 'strangeness' of others remains unclear. Thus, in traveling, difference is framed through a positivistic lens, as participants' roles are confined within the limits of them being spectators. This, again, can generate hierarchies and inequalities, and, thus, jeopardize relational rigor. As a result, virtual traveling can become a source of tension for the immersive experience.

To overcome challenges and tensions, a combination of technologies and genres can shift the focus, enrich the overall narrative, and thus enlarge the repertoire of activities aiming for education without walls. Real-life visiting is another example of multisensory exchange that can open up horizons for a plurality of experiences with affective–embodied elements at play. As such, it raises expectations of deeper immersion.

As we discussed in the analysis section, the integration of tools and genres (e.g., blogging, walking with scholars, etc.) in the activities of the project benefits the process, with the fluidity of roles it entails along with the multiplicity of channels of interaction for knowledge production. And yet, it is with the opportunity for real-life visiting in the post-COVID period that mentoring in OLIVE transitions from the mainly cognitive to the affective–embodied dimension. While virtual traveling makes a fusion of perspectives and identification with the other possible, real-life visiting has an orientation towards an encounter of worlds that, as Andreotti et al. [8] put it, is unscripted. Visiting makes it possible to actually be in the spaces that virtual traveling merely projects, and, thus, actual and virtual walls become part of lived experience. In this way, proximity and relational rigor increase, while difference (or otherness) is overridden by working "through the discomfort of being in an unfamiliar place" [8].

9. Conclusions

This paper uses metaphorical analysis to offer a conceptualization of mentoring without walls, based on contemporary needs, as defined by technological advancement and socio-political changes when developing learning in emergencies. To this end, the OLIVE international project is used as a key example to contextualize theoretical analysis and

discussion within a low-risk (Finland) and a high-risk (Palestine) situation. In this direction, the argument is guided by both ontological (i.e., mentoring as shared, cognitive–affective–embodied experience) and epistemological (i.e., metaphorical analysis) orientations to offer novel methodologies for mentoring in higher education. A novel outlook sees mentoring as a fluid process, where roles and time–place collapse.

In the study, metaphorical analysis draws from different domains and looks into the intersection of metaphor theory, the integrated use of technology, and immersive learning to offer a more encompassing scientific research approach [50] and, thus, match with the needs arising in a complex situation.

The difficulties of traveling, for example, from Palestine to Finland and vice versa pre-date the COVID-19 restrictions and are a barrier that the occupation generates. In addition, geopolitical factors, such as diverse historical developments (North–South) and high- vs low- (Palestine–Finland) intensity situations constitute walls, both actual and metaphorical, that constrain the actualization of mentoring as a shared process and thus allow challenges and tensions to interfere with the process.

Connective technology aspires to overcome walls, challenges, and barriers. Evidently, more research and empirical work is needed for a deeper understanding of education without walls, agency, fluid mentoring practices, and the role of technology. The insights of this study into what constitutes a novel metaphor and the requirement to build relational rigor into immersive learning experiences could be a departure point. Importantly enough, relational rigor reaches higher levels when real visiting turns virtuality into an embodied experience. In this way, as exclaimed by Hanna Arendt [48], as "I move my body and touch the tangibility of the world", real and virtual walls collapse along with roles and hierarchies that generate inequalities.

It is then that we become less strange to one another in a multidirectional process of developing learning and education.

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