One example of a way to support novice teachers is mentoring, where more experienced teachers act as mentors. With the aim to highlight novice teachers’ experiences of having a mentor during their first year of work, an interview study was conducted after the novice teachers had been working for two years. It was found that the majority of the teachers had appreciated the mentoring support. However, one teacher reported being disappointed with the mentoring, primarily due to the lack of engagement of the mentor. In the beginning, the teachers had felt insecure and uncertain of what was expected of them as new teachers. After two years of teaching, the teachers had developed a fairly realistic understanding of what is involved in teachers work. They enjoyed their work and felt comfortable with their role as teacher; although, they could still feel insecure about some work situations. The teachers were not left on their own during their first year of work because they had mentors who gave them continual support and the possibility to ask questions that were of relevance to them. As a result, they had become more aware of their professional practice, which indicates personal and professional growth. Most likely this awareness had influenced their attitudes and opinions about the teacher role and school work.

Introduction

Schools compete in society with different actors about what can be seen as relevant knowledge, which has led to questioning of the authorization of the school as well as changes in the teacher role and tasks over time. Besides the difficulty in predicting the reality in schools, the teacher role demands a transition from being a student to being a professional teacher with the responsibility of leading and guiding a group of students towards the goal of gaining knowledge and personal development. This transition is often done without any concrete preparation during their teacher education and sometimes even without any introduction at the new school.

As novice teachers’ professional level usually is low, it happens that they also have difficulties to distinguish between the teacher as a person and the teacher as a professional. Because of that they can feel insecure about what is expected of them as teachers (Cullingford, 2002).

Teachers are often facing unpredictable situations where their work as well as themselves are judged and evaluated continuously by pupils, co-workers and parents. For new teachers this can be extra hard to handle as they often have difficulties in applying the theoretical knowledge from their education to the reality they face as new teachers. Their focus is often more on themselves and their performance as teachers than on pupils learning (McLaughlin, 2002). Further more, it is not unusual that teacher students are expected to be leaders in the profes-
sion from the first day of their career, as a consequence of both pupils and parents expecting a competent teacher (Lindgren, 2003).

This insecurity, in combination with the reality of heavy work loads, difficulties with pupils and teaching, can impact many novice teachers’ opinions about the teaching profession as well as their desire to continue in the field. As this is a well known phenomenon among more experienced teachers and school managers, it is not a good strategy to allow novice teachers to start their working life without any constructive support (Fabian & Simpson, 2002; Lucas, 2002). The fact that many new teachers do not stay in their profession may be due to the difficulties in adapting to the teacher role, which is often different from their expectations about the teaching profession (Wenestam, 1999).

From many international studies it is obvious that new teachers need emotional, practical and educational support and there is still a lot to be done in this supporting process of becoming a teacher (e. g. Jordell 2002; 2006).

Mentoring

Even if mentoring has old traditions, today mentoring is frequently used in industry and the public sector as well as in higher education as a tool for both personal and professional development. A good mentor relationship, where an experienced, judicious person and a mentee meet regularly for discussions according to the needs of the mentee, is built upon openness and confidentiality (McGee, 2001).

The mentor is not supposed to be a problem solver or a judge of the mentee’s opinions. Instead, the mentor’s task is to question the mentee in order to support the learning and reflective process (Chubbuck, Clift, Allard and Quinlan, 2001). Lick (1999) and Alred and Garvey (2000) stress that a special goal with mentoring is to contribute to learning. To make that happen the mentee, as the learner, ought to be engaged and have a constructive self-awareness.

Objectivity and distance, as well as the ability, to expect and receive constructive criticism are necessary in a mentoring process (Dedrick & Watson, 2002) To get on speaking turn and gain as much knowledge as possible from the mentoring process, the mentor and the mentee ought to have regular meetings during the mentoring period. A recommendation can be meetings two hours once a month. The goals of the mentoring project, as well as the novices’ personal goals, should be the base of the reflective talks and the mentor should take an active part in the discussions (Lindgren, 2006).

Mentoring of novice teachers is to its nature different from supervision of student teachers. While mentoring typically is voluntary, supervision is included as a paid service in teacher’s work. Normally a supervisor has mandate to control the outcome of the student. Opposed to a supervisor, the mentor has no appraisal or reporting obligation. What the mentor and the mentee talk about is not shared with anyone else. The task of the mentor is above all to listen, support and develop the thinking of the mentee for his or her constructive progress not telling the right things to do nor the right answers. However, the most important difference between supervision and mentoring is that supervision is a dependent relationship while mentoring is an independent relationship (Lindgren, 2000).

Internationally studies have shown that when mentoring goals are clearly stated for the mentor and the mentee, mentoring can be a powerful method for supporting novice teachers and
bridging the gap between teacher education and working life (Cederqvist, Nordenstam & Ganser, 2004). Mentors ought to encourage novices to learn from their own experiences in order to develop a vision of good teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). This can be done by visualisation of occurred teaching or fostering situations. Sometimes a mentor can feel that it is easiest just to give practical or emotional support. Ganser (2002) advised mentors to be aware of this tendency and to remember that mentoring novice teachers should be more than just emotional guidance.

A desirable goal with the mentoring is that the mentees gain increased knowledge about the teacher role and effective teaching methods. To facilitate this progression, the mentee needs to be able to clarify the own expectations of the mentoring, prepare questions in advance for the mentoring discussions and also take notes in a diary. The mentor can facilitate this process by summarizing the discussions afterwards as well as follow up when necessary (Lindgren, 2006).

Furthermore, mentoring has another important task. Usually there are no courses in basic academic education concerning social competence, individual maturity, ability of conversation and professional development (Lindgren & Burman, 2003). Therefore, it is the student’s own responsibility to develop these abilities. This reality has also been internationally noticed, for example by Hulbert (1994): "I am concerned that we in higher education are not doing a very good job of guiding and nurturing the next generation." (p 261). A mentor has good possibilities to focus on social competence in the reflective talks, and a progressive mentoring process should support the development of professional skills such as building relationships, establishing trust and encouraging reflection in others (Alvarado, 2006).

Method

This study is following up from the study in 2002, when seven new teachers were interviewed four times during their first year as teachers. Criteria for participation in the study were that the participant was a recently graduated teacher, had as little experience of teaching as possible, was working with children in the ages 7-16 and had received a mentor. When the interviews in this study were carried out in 2004, the teachers had two years of teaching experience and the mentoring period had been one year previously.

Four of the seven new interviews were carried out by phone and three at the different schools of the teachers. The aim with the interviews was to find out how the seven novice teachers had experienced having a mentor one year after the mentoring programme was ended. Regardless of phone or face-to-face meeting, the interviews were carried out in a calm and secluded environment without any interruptions. The interviews were semi-constructed in such a way that the primary questions were similar for all the individuals but there was opportunity for follow-up questions and a chance for the teachers to give an independent account. Each interview round took approximately 45 minutes. None of the teachers had read the questions prior to the interviews but were informed about the aim of the study. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed in their entirety. To protect the identity of the individuals their

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1 Lindgren, U. (2003). Nya lärares upplevelser av arbetsplanering och mentorskap under ett år. [Novice teachers experiences of work planning and mentoring during a year.] Umeå University: Department of Swedish and Social Sciences. The study was financed by the Science Council in Sweden and was led by professor Torgny Ottosson at Kristianstad University. It is more detailed described in Aili, C., Brante, G., Gannerud, E., Lindgren, U. and Ottosson, T. (2002) Not only teaching: Teachers Ways of Organising Their Work.

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names have been replaced by numbers from 1-7 in the report and their gender is feminine regardless of the reality.

Result

After two years of working, the familiarization of the work conditions and assignments had increased for the teachers. All of them claimed to have adapted themselves to the professional role and felt good about their choice of profession. During the mentoring year it was recommended from the project leader that each mentor/mentee pair should meet one hour per week or two hours every second week during the project year. Generally this was accomplished, as the teachers in the earlier report\(^2\) stated that they had had regular contact with their mentors, although the number of meetings as well as hours had varied. As the mentoring was ended one year ago, when the current interviews were conducted, mentor meetings were not scheduled any longer. Only one of the teachers was still in touch with the mentor, even if it not was as often as under the mentoring year. Three teachers met their mentor just as a colleague among others at school and three other teachers did not stay in touch with their mentors any more.

When the teachers were asked about the mentoring six of them remembered the discussions with the mentor as the most important.

> It was so good with these discussions, the possibilities to talk about one’s work. The reflections were so good. They are really needed but, were are they in your daily work? (Teacher 4)

> It is such a good idea to get a mentor, to have somebody to ask, to get feedback as being a teacher can be quite a lonely work. Being just employed it is an advantage to have a person to ask as much as you want and need. (T 6)

Unfortunately, even if the own trust to mentoring in general was high; one of the teachers was disappointed about his own mentor and the result of the mentoring, mainly depending on the mentor’s low engagement.

Experiences of the mentoring

What the teachers remembered as the most positive experience was that they had been given opportunities to analyse different situations with an experienced colleague and that the talks with the mentor made it possible to solve problems that might be.

Three teachers gave weight to the opportunity of sharing their opinions and discussing their thoughts from different perspectives together with an experienced teacher.

> My mentor and I are quite different and didn’t share the same ideas, but reflections are important // and then you start to question your own ideas and

broaden your mind. The thing is that you question yourself about things you do in a more reflecting way. (T 1)

Two of the teachers stated that the mentoring had helped them understand things that initially had been unclear, for example planning and structure of parental contact and development discussions.

That you started to understand the work and could ask someone, who weren’t that stressed and whom you could ask anything. (T 2)

One of the teachers felt that the mentoring had contributed to increased self confidence:

I feel that I have become more self confident and it feels like the right way to work in order to achieve my current goal /…/ the planning and the way of carrying it through have felt more secure. (T 6)

Additional one teacher mentioned the routine of structuring and writing down current questions prior to the discussions with the mentor. This had led to working with own thoughts and questions.

I tried to figure out what to talk about, which made me work with my ideas a bit. To write down your thoughts creates a structure so that you are working with your ideas while you are writing them down. (T 3)

Missing in the mentoring

According to two teachers nothing was lacking in the mentoring process. One explanation can be that the achievement of the mentor had come up to their expectations. Another explanation can be that over a long period of time, only the positive experiences are remembered. One teacher had not missed anything during the mentoring year but later on:

There is no time any more for sitting down and reflect together. I am missing it now. (T 5)

One teacher wanted better planning prior to the meetings, and blamed herself for this.

I could have planned differently, dealt with more things and taken some time to sit down and discuss things thoroughly. (T 1)

The teacher, who had had her mentor in the same work team, thought that a mentor from another work team could have added a new perspective to the mentoring.

Maybe you shouldn’t work together with your mentor, because before you learn to know each other well... You don’t want to hurt anyone and you want to be good. Maybe there are other goals that govern, and it could be a good idea to meet another mentor outside your work team. (T 6)

One teacher had wished for information about practical things, which often are unfamiliar to new teachers.
A bit, but not in the mentoring itself, but rather as an introduction to the workplace later on. I don’t think anything has been missing in the mentoring, but other important information which has taken some years to emerge. (T 7)

However, the opinion of the mentee was that it was not the mentor’s responsibility to give this information, but that supposedly there was a minor disappointment with the school management and/or colleagues, who had not felt any responsibility to inform about practice and actual routines.

The teacher, with the passive mentor, thought that as a mentee she could have demanded more from the mentor and partly blamed herself that she did not get out of the mentoring as much as she could have. At the same time she thought that the mentor ought to have shown more initiative and engagement.

**Effects of the mentoring**

*Emotional or professional support during the mentoring*

According to for example McGee (2001) mentors should act on an emotional as well as professional level, much dependent on the wishes from the mentee. Six of the teachers thought they had got support during their mentoring period, while one teacher did not experience any such at all.

Two teachers thought they had had a good professional support.

> Professional. Maybe that was my choice. Initially it was not the idea, it should have been on a higher level. /.../ but at that time I needed support and it was not always possible to get support from the work team, so I thought it was good I could ask someone. (T 5)

Three teachers stated they had had emotional as well as professional support.

> Both. We talked about things that were emotionally tough, and also about facts – that is more practical things. (T 4)

> With the subject itself I hadn’t had too much support, although purely professional, since general questions about teaching were discussed. But also purely emotional if you faced unsolved conflicts or issues. (T 7)

One teacher felt above all to have had emotional support:

> Mostly emotional, I think. How I experienced things and how she had experienced things when she was new and how she experienced them now. But it was not too emotional so that you had to express your feelings. We talked mostly about that and what you thought about things. (T 1)

Table 1 shows the kind of support the teachers had experienced through the mentoring together with the number of teachers, who had stated them.
Table 1. Kind of support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind of support</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional and emotional</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No support at all</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both previous and current experiences will influence the kind of support a novice teacher needs and variation is falling out of that, which was also made clear by the teachers` statements.

**Long-term effects of the mentoring**

Two teachers did not mention any long-term effects of the mentoring, although the mentoring was experienced as something good. This can be due to difficulties with evaluating personal development and/or not having prepared the mentor talks. The teacher with the low engaged mentor experienced no long-term effects. The other teachers could see concrete effects, for example:

- increased reflections.
  
  This is what you call in question and with which you are more careful what you are doing. I have become more reflecting. (T 1)

- better self-confidence
  
  To consider ideas, which made me more confident with trying them. It made a good start and made me enter the community at the school and get acceptance.
  
  (T 6)

- becoming more secure in the professional role
  
  I hope and think it has contributed to making me a confident and better teacher. Without the mentoring I probably would have struggled with things that would have taken a long time to solve, but now there was someone I could ask directly.
  
  (T 5)

**Recommendations for future novice teachers**

When asked about what to inform future colleagues, three teachers wanted to stress the importance of putting aside time for the mentor meetings.

- Take some time and be alone. Use this time to write down things you want to say. (T 1)
To really take some time and to cease that moment. Not to give up because it is hard or there is not enough time. You should demand getting some time. It can be hard to prepare questions, often it is linked to a certain situation you have experienced. (T 6)

Two of the other teachers stressed the importance of preparing for the discussions and carefully consider what to get from them.

Then it is important to think about such things, which you not yet have been subject to, and how to prepare for things in case they occur. You should use the mentoring to help prepare for bad things that might happen. (T 2)

That the novice should take the mentoring meetings seriously and prepare herself. It is individually if you write it down or whatever you do. Whatever meeting or discussion you attend you should at least mentally prepare yourself. (T 3)

One teacher recommended taking notes of unexpected things in order to discuss them with the mentor later on.

As something comes up, quickly write it down so you can ask your mentor about it later on, because once you meet you have forgotten what you wanted to ask. Write down every single thing. (T 5)

Another teacher thought it was important as a novice to clarify the own expectations about the mentoring.

Really consider how the mentoring should be, and such things. (T 7)

Three teachers said that a mentee never should accept a mentor who showed no engagement.

That the mentor is serious and that she really is interested and convinced that this is of importance. ../ [If you quickly discover that the mentor is not serious, what should you then recommend a novice to do?] I think you should talk to the principal. (T 3)

Additionally two teachers wanted to make clear the novice’s right to appointed meetings and to govern the discussion based on the own current needs.

Demand to have all the meetings! You need them. It’s a possibility to reflect over your work. (T 4)

Leave the meeting if the mentor keeps complaining or can’t understand you, because the meeting should be based on the novice’s demands and needs. [You mean that to speak your mind if the mentor doesn’t seem to show any engagement?] Yes, I do, and ask the principal if there isn’t anyone else. (T 7)

The recommendations mirror what the teachers had experienced during their mentoring year. Probably, if they will be given a new chance to mentoring or if they will become mentors
themselves, they will have these advises in their mind. Some teachers gave more than one recommendation which is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Recommendations for future novice teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important recommendations to future novices</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not accept a mentor with low engagement</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare the discussions with the mentor</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putting aside time for the mentor meetings</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand to have all the meetings that are recommended</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take notes of unexpected things to discuss with the mentor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarify your own expectations with the mentoring</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The different statements express a desire to make future novices aware of the fact that they can get a lot out of mentoring, but this calls for conscious efforts. Nobody shall accept a mentor, who shows low engagement to his or her task.

Conclusion

International studies have shown that participation in mentoring will contribute to personal and/or professional development. However, to get this happen, it is important that the mentees has a realistic picture of what is likely to be expected through the mentoring and have open minds. At the same time the mentees must be aware of that they, during the time of the mentoring, are part of different connections, they meet a lot of other people outside work and experience different situations and occasions in the private life, which also have importance for their personal and professional development. Although a participation in mentoring seems to have positive effects other factors of influence cannot be excluded (Lindgren, 2000).

One of the corner stones of mentoring is the analysing dialogue between mentor and mentee (Lucas, 2001; Alvarado, 2006). The dialogue helps both mentor and mentee gain a deeper understanding of their own ways of acting as well as situations at work, and facilitate describing their thoughts and ideas, which contributes to a more reflective way of working. Mentoring novice teachers may lead to an increased awareness of and security in the teacher role, which was clear in many of the teachers’ statements in this study. It is also important to notice that mentoring can be seen as a part of collaborative partnership for more experienced teachers, where the mentors through their mentees, who just have left their teacher education, can get knowledge about for example what is focused in teacher education today, political trends in education, actual literature and teaching methods. Through the talks with the mentee even the mentor will develop professionally by reflecting own teaching strategies and values.

The majority of mentors in this study had made the transition from being a student to a new teacher a lot easier for the mentees through their participation in the dialogues. The content of the dialogues was not decided upon in advance and tended to be focused on concrete, practical questions concerning teacher’s work. The majority of the mentors seem to have succeeded in meeting their mentees on the right level and showed an interest in questions and areas of discussion that were important for the mentees. They also seem to have been sensitive to their mentees, been able to understand their situations, support their reflections and give suitable feedback.
In contrast to other studies on mentoring (Ganser, 2003; Morton, 2005), none of the teachers said anything about their goals with the mentoring or expected results. Their statements show that the discussions had primarily focused on experiences of the mentees, which may reflect the novice teachers’ primary need for support and understanding. However, it is possible that by clarifying project and personal goals of the mentoring in advance as well as having better prepared meetings, that questions related to curriculum, policy, teaching goals and changes in the professional role could have also been included in the discussions. However, certain topics may have been discussed during the mentor talks but were not given any particular attention.

The fact that six of the teachers had appreciated the mentor as a discussion partner, who had given support in specific situations and guided them with advice, was evident by their statements that the mentoring had made a difference to them, either personally, professionally or both and that their work had been made much easier. The teachers had felt that they could choose what kind of support they received, which is the kind of flexibility that is expected in mentoring because it is the mentee’s needs that should be in focus.

However, there were also indications that the discussions were insufficiently organized such as mention of poor planning, lack of time for the meetings as well as an awareness that the mentees could have gained even more from the discussions if they had taken more initiative. If this understanding had existed during the mentoring year, the discussions could have been even more beneficial and developmental.

There was no explanation given as to why the mentor discussions were insufficiently organized. One explanation could be that the work situation of the new teachers was stressful so that the mentor discussions were not given full priority. Another explanation could be that not all of the mentors asked the mentees to be prepared for the meetings. Furthermore, even if there are clear goals with mentoring, often the most important need for novice teachers is the possibility to discuss and get advice about current situations. For example, one of the teachers gave the following advice to future novice teachers:

Choose the topic! Is it about practical things you want to talk, bring it up at the very beginning, for example if you have some problems with a group and want some help and support. If you don’t get the opportunity to talk about it, you aren’t open for anything else either. (T 4)

This statement shows how important it is for novice teachers to be able to discuss acute problems and frustrations that they have experienced while teaching with their mentors. Probably topics, prepared in advance, have low priority in those situations.

The advice to future colleagues to carefully put aside time for the mentor discussions and to prepare oneself for them, show that the teachers had experienced the mentoring positively and that they were able to see both the advantage of and the need for mentoring. Results shown by international studies concerning the importance of mentoring for beginner teacher’s professional development (Mullen & Kealy, 1999; Andrews & Martin, 2003; Ganser, 2003) is to a great extent confirmed by the novice teachers in this study.

For future mentoring projects
The teacher, who experienced a lack of engagement from their mentor and was justifiably disappointed, is a reminder of the importance of careful mentor selection and training as well as the provision of ongoing support to mentors during the mentoring period. Mentor training and ongoing support can contribute to an increased awareness about the mentor obligations such as to show interest and take the mentee’s questions and ideas seriously. Otherwise it is difficult to create a mutually beneficial relationship between mentor and mentee.

An important task of a mentor is to reduce the reality shock, which new teachers might experience. Mentors have the opportunity to share their knowledge and experiences with new teachers and to guide them through the transition from being a student to becoming a teacher. However, mentoring in itself does not guarantee quality and development because the results depend on various factors, for example well planned programmes, clear goals, trained mentors and above all, engaged participants. Since support for new teachers is important for their professional development, their attitude towards their profession and their will to stay in the profession they are educated for, it is of great importance how future mentoring programmes are organized.

New teachers’ professionalizing process can be made a lot easier by making the mentoring goal related and ensuring that the mentors are aware of the importance of not only being a support in acute situations but also a reflective discussion partner that expects students to come prepared with thoughts on predetermined topics. Evaluations of mentoring programmes could then focus on set goals. In order to develop mentoring, regular support to mentors, besides mentor training, is needed during the mentoring period. Meanwhile, more national and international studies are needed in order to illustrate the optimal planning and implementation of mentoring programmes as well as the experiences and results of mentoring programmes.

References


