

Mentoring in Supporting Newly Qualified Teachers' Professional Development

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What practical qualifications has teacher education given to new teachers?

Initial teacher education cannot transmit all the knowledge and skills that a teacher needs in their work. New teachers are still in the process of learning to teach, looking for support and guidance in the construction of a professional identity. Teachers find themselves in the paradoxical situation faced by all novice professionals: they must simulate skills and abilities that they do not yet possess and that they can acquire only by starting to do things that they do not yet fully master. Starting to work as a teacher involves many things that are unfamiliar to a novice or that a novice has only limited knowledge of – the students, the curriculum, the school community, local action principles and practices. New teachers must deal with daily uncertainty and many problems as they engage in the multifaceted activity of teaching. The induction period can involve not only the process of learning to become a teacher and professional development but also socialisation and becoming familiar with the school community and its action culture and with the environment and conditions of teaching.

In the teachers' opinion, teacher education should offer more links with the daily life and practice of schools. They saw important to become familiar with the action cultures of different work communities. The teachers emphasised that there are great differences between teacher training schools operating alongside universities and schools in the field as regards, for example, teaching group sizes, teaching aids and financial resources. The teachers said that there should be more training in human relations skills and interaction skills. They have not been given adequate practical qualifications for meeting their pupils' parents and cooperating with experts representing various fields. More attention should be paid, in teacher education, to the special features of teaching immigrant students and students with special needs.

The organisation of new teachers' induction in school

Finnish schools have no formal system for inducting new teachers. Education authorities and individual schools can induct or introduce their new teacher as they like. It means that there are great differences between schools in ways in which induction is implemented. The arrangements for induction are casual and there is often a failure to provide any induction at all. During induction, it was rare to discuss things that would prepare the ground for the new teacher's professional growth and the development of a professional identity. In the phase of professional development novice teachers are concentrated on their own teaching performance. They are not able at that time to reflect events and student working in the classroom (Jokinen and Saranen 1998).

As regards induction as a concept, distinction has been drawn between three senses of the word: it can refer to the phase when the new teacher learns to teach, the process of their socialisation, and a programme to induce new teachers (Feiman-Nemser et al. 1999). In Finnish schools, the phase of learning to teach seems to be based on learning from practical activity and from the experiences and problems linked with it. The teachers often reported that the principal or one of the teachers had acquainted them with the school's premises, modes of action, teaching aids and everyday routines in quite a short time. In the best cases the new teacher might be guided by an experienced teacher, for example by a colleague teaching a parallel grade, giving the new teacher a good opportunity to find out about the school's action culture and tacit knowledge. The teachers emphasised in their answers that finding support for their induction depended mainly on their own initiative. They must have the courage and readiness to ask, when needed, their colleagues or the principal for advice.

When induction is defined as a socialisation process, the emphasis lies on professional development and the professional community that the new teachers are entering. In

Finnish schools, the emphasis was more often on adaptation to the work community and its modes of action than on the provision of conscious and systematic support for the new teacher's professional development. Nevertheless, there are messages coming from more experienced colleagues and the work community about what it means to be a teacher and about how these messages affect the new teachers' emerging identity and actions.

Principals said in their interviews that new teachers have problems in

Relations to their students

- new teachers are sometimes too chatty, especially at secondary level

Social network of the school

- new teachers have adopted to hierarchy of school community and strong older colleagues
- there are problems between colleagues
- it is not easy for them to ask help from older colleagues

Reality shock of the beginning and how to manage the whole situation

- no time to get familiar with issues in the beginning
- problems with time management
- daily practical problems

Relations to parents

- to create relations to students' parents
- meeting the parents and their expectations

Diversity of the teaching, no experiences of work outside the classroom

- new teachers have no experiences of teachers' work outside the classroom
- to get used to a curriculum of the school

Some new teachers are too stubborn

- some of them are not ready to listen and to get advice

According to the teachers, induction activities lasting a few hours should be replaced by a long-term induction period or process. This would be a planned system covering what might be a period ranging from a few weeks to an academic year. It was also suggested that every new teacher should have a sponsor or mentor who would assume responsibility for initiating them into their job. New teachers should have a say in deciding about the content of and procedures used in their induction. Induction should foreground the development of the teacher's work and the construction of a teacher identity. The aim is to ensure new teachers' personal and professional well-being and transmit the school community's action culture to the novice teachers. In addition, in the teachers' opinion the municipalities could organise events providing newcomers with basic information on the municipality and its educational emphases and strategies.

Aims of the research and the research method

The aim of this project is to study the role of the induction phase and the mentoring process in

supporting new teachers' professional development. The function of *the new teacher's induction* into their first school is to help them to construct a professional identity and professional practices suited for the realities of school and integrated into the teacher's own conception of good teaching. The stage of

professional development focuses on developing methods in collaboration with experienced teachers, the aim being more flexible and in-depth pedagogical expertise. Constructing a support system requires cooperation and partnership among schools, education providers, teacher education departments, universities and trade unions.

The study brings together experiences from two mentoring projects. In the Kokkola project, launched last autumn, five separate teams were formed. Three teams consisted of new primary- and secondary-school teachers, one team of new special education teachers and one team of new upper secondary school teachers. The teams had 2-5 teachers, in most cases from different schools, and one mentor, with the exception of one primary- and secondary-school teacher team which had three mentors. Altogether there were 20 actors taking part in the project, comprising Years 1-3, mentored by seven experienced teachers. The new special education teachers met with their mentors usually in pairs. In the other teams mentoring was organised as group discussions. During a school year the teams had 6-7 mentoring meetings. Most of the new teachers considered this a suitable number. Some of them would have also liked personal meetings with their mentor. In Helsinki mentoring project, the relevant activities have been organised as paired mentoring (one actor and one mentor). Data will be gathered through interviews from a total of nine mentoring pairs. The data-gathering process will apply the principle of triangulation and the study will exploit documents, questionnaires and interviews.

Preliminary findings about the mentoring process

It has been found that an induction phase and mentoring activities associated with it enhance teachers' job satisfaction and professional well-being. A teacher's commitment to their school community is deepened and they are made better equipped to establish links with the community and its members. Together these factors help the teacher to act more effectively and perform their job successfully (Kajs 2002). It has been assumed that a teacher's first working year predicts how successful they will be during their career and whether they will stay in the profession.

Mentoring has become a popular tool during new teachers' induction phase. The emphasis lies on a collaborative partnership between new and experienced teachers and on shared reflection on various aspects of the theory and practice of education (Bey 1995, Hargreaves and Fullan 2000). The purpose of the mentoring process is to enable new teachers to accomplish a flexible and smooth transition to the teaching culture and, at the same time, to make the start of their working life less exhausting (Tillman 2003).

In many fields of working life, mentoring has become quite a popular method of inducting new workers. Among entrepreneurs mentoring has been in use for years, which is not surprising given that it goes back to the familiar idea of a master teaching an apprentice. In many universities, students in the final stages of their studies are organised a "transition" to working life through mentoring by sending them to familiarise themselves with working life under the supervision of a professional acting as their mentor. It seems that systematic induction and mentoring are gradually spreading also to Finnish schools. Promising examples can already be found.

In every demanding and complex profession, newcomers need someone who knows how to develop their competence and understanding and help them to adjust themselves to their profession (Hargreaves & Fullan 2000). Even experienced workers can benefit from advice, support and role models

provided by their colleagues. Considered as a professional activity, teaching is a demanding and complex task. Various induction and mentoring programmes have become common in teaching. It is known that teachers will work more efficiently when they can collaborate with their fellow teachers and learn with the support of the school community. Mentoring is seen as one means of achieving, in schools, development-oriented teachership. Given this, mentoring should be seen as an essential element of professional culture in schools, not merely as a separate interaction process between a mentor and a new teacher. Mentoring also enables a teacher to establish close relations with their colleagues. Mentoring means leaving behind the hierarchically structured sharing of wisdom and moving to knowledge gathering in the context of collective practical action. Mentoring is not a separate innovation; instead, it must be closely linked with development projects designed to reconstruct the action culture of schools.

Mentoring processes foreground collaborative partnerships and teachers' reflections on educational issues linked with theory and practice (Bey 1995). Mentoring involves intensive interaction where the parties discuss teaching and learning, ways of supporting and encouraging a new teacher, and counselling and role models. Mentoring is intended to promote novice teachers' flexible and efficient transition to the culture of teaching, help to reduce their exhaustion, and help them to construct and develop their own teaching practices and the culture of teaching (Tillman 2003, 226-233).

The roles of the play: who is the mentor and who is the mentee?

The new teachers stressed that the mentoring meetings had enabled them to tell about their experiences and problems in a confidential atmosphere. In their mentoring team they could ask "stupid questions" without being criticised or considered incompetent. They could do this without there being any fear that their questions might affect their future in the school community.

"You could pose your own questions and share your own worries or things you have wondered about. It's somewhat relieving to meet other people with similar thoughts and problems. You are not alone, and recognising that helps a lot. You get a number of good suggestions of what to do in the situation, how to proceed. It has been really conversational or dialogical. The mentor has not kept up a strong role."

The new teachers felt that their mentoring teams supported them in their choices, at the same time as they learned to analyse and critically assess their own teaching activities and the tasks associated with them. They were changing experiences of important educational issues and daily practical problems. Mentoring was for new teachers an opportunity to reflect their thoughts and activities against other teachers at the same position. They were critical friends for each others. The mentees considered that the mentoring teams functioned as peer support. The discussions enabled them to get tips on how to do their own work and learn from the choices made by other new teachers.

The mentors saw their task primarily as that of listening to the new teachers and sharing their experiences and problems. The experienced teachers wanted to support the novices in their choices, but simultaneously they considered it important that the new teachers would learn to themselves evaluate their choices.

"My role as a mentor has been a kind of activator or a catalyst – you raise some issues and ideas or thoughts. Then the conversation starts and you just contribute to it and try to get everyone involved with it and so on and so forth. But there are a lot of those direct questions as well: what do you think of this, or have you ever encountered anything like this. And then you might actually give somebody some advice, or ask somebody if she has tried this or that. But mainly my role has been a kind of courier or a guide. Mainly I have promoted people to ponder and reflect the issues from many perspectives. In the beginning I think I said aloud much more, but excitingly the newly qualified teachers have caught the point and nowadays they ask questions each other. In a way, we have gradually moved into a kind of peer-to-peer mentoring. It has happened in a very easy and natural way."

"The most difficult thing is to listen. I mean just myself; to listen enough. I think I can learn. That's actually why I started this. Just that you need to learn and not that you were excellent already."

The mentors had no wish to offer ready-made approaches but wanted, rather, present the actors with alternative ways of action or of solving a particular problem. As the mentors saw it, their role was to guide the discussion in the teams towards factors that are important in the process of becoming a competent teacher. The mentors also emphasised that they themselves learned from the team discussions and from the opinions expressed by the actors.

What were the issues discussed?

The issues discussed in the mentoring teams stemmed chiefly from things raised by the actors. During the mentoring meetings the teams talked mostly about the daily problems encountered by the new teachers, such as problem students, students' behaviour problems, interaction with their parents, the actors' own work communities, and collaboration with fellow teachers. It was also common to bring up school practices that the new teachers had not been familiarised with during their induction. A teacher's professional development was discussed by considering the actors' own strengths and development targets. The mentoring team consisting of special education teachers discussed specific student cases and the steps taken in them more frequently than the other teams. These discussions were often conducted as paired mentoring between a mentor and an actor.

The subjects aired in the mentoring discussions seem to be linked with just those areas that have, in the opinion of the new teachers, been neglected in teacher education. According to the actors and the mentors, the mentoring meetings rarely discussed pedagogical or didactic choices or arrangements directly linked with teaching activities, for example how some content should be taught to particular students. Such issues surfaced most often among upper secondary-school and secondary-school subject teachers.

Preliminary conclusions:

Mentoring seems to promote novice teachers' professional learning and growth – what about the development of school community?

The new teachers' experiences of mentoring were highly positive, and they wished to see it made a standing practice. The mentoring meetings had served them as an useful interaction situation.

Be mentoring there was no more time for dialogue, discussion and mutual interaction. Mentoring serves to new

teachers practical impulses and an opportunity to therapeutic discussions. All this can happen in the confidential atmosphere. We are able to see mentoring as contextual support to learn to teach and to develop their identity as teachers.

Secondly mentoring can be seen as constructive support. It gives an opportunity to evaluate self new teachers' own teaching activities, daily problems and how they have solved them. That supported them in their work and enabled them to learn from each other and from an experienced mentor. New teachers get ground and alternatives for their own thinking and solutions. Mentoring enabled new teachers to consider matters with mentor and other new teachers who were in the same situation. New teachers can reflect their own situation and actions against to other new teachers' activity and thinking. Mentoring supports learning to teach and constructing the identity of a new teacher.

The new teachers considered mentoring a highly important tool for inducting a new teacher and fostering their professional growth. All new teachers should have access, over one or two school years, to either team-based or individual mentoring. However, mentoring does not remove the need for induction into the activities and practices of the new teacher's own school, best arranged, in the actors' opinion, by entrusting the process to a specifically appointed colleague.

Individual and peer support or organizational development?

The mentoring meetings have served the novice teachers as an useful interaction situation that supported them in their work and enabled them to learn from each other and from an experienced mentor. However, do they see mentoring, too often, as an isolated interaction process between a mentor and a new teacher? It appears that the new teachers perceive mentoring as an individual process taking place outside their own school organisation rather than as an internal process.

It has been considered important to relate mentoring closely to other development work undertaken in a school, thus making it a school-specific activity (Hargreaves and Fullan 2000). However, most of the mentees and mentors interviewed in the study wanted and considered it important that mentoring meetings are held outside their schools and that the mentor and actor are from different schools.

Role and effects of mentoring in the school community

After many principals of the schools where the new teachers came they get in the mentoring

meetings support, answers to their questions, new ideas and more courage. New teachers get support from other teachers who are in the same situation. Novice teachers are more able to reflect their own teaching and actions against other new teachers' actions. They do not need so much support and advices of the principal. However, there were some principals who did not know about the mentoring process and how it could have helped the novice teachers. They did not observed real changes in the school community. Some principals said that effects of mentoring depended on attitude and personality of new teachers, usually feedback of the community was positive. New teachers bring new things with them. It means that the support from mentoring to a single teacher could be seen in the activities of the school community.

To organize mentoring inside or outside own school

The new teachers stressed that they preferred to discuss their concerns with outsiders rather than with colleagues from their own school. They felt that in their own school community they were unable to bring up questions linked with their own competence and problems because they were afraid that this would affect their position and future within the school

community. On the contrary,

most of principals interviewed pointed out that mentoring should organize as an action of novice teachers' own schools. The organization of mentoring inside the mentee's own school could help better the whole school community. The feedback from new teachers and mentors would be also a good basis for developing the school culture and activities. It is possible to utilize also teachers' collaboration, 'natural mentoring', between parallel classrooms. However, the biggest problem will be, that organising mentoring in the novice teachers' own schools is a question of time and resources. Is it possible to relieve new teachers and their mentors from the teaching work during the school day for mentoring meetings a couple of times in the month? Are there in the schools resources available which could be used in mentoring?

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