ARTICLE 6

Mentoring in Iceland: An Integral Part of Professional Development?

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Abstract: The main aim of this article is to give an overview of the development of mentoring for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in Iceland and to shed light on the outcome of a mentoring education program developed by the University of Akureyri.

Over the past few years, mentoring and induction have gained momentum in research and scholarly writings in Iceland. Teacher dropout rates, teacher shortages and occupational stress have highlighted the importance of induction plans and mentoring for NQTs (Bjarnadóttir, 2005; Bjarnadóttir, 2015; Steingrímsdóttir & Engilbertsson, 2018).

As of 2013, the Department of Education at the University of Akureyri has offered an education program (30 ECTS credits) with a focus on mentoring. An evaluation of this program was conducted in order to assess the learning outcomes and the structure of the program, focusing on the following research question: How have the teachers who have completed the mentoring program at the University of Akureyri experienced it in terms of their professional development and work as mentors? Also, we wanted to find out if a "third space" had been realized, where teacher educators, local authorities and practicing teachers come together and learn from each other on the premise of professional improvement. Data was collected through focus-group interviews, self-evaluation and action research of participants in the mentoring program.

Our findings imply that the teachers involved found themselves to be more competent after completing the mentoring program, with deeper understanding of the

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theories behind mentoring which was reflected in their increased engagement in school improvement.

Keywords: mentor education, induction, NQTs, professional development, third space

Introduction: Teacher education and mentoring in Iceland

Here we will address teacher shortages and teacher education in Iceland, and mentoring and induction in the Icelandic context, to give an insight into the background of the mentoring program and the research we based it upon. Also, we will describe the 30 ECTS credit mentoring education program this article revolves around.

Teacher shortage

In Iceland, according to the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (OECD, 2014), the average age of the teaching profession is getting higher and in order to avoid teacher shortages, ensure teacher retention, as well as boosting the number of teachers, it is important to support NQTs. The results of TALIS reveal that the average age of Icelandic teachers has gone up since their previous report in 2008. Also, the report shows that teachers below the age of 30 made up 6 % of the teaching profession in 2014, compared to 2008 when the ratio was 13 %. Also, the number of teachers about to retire is growing.

More factors may play a role in the Icelandic context when it comes to foreseeable teacher shortages. Following the enactment of a new law on education, which introduced a five-year program in teacher education (law no. 87/2008), fewer teachers have graduated than before the law came into effect. Admissions to teacher education (for preschool, primary and lower secondary school teachers) have decreased by 40 % since 2008. The universities educating teachers do not pass enough graduate teachers to meet the demands of recruitment: 270 new teachers are needed every year, but on average, only 90 students graduate. There is a significant dropout rate among NQTs, especially in the first three years (Ministry

of Education, Science and Culture, 2019). Recent research indicates that teacher recruitment will not meet demand, since such a large number of teachers are about to retire. Therefore, it is urgent to explore how NQTs can be supported and find out what kind of support leads to teacher retention (Eyjólfsson & Jónsson, 2017).

Teacher education

In 2008, a law (no. 87/2008) was passed by the Icelandic Parliament in which a new education policy was presented for all school levels in Iceland, as well as teacher recruitment and education. As of 2008, teacher education in Iceland is a five-year program at Master's level for preschool, primary school, lower secondary and upper secondary school teachers. That is, a three-year B.Ed., BA or BS degree without a teaching license, followed by a two-year M.Ed. degree leading to a teaching license for one specific school level. Worth noting is that the upper secondary school level is financed by the state while the municipalities finance preschools, primary and lower secondary schools (Government of Iceland, 2019).

To respond to foreseeable teacher shortages, a new law on teacher education and teacher competency was enacted in 2019 (law no. 95/2019). The section about teacher education remained more or less the same, that is, a five-year program is required. Teacher students will continue to specialize in one school level, but the new law allows for more mobility of the profession between different school levels due to one teaching license for all. Students that start their teaching education in 2021–2022 will graduate in accordance with the new laws. By implementing this law, the government's goal is to:

- increase the flow of teachers between different school levels and promote the professionalism of teachers in diverse educational systems,
- encourage consistent professional development and acknowledge specialization at different school levels,
- prevent teacher shortages since teachers have credentials and can secure employment at all school levels, as well as increase the number of new teachers (law no. 95/2019).

Teacher students can take different modules according to which school level they have chosen for their career and have priority when it comes to relevant teaching positions available. However, they can also specialize for other levels assessed by a national teaching council based on a qualification framework. The Ministry of Education appoints the council of 11 delegates representing different stakeholders in the education system (law no. 95/2019).

The new law also allows teacher education institutes to offer a more practice-based teacher education, without a research project or with a research project of less than 30 ECTS credits. Those students receive a MT degree (Master of Teaching) but cannot commence a PhD course unless they add a 30 ECTS credit research project (law no. 95/2019).

The details of the one teacher license (as opposed to three) remain to be seen but it needs to be taken into consideration that teacher education is still structured according to previous law, and curricula based on the new law will not be adopted in full until the fall of 2021. Thus, some time is allowed for adjustment.

There are some structural differences between universities that offer teacher education when it comes to field practice, but in total the amount of time is similar. For those studying to be preschool, primary or lower secondary teachers, about 42 ECTS credits in practical training are required, while those studying to become upper secondary school teachers are required to take 10 ECTS credits (University of Akureyri, 2020a, 2020b & 2020c). Most field practice takes place during the students' last year. Those studying to be preschool, primary or lower secondary teachers can now choose a paid induction year while simultaneously writing an M.Ed. thesis (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2019). This induction year includes a 50% position at a school and the student fulfills all duties entailed in the position. This is only available in areas where there is a teacher shortage, since no positions are designated specifically for teacher students (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2019). A student can also take a different route and split her/his fifth year between field work and teacher training (30 ECTS credits) in the fall semester and then write her/his M.Ed. thesis (30 ECTS credits) in the spring semester without pay.

Induction and mentoring

In Iceland, no national policy concerning induction or mentoring of new teachers has existed, which is in contrast to many other European countries (European Commission, 2010). No laws or regulations in Iceland ensure support for new teachers from mentors when they start working, and thus no tradition has been developed for professional guidance or systematic induction to the teaching profession.

Yet the need for support for NQTs has been acknowledged to a certain extent, and some schools have developed support for newcomers, but it has been highly informal and unsystematic. Thus, induction is dependent on the school administrators and the financial situation of the school (Steingrímsdóttir, 2007). In fact, NQTs' need for mentoring and induction was very little discussed until around the turn of the 21st century, with the emergence of the first scholarly writings in Icelandic on NQTs based on Icelandic research (Bjarnadóttir, 2005; Steingrímsdóttir, 2007).

During the last few years in Iceland, as in other countries, mentoring and induction has become more prominent in the discussion as one of the factors to prevent beginning teachers from failing and leaving the profession. The teachers' unions and universities providing teacher education in Iceland have been advocates of support for new teachers. Their objective has been to develop mentoring as a sustainable part of schoolwork (Bjarnadóttir, 2015; Hauksdóttir, 2016; OECD, 2014; Steingrímsdóttir, 2010).

Icelandic research on new teachers (Steingrímsdóttir, 2007, 2010; Steingrímsdóttir & Engilbertsson, 2018) has highlighted the urgent need for induction and mentoring. Also, the researchers imply that although some new teachers are being provided with mentoring, it is neither systematic nor formal. Based on these research studies, although no laws or regulations stipulate that new teachers must receive mentoring, 40–50% of first-year teachers are provided with mentors. The mentoring NQTs receive is mostly focused on practical aspects of their schoolwork. The focus is not on theoretical or professional support, although research confirms that they also need this. Steingrímsdóttir and Engilbertsson's research (2018) indicated that a large group of the newcomers rarely met their mentor and were not assigned mentors with the same subject or in the

same field as the new teacher. That particular group of new teachers valued the mentoring/support much less than the group that met their mentors more often and had a mentor that had the same or a similar teaching field. This correlates with other studies (e.g. Desimone et al., 2014). The frequency of formal meetings with mentors and the professional background of mentors were the variables that had the strongest connection to job satisfaction and the experience of support for schoolwork.

This Icelandic research (Steingrímsdóttir & Engilbertsson, 2018) gives an indication that emphasis should be placed on creating time and space for mentors to do their work, and mentoring should not be an addition to a full workload. Also, even though NQTs were assigned mentors, it differed whether these mentors complied with their assigned task. In some cases, mentees never met their mentor (ibid). Therefore, it is of importance to ensure that those who are assigned as mentors know their role and that their work is knowledge-based. They should be able to support those beginning their careers and have a constructive effect on their work and attitude, so that NQTs can better cope with and stay in their chosen career instead of leaving the profession. Also, mentors must value the knowledge and past experiences that new teachers bring to the profession, as has been pointed out in other scholarly writings (Ingersoll, 2012; Hong & Matsko, 2019).

It may be noted that in Iceland the percentage of teachers who did not take part in formal or informal induction activities is above the OECD average, but is not statistically different from the OECD average concerning assigned mentors at the current school (OECD, 2020).

Putting mentoring on the agenda

In spring 2018, the Minister of Education appointed a group of educational experts from universities with a teacher education program, the teachers' unions and municipalities. This group was to put forth proposals of actions to increase the recruitment of teachers and counteract the dropout rate in teacher education. For example, the group proposed three measures that included formal mentoring and induction for new teachers. The first deals with targeted mentoring for NQTs in all schools. The

second deals with formal training and specialization in mentoring for experienced teachers who oversee the induction of new teachers and student teachers. The third measure concerns an induction year for teacher students – the fifth year – which has been mentioned previously in this article. In 2019, the Ministry of Education launched an initiative that includes formal mentoring for new teachers, and more emphasis on mentoring education for experienced teachers to support and mentor student teachers and NQTs. The Ministry will finance mentor education for experienced teachers for the next five years. Also, new teachers will receive formal and systematic mentoring during their first three years in the profession, and will have a reduced workload assigned to them (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2019). This is an explicit acknowledgement of the importance of mentoring and support of NQTs.

When reviewing the results of Icelandic research, it becomes clear that mentoring in Iceland needs more discussion in order to further develop and improve. For example, there is hardly any, or at least very little, mentoring culture in the Icelandic context, such as peer mentoring and other formal measures that encourage experienced teachers to support newcomers (Steingrímsdóttir, 2007, 2010).

An important milestone in Icelandic mentoring history was reached when the universities with teacher education departments started to offer a 30 ECTS credit mentor program in 2013. The aim of the program is to strengthen mentoring as a niche within the school culture so that it becomes an ecological entity. The mentoring education program at the University of Akureyri (UNAK) is part of its graduate program, where professional development of mentors is put at the forefront of its programs, as well as efforts to promote peer mentoring which again could contribute to creating a spirit of the third space, which aims at more systematic collaboration between different stakeholders (teacher educators, local authorities and practicing teachers), as explained by Zeichner (2010). This corresponds with the Ministry of Education's initiative mentioned above, which aims at putting mentoring on the agenda. The mentoring education program consists of three courses, taught consecutively over three semesters: *mentoring in the field*; *professional development and school community*; and *mentoring – a part of teachers' professional*

education. Each course is based upon learning outcomes that focus on the role of mentoring NQTs (University of Akureyri, 2020d).

In the light of current discussions about NQTs and the Ministry's initiative of boosting mentoring and induction, we felt it necessary to review and evaluate the mentoring education program at the University of Akureyri to see whether it yielded the professional development hoped for, as well as contributing to a process where mentoring becomes a sustainable and integral part of the school community. To assess the outcome of this initiative we conducted an evaluation based on interviews of the participants that completed the mentoring education program in 2018.

The structure of the mentoring education program and its learning outcomes are based on international and Icelandic research highlighted in the following article, followed by our research question:

How have the teachers who have completed the mentoring program at the University of Akureyri experienced it in terms of their professional development and work as mentors?

Laying the groundwork for the mentoring program

According to research, it is unequivocal that supporting teachers who are developing professionally is an important part of their learning process (Fullan, 2007; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Such support can be on a personal level or a team level and revolve around reflection (Smith, 2015). Constructing and integrating comprehensive induction and formal support for NQTs can be a challenge (OECD, 2020). Different approaches to mentoring subsequently lead to different kinds of learning, and therefore many variations of methods and actions of mentors (OECD, 2019). According to Kemmis, Heikkinen, Fransson, Aspfors, and Edwards-Groves (2014) mentoring might include support and/or collaborative self-development, while Fransson and Gustafsson (2008) discuss the importance of balancing evaluation on the one hand and promotion of professional development on the other. In a recent OECD report (2019), the authors point out that it is also a challenge to extend and maintain mentoring schemes, as well as training experienced teachers to become

effective mentors. Not only do mentors have heavy workloads, but also there is a lack of recognition of their work, which again can hinder the improvement and quality of mentoring.

Significant social changes over the past few years have had an impact on education and, consequently, teachers and their work (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orpjanos, 2009; OECD, 2014). Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) point out that the teaching profession is no longer limited to work inside the classroom. It also requires collaboration with colleagues and other specialists, parents, students and, last but not least, reflection on the work itself as well as professional development. Therefore, teachers need to develop lifelong learning skills (Heikkinen, Joikinen, & Tynjälä, 2012).

Research, both international and Icelandic, has shown that many NQTs find the transition from teacher education to the field challenging, both professionally and personally, and they need support at the beginning of their career (European Commission, 2010; Hauksdóttir, 2016; OECD, 2014; Steingrímsdóttir, 2007, 2010; Ulvik, Smith, & Helleve, 2009). Thus, recent research on NQTs has focused more on what kind of support they need at the beginning of their career and the most efficient ways to provide the mentoring and induction they need. The goal and purpose of such support is to facilitate NQTs' assimilation into the profession and the school community so that they become more successful and more capable, thereby reducing the number of teachers who drop out in the first few years (Bartell, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006; European Commission, 2010).

It has also been argued that teacher education must focus more on introducing teacher students to different practices, such as providing constructive feedback and cooperative learning, at the expense of too much emphasis on a theoretical and methodological approach. Also it should lead the way in terms of professional development (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009).

For mentoring to be as effective as possible, Smith (2015) points out that those responsible for mentoring need to be trained in its basic factors, since there are indications that there is a difference between those who have had such training and those who have not (Helleve, Danielsen, & Smith, 2015). The difference is most apparent when it comes to those

who are well prepared and know how and why certain factors need to be emphasized. Mentoring should facilitate reflection and ensure that mentors are conscious of their responsibility for teachers' professional development. Thus, their approach aims at leadership in change as explained by Fullan (2007). Various scholars have pointed out the misconception that teacher induction fixes problems when, in fact, teacher induction is reciprocal – a learning process for experienced teachers as well as NQTs (Bartell, 2005; Tolhurst, 2010; Van Esch & Tillema, 2015).

Tolhurst (2010) concludes that it is necessary for mentors to be able to analyze what kind of support is needed in every case. He emphasizes the importance of NQTs receiving constructive feedback on their work based on dialogue. This means that teachers receive help to reflect on their work, how effective it is and learn from it. Also Tolhurst explains that mentoring requires a certain balance of support for personal style and practice, as well as promoting understanding of what effective teaching is. This is in accordance with Van Esch and Tillema (2015), who believe dialogue between parties needs to be demanding, supportive and solution orientated.

Effective leadership must not be underestimated in induction and mentoring. According to research, principal leadership is one of the most significant factors of teachers' commitment to the profession (Hong & Matsko, 2019). In terms of mentoring, it seems that more emphasis is now placed on the cooperation and co-responsibility of teacher educators, and field experiences based on academic research pertaining to quality teacher education. Thus, it cannot be realized without a meaningful and extensive partnership of schools and universities (Bjarnadóttir, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Zeichner, 2010).

The third space, as explained by Zeichner (2010), aims at a more systematic approach and collaboration between universities and schools in order to make teacher education more seamless, where different stakeholders meet in a partnership and all voices are of equal value (Bjarnadóttir, 2015). Also there is a consensus that everyone is a learner, but their expertise is based on different experiences. An example of such partnership is found in Finland: *Verme*, a Finnish network for peer-group mentoring. Its main goal is to develop and disseminate the peer-group mentoring model (PGM) to support professionals in the educational field. There are

some similarities between this Finnish approach and the mentoring program at the University of Akureyri that is discussed in this article. In Iceland, teacher education has been reorganized in the light of this, where mentoring is more prominent than before (Bjarnadóttir, 2015).

Since more emphasis is placed now on mentoring and induction of NQTs, we decided to evaluate the mentoring program and its impact on the professional development of the teachers involved. As has been pointed out, it is important to conduct more small-scale studies to understand the processes in question better (Simmie, de Paor, Liston & O'Shea, 2017).

Method

The evaluation of the mentoring program is based on two focus-group interviews conducted in January 2019, self-evaluation of participants in the 30 ECTS credit program, and an action-research project (Mills, 2017) which the participants completed in the last course of the program. In order to get a dynamic discussion of the program we chose focus-group interviews to collect data rather than individual interviews. The self-evaluation was based on a critical reflection of teachers on their own participation and contribution to different aspects of the program. The participants supported their reflections using examples and with references to the proposed learning outcomes of the program. The final course of the mentoring education revolved around an action-research project, which focused on mentoring and participants carried out in the field. The action research followed a plan where participants defined the subject, developed a research question, defined a sample, collected data, connected their analysis with the results of the research and mapped out a plan for improvement. Students then presented the outcome on the Internet as well as in seminars. Their grade was based on peer assessment in the seminars.

There were nine participants who all had five–twenty years of teaching experience. One focus-group included five teachers, the other one four. Participants were working in pre-schools, primary schools and upper secondary schools and had completed a 30 ECTS credit mentoring education program at the University of Akureyri. Each interview was semi-structured and lasted about an hour. The interviews were

then transcribed, and thematic analysis was applied (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000).

An evaluation is specifically designed to provide information for decision making, and the findings cannot be generalized (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). The objective of this evaluation was to provide information about teachers' experiences of the mentor program and to assess its quality and need for future improvements. Also, to find out how it impacted upon participants' professional development.

Ethical considerations and limitations

All students who completed the mentoring program in December 2018 received an invitation to participate in the evaluation. They all accepted and consequently gave informed consent to taking part in a focus group and allowing the use of their data for the evaluation. Those carrying out the evaluation were aware of their ethical responsibility, since the evaluation was aimed at the courses and students they taught and knew and could, therefore, bias the results even though systematic, ethical and reflective processes were used (Davíðsdóttir, 2013; Mills, 2017). All conditions concerning validity for this type of evaluation were met (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). The objective of the evaluation was clear; it was based on a systematic plan and yielded practical results.

Outcomes

The objective of the evaluation was to explore how the participants experienced the effect that the mentor program had on their work as mentors and their professional development. To shed further light on this we focused on the structure of the mentoring program and the impact of its learning outcomes on participants.

Thematic analysis yielded three main themes: Firstly, *practical implications regarding content and structure of the course*; secondly *new approaches in mentoring and commitment to the role of a mentor*; and thirdly *mentoring as a contributing factor to professional development of teachers and the importance of creating a third space.*

Practical implications

Regarding the overall evaluation of the program, new knowledge and structure were frequently mentioned by participants. They found the structure of the mentoring program to be logical and with a clear reference and relation to field work, and one of them described its benefits as follows: "It is like my battery has been recharged."

The participants found the build-up between the courses to be logical; the first course focused on the theoretical framework, the second course on the school community and, finally, the third course required action research and a comprehensive approach to cooperation. One participant commented on the action research in the final course:

> I felt liberated, wow, this is great, this was awesome … I found it [action research] to be such a powerful tool. You had heard about it before and people were talking about this. I am all for having this as a part of my job.

The participants' self-evaluation and action research revealed that they had learned and adopted academic vocabulary and ways of thinking, and now regarded mentoring as a reciprocal process and a challenge for the school community as a whole. The following comment exemplifies this:

> I had no theoretical background to rely on when working as a mentor. Did the best as I could but always based on my own practices and worked according to that. Now, I have so much more knowledge because I have read so much.

Another said:

> This opened my mind in so many ways. I loved studying scholarly articles and theoretical frameworks.

The participants were generally satisfied with the content and the structure of the courses. A stronger knowledge base, constant self-reflection, cooperation and action research were mentioned by participants. Factors were also mentioned that promoted professional development, changed their practices and yielded stronger commitment to providing mentoring to all co-workers, not just pre-service teachers and NQTs. They also considered themselves more capable of mentoring their co-teachers. One said:

> My emphasis went from practical things, checklists and box ticking to deeper discussions with him [mentee] to make him reflect more on what he was doing, and why, and you just went deeper.

The participants observed a clear connection between the courses and their experience in practice. Thus, one said:

> Yes! … You sort of knew; you had dealt with lots of things but now you knew they actually had a name.

Another said:

> … I am just one of those who has not sat down and read scholarly articles for years. I found it to be incredibly rewarding.

They believed now that they were more aware of the importance of active listening and being there, not only for NQTs but also other colleagues. They allowed themselves more time to pinpoint challenges in discussions with other teachers and believed they were more apt at problem-solving as equals. They also thought they now had a deeper understanding of co-workers' feelings and challenges in practice.

New approach and commitment to the role of mentoring

In regard to Theme 2, the participants considered the knowledge of mentoring of NQTs as very important within the school. The role of mentors is still rather undefined in Icelandic schools, so classroom teachers did not necessarily assume responsibility for mentoring. The participants stressed that the responsibility of induction and mentoring should not be assigned to just one teacher or leader but rather be regarded as a collaboration of the school as a whole. Delegating roles is therefore important. Participants pointed out that generally speaking, induction was not prioritized in the field, and there was a strong tendency to assign the responsibility of induction to one person only. According to the participants, they felt that this was ingrained in the school culture.

One said:

> It is more about working conditions … or the culture of that school … how important the administrators are.

Another said:

> I started thinking about **what kind of** teacher I wanted to be, both in regard to students and NQTs etc. Then when we reflected on our practice … I realized: **this** is who I am [as a professional].

A third one described the order of importance this way:

> … if there is conflict about whether to attend a team meeting or [a mentor meeting], then the team meeting comes first. If there is a need for a teacher substitute, that comes first; it [mentoring] is not considered more important than that. Which is maybe normal considering how busy things are, but still …

In a few of the participants' schools, induction plans had been implemented for some time, but they were further developed during the participants' time doing the courses and after they had completed the mentoring program. Other schools started to write induction plans while the teachers were taking the mentoring program and, in yet more schools, efforts were made to create such induction plans. Those teachers who had taken the mentoring program often took responsibility for such work.

Professional development of teachers and the importance of creating a third space

A third theme the participants expressed was the need for a clear and formal vision on the school leaders' behalf when it came to induction and mentoring of NQTs. Generally, they believed mentoring was not regarded as part of school culture. Participants in the mentoring program realized that peer support is of importance, especially to promote mentoring and professional development. They also mentioned the importance of principals and local municipalities getting involved in policymaking and implementation. Their voices needed to be heard and they needed to be introduced to different methods and theory. One said:

> This needs to be presented to … all the staff. That is our plan in our next staff meeting, then I will present my action research and its background. This is exactly what I mean by everyone taking part, induction is not a private issue … which is what I experienced in the beginning: She is learning about mentoring and induction! She will shoulder the responsibility! [opinion expressed by the teachers' colleagues]. But that is not good enough, we need to work together so things are done properly.

Participants voiced their will to find a platform where NQTs and even pre-service teachers, experienced teachers and teacher educators could actively participate in a formal discussion and referred to *Verme* (http://osaavaverme.wixsite.com/verme/en), which they had learnt about in the mentoring program. Such a platform could create a connection between the theoretical framework and those working in the field, in preschools, primary schools and upper secondary schools, and serving as professional development.

They said:

> It would be beneficial to both teacher students and experienced teachers to meet and have a dialogue. Not necessarily listening to lectures. It is about dialogue … there is such a wide gap between the theory and practice. This is what I felt was needed for teacher students beginning their studies [teacher education], a little bit of a reality check.

Aiming at bridging the gap between theory and practice and to build and improve a mentoring culture, they discussed if it was possible to have a formal discussion group including mentoring teachers, NQTs, as well as teacher educators, meeting regularly over the school year.

Indications

In this evaluation, we searched for an answer to the following question: *How have the teachers who have completed the mentoring program at the University of Akureyri experienced it in terms of their professional development and work as mentors?*

Our findings seem to indicate that the mentoring education program promoted professional development and peer support for the participants,

as well as a deeper understanding of the need for implementing dynamic collaboration. Also, there was a deeper understanding of the importance of induction and mentoring for NQTs and the learning process involving all teachers in the school. The mentoring program seemed to have changed the practices of participants in such a way that it promoted professional work and targeted academic discourse.

When reading theories behind induction and mentoring practices in the first course, the participants realized that the framework of that part of teacher's practice was supported by theories and research. That gave them self-confidence in the practice as Bartell (2005) claims, and they became more fluent in the relevant professional discourse of induction and mentoring. Participants said they had gained a new perspective on the role of mentors. Instead of regarding it as a one-way street, they now believe mentoring should be an integral part of the school culture. That included reflection, critical thinking, problem-solving, peer support and commitment—not only for the NQTs but all teachers—disregarding teaching experience as is stated in the Finnish model of *Verme*, as Heikkinen et al. (2012) highlight. Therefore, mentoring seems to be a factor that potentially can support professional development for all, and with the intention and opportunity to create a third space where all stakeholders take part. Many scholars have pinpointed this as instrumental for improving mentoring and teacher education (i.e. Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Grossman et al., 2009; Smith, 2015; Zeichner, 2010). In our evaluation, we noticed that in schools induction and mentoring were not a priority, which implies that school principals did not lead the way when it came to this important part of NQTs' first year. These findings are in conflict with those showing effective leadership being instrumental in induction and mentoring (Hong & Matsko, 2019).

The Icelandic educational system has been undergoing significant changes recently, and it is still too early to make definite conclusions about improvements, for example, regarding induction and mentoring. However, we can assume from the conclusions of our evaluation that the mentoring program motivated experienced teachers to seek further professional development, or as one participant said: "It's like someone recharged your battery." From our evaluation, we see that the mentoring

program and its learning outcomes are consistent with the proposal and objectives of the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2019). We cannot make any assumptions about the perspective of mentees since it has not been the subject of evaluation yet.

Following this evaluation, it would be of interest and importance to delve into what the induction meant for the NQTs, and its implications for their professional development. Also, it remains to be seen what changes the Ministry's initiative will have on the sustainability of induction and mentoring in the Icelandic education ecosystem. The third space may not be realized unless different stakeholders, including teacher educators, school leaders, experienced teachers, local authorities and policymakers, become partners sharing this common goal. Ultimately, this evaluation further supports our notion that the mentor program yields the results hoped for and possibly further reveals the importance of dynamic collaboration towards the third space.

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