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Towards Induction – The Case of Training Mentors for New Teachers in Finland

Abstract

The chapter describes a pilot induction programme (2011–2013) to support new teachers through mentoring. The chapter summarises new teachers’ needs in Finland and how the pilot programme was developed using Finnish contextual knowledge and the experiences of the New Teacher Centre in California. The chapter also describes how the mentors who were developing the programme viewed their role in the induction. The mentors were interviewed in 2013. At the beginning of the chapter, the special features of the Finnish education system will be described in order to provide a holistic picture of why new teachers need support in Finland, even though they have a high level of teacher education, including effective practicums, before they begin teaching. The pilot programme made visible the urgent need to create a teacher education continuum and support teachers through induction. At the end of the chapter, recommendations are given on how to make induction a sustainable part of the education system.

Key words: induction, teacher education, teachers, professional development, mentoring

1. Induction as part of the continuum of teacher education

The induction of new teachers has become one of the key priorities in developing teacher education in the European Union. By reviewing the latest research evidence and comparing policies from several member states, the European Commission produced a Handbook for Policymakers in an attempt to introduce induction programmes in all member countries (European Commission 2010). It proposes that all new teachers should have an induction phase in their early careers. Newly qualified teachers often experience a “praxis-shock” when they confront the daily reality of school. They may feel stressed, especially in schools where they are expected to cope with complex new situations on their own.

The European Commission proposes that teachers’ professional development should be supported through a three-phase model: initial teacher education, induction (for new teachers, 3–5 years after graduation) and in-service teacher education. This continuum is needed for teachers’ career-long development. The aim is that member states will develop coherent and system-wide induction programmes for beginning teachers (European Commission 2010, 3):

This professional development of teachers is a lifelong process that starts at initial teacher education and ends at retirement. Generally this lifelong process is divided in specific stages. The first stage concerns the preparation of teachers during initial teacher education, where those who want to become a
teacher master the basic knowledge and skills. The second stage is the first independent steps as teachers, the first years of confrontation with the reality of being a teacher in school. This phase is generally called the induction phase. The third phase is the continuing professional development of those teachers who have overcome the initial challenges of becoming a teacher.

The importance of the teacher education continuum is based on many studies that have investigated teachers’ professional learning and growth. Kay Livingston (2012a, b) and Livingstone and Shiach (2010) argue that a teacher learning continuum is required because teachers must learn throughout their careers; pre-service time is only a starting phase of career-long professional development. Many processes, such as identifying and exploring teachers’ own assumptions and personal experiences about learning and teaching through dialogue with peers and teacher educators in pre-service time, as well as the development of questioning and critical enquiry, are important (Livingston and Shiach 2010), and these processes should also be supported later in teachers’ careers.

Career-long professional learning requires that professional development programmes are organised for teachers. Optimally, they should take into account the entire spectrum of teacher learning (Schwille and Dembélé 2007). However, the provision of induction programmes does not seem to be common or well-organised. According to member states’ own data (www.eurydice.org), only 18 member states offer new teachers systematic support (induction) in their first years of teaching. Even though there are some forms of support for new teachers (Scheerens 2010, 16), the arrangements are not systematic:

Member States undertake little systematic co-ordination of the different elements of teacher education. This results in a lack of coherence and continuity, especially between a teacher’s initial professional education and subsequent induction, in-service training and professional development. Often, these processes are not linked to school development and school improvement or to educational research.

New teachers’ problems are recognised worldwide (Conway, Murphy, Rath and Hall 2009). OECD reports provide an overview of the many ways of organising induction. There is enormous variation among countries. The forms of support can be mandatory national programmes, support processes provided by local schools or more or less project-based arrangements. Typically, even if there are formal induction programmes or formal induction at the school level, not all teachers have the opportunity to participate. Thus, the need to support new teachers is well-recognised, but many countries are still trying to organise the provision of support successfully.

Finland has a reputation for being a successful country educationally (OECD 2003, 2010, 2013). However, Finland does not have any mandatory national or local programmes for new teachers. Local schools usually provide new teachers with a short introduction. This is more technical and administrative, providing an overview of the locations and daily practices in the school. Otherwise, new teachers participate in in-service training that is designed for all teachers.
The need for induction has been recognised in Finland. Schools are becoming very complicated workplaces. The Finnish education system places a strong emphasis on equity and inclusion (OECD 2006; Niemi 2012). It demands teachers work with very heterogeneous student groups and identify students’ learning problems as early as possible. New teachers, after graduation, must meet all professional demands immediately.

The Advisory Board for Professional Development of Education Personnel, which was set up by the Ministry of Education and Culture, proposes that an entity for continuing professional development between initial and continuing education should be created. Newly qualified teachers need support in the process of transitioning from study to work. This support should be provided to all new teachers (Hämäläinen, Hämäläinen and Kangasniemi 2015, 7).

This chapter describes a pilot project that was started in 2011 to support new teachers through mentoring. The chapter summarises new teachers’ needs in Finland and how mentors themselves see their role as part of the induction. At the beginning of the chapter, the special features of the Finnish education system will be described in order to provide a holistic picture of why new teachers need support in Finland, even though they have a high level of teacher education, including effective practicums, before coming to school (Niemi and Jakku-Sihvonen 2006; Niemi 2014).

2. The Finnish education system sets high levels of responsibility for new teachers

A purposeful policy aimed at equity, a high level of education for all, and excellent teachers has been identified as the main reason for Finnish educational success (Laukkanen 2007; Niemi 2012b; Sahlberg 2011). The Finnish education system allows teachers a great deal of professional freedom, but it also makes the profession very demanding. From 2014 to 2016, in the Finnish education system there were large national core curriculum reforms for both basic education and high schools. Both reforms aimed at strengthening students’ twenty-first-century skills. Local schools and their teachers are in the middle of these change processes and are designing their local curriculums, which should be ready in August 2016. These reforms should be integrated with the leading principles of the education system, which will be summarised below.

*Equity and lifelong learning as basic values*

Niemi and Isopahkala-Bouret (2012) summarised the major features of the Finnish education system that influence teachers’ work. Their analysis reveals that Finnish education policy has three main principles that guide all activities throughout the education system. These principles are *equity*, which means providing equal opportunities to every learner regardless of their social, ethnic and economic background (OECD 2006); *flexible educational structures*, which allow continuing one’s education, even in the case of a failure, and a *high level of education* for the entire population. Lifelong learning is integrated with all levels of the system from early education to adult education. Teachers are responsible for much more than simply providing teaching contents. Students must be ready to continue studying at the next level of education and learn new skills, and schools must support their
personal growth (Niemi and Isopahkala-Bouret 2012). In basic education (Grades 1–9), there is no streaming or tracking. Teaching happens in mixed-ability groups. Teachers must take care of different learners and also identify which kinds of special support students need. Teachers must make a huge number of pedagogical decisions every day, and must communicate about students’ learning problems with parents, special needs teachers, social workers and nurses. Teachers must also act as partners in multi-professional groups for students’ well-being.

**Professional autonomy**

Teachers have a great deal of freedom in their teaching. The national core curriculum provides the basic values and frames (Halinen and Holoppa 2013). Schools are responsible for the local curriculum, which is designed by teachers and principals. Local partners, such as parents and other stakeholders, are invited to contribute. Teachers have the freedom to choose what kind teaching and learning materials they use and which kinds of teaching and assessment methods they apply. The leading principle is that they make choices and decisions that support various learners’ growth in the best possible way (Halinen and Järvinen 2008).

**Enhancement-led evaluation system**

Finnish education’s evaluation system has been described as enhancement/improvement-led evaluation (Kumpulainen and Laukkanen 2012; Niemi and Lavonen 2012). Evaluation is performed for the sake of improvement, not ranking. Teachers’ work is not determined by high-stakes testing or outside control. In Finland, there is no standardised testing. The evaluation system aims to determine which kinds of improvements are needed for better learning outcomes. Local education providers (municipalities) are responsible for the quality of educational services and assessment methods. Teachers also use enhancement-led evaluation in student learning. This means that formative evaluation methods are used to decide how to support various learners. Toom and Husu (2012) write:

> Added to this, the task of assessment is to help pupils form a realistic image of their learning and development. It is also stated, that pupil assessment forms a whole, in which on-going feedback from the teacher plays an important part. With the help of assessment, the teacher guides the pupils in becoming aware of their thinking and actions and helps them understand what they are learning.

In Finland, there is neither an inspectorate nor probation time. New teachers are fully licensed when they start their work in schools after they graduate from teacher-education programmes. New teachers must fill a professional role from the very beginning of their careers. They are expected to be capable of meeting all national and local educational aims in schools. They have 5 years of high-quality academic pre-service education in universities, integrating theory and practice and emphasising teacher autonomy. In spite of pre-service experiences, the transition to a school community can be surprising. New teachers must meet all professional demands immediately when they start their work, and they have hundreds of interactions every day in school. These demands burden all teachers but, more specifically, new teachers do not necessarily have the strategies or models needed to cope with all these
professional tasks. Finland is also becoming a multicultural society, and teachers face an increasing amount of student heterogeneity in classrooms.

3. New teachers’ needs in the Finnish education system

To obtain more evidence about new teachers’ needs, three surveys were implemented in 2010, 2013 and 2015. The first one collected data (N = 445) from student teachers at two large universities to illustrate what kind of competencies teacher education had provided them with (Niemi 2011; 2012 a, c). The questionnaire consisted of 40 items regarding a broad range of teachers’ work in classrooms, in the school community and in co-operation with various education partners. The results suggested the student teachers were satisfied with the skills and competencies they had achieved regarding classroom teaching. They assessed they had good basic skills in designing teaching, had good content knowledge and managed classroom pedagogy well. They had internalised ethical commitments regarding teaching and also saw teaching as a lifelong learning career in which they would be responsible for their own professional development. They reported they had the lowest competencies in co-operating with the school community and with partners outside the school, particularly with parents. The second challenging area was teaching a diversity of pupils and preparing them for the future.

The same questionnaire was also distributed to newly qualified teachers (Niemi and Siljander 2013). The questions were changed to determine the biggest needs among newly qualified teachers (NQTs). This survey was conducted among a group of new teachers (n=40) who had participated in Teacher Union courses for newly qualified teachers. They responded to the same questions as the student teachers but described areas in which they would need the most support in their work. They were representatives of different geographical areas in Finland. The third survey was organised in 2015 (n=102) and also distributed to newly qualified teachers who had participated in Teacher Union courses in the previous 2 years.

We could find a great deal of consistency among the student teachers’ and newly qualified teachers’ experiences. Those competencies that were weakest during teacher education were on the top-ten list in terms of requests for support and mentoring. Student teachers assessed they had good basic skills in terms of classroom work including content knowledge and pedagogy, and NQTs also felt that they would not need support in this regard during their first-year work. Instead, they felt they needed support in guiding and helping students with learning difficulties and differentiating teaching for them. Students’ needs and preparing students for their future are key areas in which new teachers are struggling. In addition, co-operating with parents was among the top-ten priorities in 2013. Teachers still required support regarding those competencies with which they had struggled during teacher education. The needs of NQTs were very similar in both surveys. Among the top-ten areas of needs, there were six professional tasks that were the very same, and almost in the same order. The most urgent task is to find solutions for how to act in a conflict situation, such as mobbing. All tasks were related to students’ learning and well-being, especially for differentiating and helping different kinds of learners. Even administrative tasks were related to arrangements for students’ transfer to have extra support in their learning. All Finnish schools must also have a students’ welfare group. It is multi-professional support group with special needs teachers, health and social professionals to help
students when they have troubles in their life. This co-operative work is often very challenging for a new teacher.

An interesting difference between the 2013 and 2015 data for NQTs is that the newest survey’s top-ten list includes curriculum planning and students’ ICT skills. This can be seen as a direct consequence of the new national core curriculum reform in 2014–2016. Schools must have their own school-based curricula designed and ready for implementation in August 2016. Schools have 2 years to develop their own local curricula. The reform emphasises learning and learning environments in the framework of 21st century skills also consisting of digital learning solutions. From these studies, we learn that the areas in which teachers need support are not stable. They are connected with the actual situation and on-going reforms in schools. However, in the Finish case, major needs are related to student welfare and how to make learning meaningful for students.

Table 1. Newly qualified teachers’ self-assessments: “I need support or mentoring in the following tasks”

1= Not at all or very little, 2=A little, 3=Somewhat, 4= Much, 5=Very much

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional tasks in which support is needed</th>
<th>2013 n=40</th>
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<th>Professional tasks in which support is needed</th>
<th>2015 n=102</th>
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<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acting in conflict situations (such as mobbing)</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>Act in conflict situations (such as mobbing)</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working with a student welfare group</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>Differentiating of teaching</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>1.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Differentiating of teaching</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>Working with a student welfare group</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative tasks (information letters,</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>Revising students’ learning environments</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>1.08</td>
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<td>reports, student transfers to other groups or</td>
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<td>schools, work diaries)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluating and grading of students</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>Evaluating and grading of students</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating students’ learning capacity</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>Evaluating students’ learning capacity</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-operation with parents</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>Developing of school curriculum</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making students ready for daily life</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>Developing applications of modern information technology</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting a learner's individual growth</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>Administrative tasks (information letters,</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.03</td>
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<td>schools, work diaries)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development of own educational philosophy</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>Self-regulated learning</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In interviews with 20 NQTs in 2013 in the Capital City area, we also identified the
following categories:

**Needs to discuss and ask for support**
New teachers described that they had managed daily work fairly well, but there were many situations in which they needed to discuss their experiences with someone else. Many had peer teachers who acted as important partners. Some mentioned having special needs teachers as supporters when experiencing difficulties with pupils. However, the main message was that new teachers would need someone with whom they can share experiences and reflect. They also mentioned it was important to clarify their own aims and that, in this process, confidentiality would be very important.

**Co-operation with parents**
Parents were mentioned in almost every new teacher’s interview. Some mentioned difficulties with parents but, even when there were no special difficulties, new teachers regarded co-operation with parents as demanding. They wanted to have more support in this area. They also mentioned that in pre-service teacher education they did not have experience working with parents.

**Differentiating teaching**
New teachers described that, even though they were confident regarding content knowledge and had the competencies needed to use different kinds of teaching methods, they were uncertain how to differentiate teaching for different learners. During lessons, it became too hectic to find such solutions. New teachers would like to discuss this with someone who could help them design and implement teaching in such a way that all learners can learn.

**Difficult students – behavioural problems**
New teachers describe that they usually manage classroom situations fairly well. However, there are also students who have behavioural problems. These students can behave aggressively or cause many kinds of trouble in the classroom. Such situations can create emotional burdens and trigger high levels of stress among new teachers. They would like to discuss these difficult situations and find ways to handle them.

**4. The New Teacher Centre as a reference for a Finnish induction programme**
Finland does not have any mandatory programme for mentoring or supporting NQTs. There have been pilots in which peer-mentoring provided extra help at the school level for new teachers and, at the same time, for all teachers (Jokinen et al. 2008). However, support for new teachers is still developing. The Finnish National Board of Education funded a pilot project (2011–2013) to determine how new teachers could be supported. The first author of this chapter led that project. The initial step in the project was to determine what is most important when supporting new teachers.

There are many models of new teacher induction in different countries. However, in most cases it consists of mentoring. In the TALIS survey (Scheerens 2010, 157), a mentor is defined as a person who is assigned to a new teacher to help and advise him or her. The quality of mentors has been seen as a key factor in successful and effective induction programmes (Moir and Gless 2001; Moir, Barlin, Gless and Miles
Feiman-Nemser (2001, 2008) and her colleagues (Feiman-Nemser, Carver, Schwille and Yusko 2000; Feiman-Nemser and Norman 2001) emphasise that continuity in teachers’ professional development is important, as is the quality of mentors.

As a frame of reference, the Finnish mentoring project selected the mentoring model of the New Teacher Centre (NTC) in California. It has an over-20-year history of training mentors for new teachers in the United States. Representatives of the NTC (Moir and Gless 2001, 112) stress:

Supporting new teachers is complex and demanding work, and it involves learning skills other than those that most classroom teachers possess. It is critical, therefore, that we think not only about what a new teacher needs to be successful but also what a mentor teacher needs to know and be able to do in order to support a new teacher.

The ultimate aim of NTC mentoring is for students in the classroom to experience high-quality teaching and increased learning outcomes. Induction programmes aim to accelerate new teachers’ effectiveness, making them more aware of how to help different students learn successfully. Other aims are to strengthen new teachers’ leadership capacity and improve teacher retention (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The main principles of the NTC model for mentoring

According to the NTC model, a key factor in supporting new teachers is the quality of mentors. Therefore, selecting and training mentors is a high priority.
In the NTC mentor programme, the following criteria are important when working with novice teachers:

- Mentors intimately know the communities, school sites and classroom contexts of their novice partners.
- Mentors provide support that is responsive to the assessed individual needs of their beginning teachers.
- Mentors facilitate new teachers, guiding them to use observation, collaborative lesson design, model teaching, veteran teacher observation, reflection, the analysis of student work, goal-setting and assessment against professional standards.
- Mentors model the importance of designing classroom instruction based on assessed student needs.

Mentors may have many functions: on one hand, they are supporters of new teachers. On the other, they are also the brokers of policy-makers, tasked with promoting student learning via their influence on new teachers (Moir and Gless 2001). Not every outstanding classroom teacher is necessarily a talented mentor. Moir and Gless emphasise the following selection criteria: strong interpersonal skills, credibility with peers and administrators, a demonstrated curiosity and eagerness to learn, respect for multiple perspectives, and outstanding instructional practice.

5. The Finnish pilot programme starts

The principles of induction and mentoring in the NTC induction programme were adopted as core guidelines when the Finnish model was being developed. The selected group of 13 experienced Finnish teachers, along with the authors of this article, visited the NTC and had a training week in November 2011 to obtain a deeper understanding of how to train high-quality mentors. The group had a special task: to learn how the Finnish system could utilise the NTC’s experiences and develop a Finnish model for induction. Most participants also had a mentee during the project and had to simultaneously learn what it means to be a mentor.

The pilot group began their mentoring and creating the model for induction simultaneously. This would not have been possible without these teachers’ earlier multifaceted professional experiences. Many had experience supervising and mentoring student teachers, and some had been academic counsellors. Some teachers also had supervisor training for work counselling. However, they did not have experience being a mentor during induction. Over 1.5 years (2011–2013), the group was trained based on the core ideas of NTC mentoring, and the teachers reflected on their own growth as mentors and shared their experiences. During that time, they drafted a handbook for the Finnish model of induction and mentoring (Niemi and Siljander 2013).

The Finnish context is different in many respects to the NTC, which is in the United States. In Finland, all teachers have 5 years of high-quality teacher education via obtaining academic MA degrees (Niemi and Jakku-Sihvonen 2006; Niemi 2012). Schools can only hire qualified teachers who fulfil both content knowledge and pedagogical requirements. Teacher retention is high, and teachers are satisfied with
their profession (Talis 2013). In the United States, mentors face much greater heterogeneity among teachers and their competencies, and schools can be very different depending on the area. In Finland, the equity principle means that all schools should be good schools and that parents do not need to be afraid regarding what their local school is like. There are no private schools, and school sizes are usually smaller than in the USA. Geographically, Finnish schools can also be very remote.

In the NTC model, mentors were mainly full-time. Mentoring was organised systematically in local schools and had a clear position in the school regions that participated in the induction programme. In the Finnish context, we could not plan for exclusively full-time mentoring. Only the biggest cities can hire full-time mentors. We had to find a model that can be used for both part-time and full-time mentoring during induction.

In June 2013, the pilot group published New teachers’ mentoring. Towards students’ and teachers’ wellbeing through mentoring (Niemi and Siljander and the group for developing mentoring 2013), in which mentor training, relevant structures and the administrative practices of induction were described. The focus of the Finnish model is students’ and teachers’ well-being. The mentors’ task is to help new teachers promote student learning and holistic growth, especially for students with special needs. They should also help new teachers find their role in the school community and work with parents and other interest groups. Mentors can support new teachers in pedagogical issues but, based on earlier studies, the major focus should be on different learners’ needs and interaction with other partners, particularly with parents. Mentors should also support new teachers in viewing students’ cultural background as a resource.

Aims of mentoring

The handbook sets six important aims for the Finnish model of induction (Niemi and Siljander 2013):

- Supporting and advancing new teachers’ professional growth and development after pre-service teacher education.

- Promoting new teachers’ ability to manage their own work, retention and well-being.

- Taking care of and promoting student well-being in schools.

- Fulfilling quality standards in basic education and ensuring that all students can have a high-quality education.

- Supporting mentors’ professional growth and development.

- Enhancing school culture and the school community in an attempt to provide a professional learning community.

Mentors’ training
In the handbook, it was recommended that mentor training be organised by universities’ continuing education centres for teachers, together with teacher training departments and teacher educators. Trainers should be university teachers and teacher educators with high-quality experience as teachers in schools. The programme should be at least five ECTS (European credit transfer system) points, which means at least 140 hours of learning on the mentor’s part, including five intensive days over 1–1.5 years, depending how those intensive days are arranged. Between the intensive days, there is individual work with one’s own mentees and on-going reflections about mentors’ joint electronic platform. The following topics should be covered in the training programme:

- Mentors’ professional growth, identity and roles
- New teachers’ needs and support for their professional development
- The ethics of mentoring and guidance, especially confidentiality in mentors’ work
- Communication, principles of dialogue, active listening dialogue and the language of mentoring
- Tools for e-mentoring and documentation

During the mentor training, each mentor should have a mentee with whom the mentor meets at least once or twice a week. The mentor will visit the new teacher’s school and classroom. Together, the mentor and mentee plan how often they meet, how often the mentor visits the new teacher’s classroom, how student learning will be observed in classrooms and which kinds of tools the new teacher will use for documenting his or her own learning and his or her students’ learning. The important aim is that the new teacher finds the tools and practices with which to manage his or her work all year round and to determine how the new teacher can meet the needs of various learners and ensure a high-quality education for all students. The trained mentor can be in the mentee’s own school or come from outside, depending on the local circumstances.

**What are the criteria to become a mentor?**

Because the number of new teachers can vary in different years and in different regions, there can be full-time or part-time mentors. However, all mentors must have training in mentoring. The selection criteria to participate in mentor training are that mentor teachers must have least 5 years of teaching experience. They must also have high emotional intelligence and excellent interaction skills and, to show evidence of constructive family-school co-operation, the latest knowledge about the school curriculum, experiences working as an adult educator and respect among teachers. They must be committed to lifelong learning.

**6. Becoming a mentor is a process**

Becoming a mentor to a new teacher is a long process. The work is different than teaching students in classrooms. The teachers who developed the pilot programme for mentoring and were also mentors to new teachers were interviewed. In the following descriptions, their experiences are summarised. In the analysis, the same categories
were used as were found in earlier studies of mentoring (Lieberman, Hanson and Gless 2012). In the Finnish study, the following thematic contents could be found:

**Building a new identity:**

Becoming a mentor means adopting a new identity: it is becoming a facilitator and building a scaffold for a mentee. It is a long process of learning to ask questions rather than giving answers. Mentors describe that it is a process of learning to listen and finally seeing mentoring as a mutual learning process. A large part of their growth was to learn to ask questions and lead the discussion in such a way as to support the new teacher.

*Indeed, it has been quite a path for myself and a change... and then I see it as important... when you put your own job into words.* (Mentor 2)

*So you are listening and then, in a way, you have to grasp that it is not just that you, as a more experienced worker, are giving something but that both parties have given something and taken something away.* (Mentor 4)

*I learned, maybe, to guide that discussion in such a way that it no longer wandered here and there, but I did not impose some specific direction on it.* (Mentor 2)

Mentors also described that their role was different than the role of a teacher in a school. They had to face a young professional’s growth process, and support was needed when a new teacher was tired. They had to keep in mind two levels of learning processes. The first one was related to new teachers. Mentors facilitated new teachers in reflecting on their own growth. The second concerns how new teachers could understand students’ growth and learning processes. They guided new teachers to understand situations from students’ perspectives and viewpoints. They also helped new teachers to keep their problems in perspective and overcome difficult situations.

**Facing challenging contexts with mentees**

The mentors reported they needed to help new teachers in challenging situations involving difficult students or parents. Mentors described how it was necessary to discuss difficult topics and even crises with their mentees. Sometimes, they had to be available 24 hours a day via e-mails and on-line. They also learned that they had to start from the mentees’ situation and viewpoint. Every difficult situation is unique, and discussions about various solutions are important. Mentors also found situations related to new teachers’ personalities or behavioural styles to be challenging.

*It was difficult to maintain the relationship in such a way that you could find the tools that would suit a given mentee.* (Mentor9)

*S sometimes, it is difficult if the issue is a mentee’s personality or style. Often, he or she cannot see this, though it may influence a child.* (Mentor 5)

*When there was a difficult group or student... helping to find out what kinds of solutions there could be was challenging.* (Mentor3)
Mentors described that facing mentees’ crises was emotionally burdening. They emphasised they needed support as mentors and opportunities to share these experiences.

Developing trusting relationships

Some mentors felt they had a great deal of mutual interaction in their relationships with their mentees. It was more like a peer relationship, although the mentor’s role was to provide encouraging feedback. Some mentors wanted to keep the relationship very work-related. However, the most important aspect of the relationship was confidentiality.

Well, with my mentee, we had a very easy collegial relationship and, in fact, a very positive relationship. There were no problems; it was just fine. She was always happy to have encouragement. (Mentor6)

We had a very work-related relationship. We did not share any other issues... We spoke only about work-related issues and did so confidentially. (Mentor2)

The confidential relationship also included the mentor acting as a supporter of the new teacher, and no evaluation or other mentee-related information was given to the principal or other teachers.

Accelerating teacher development:

Encouragement and positive feedback were the most important ways to support mentee development. Mentors also learned that their task is not to set objectives for the mentee. That is the mentee’s own duty and process. Mentors can only be supporters and facilitators.

...and I certainly give a lot of positive feedback. I always did so when it went fine and a mentee succeeded – just a normal interaction – but I always aimed to avoid criticising and being a know-it-all. (Mentor5)

We decided that she (a mentee) would choose where her professional development would start and the target we would aim at. (Mentor7)

Some mentors also spoke about networks they had recommended that mentees use to find new tools and inspiration.

Learning Leadership

Mentors became aware of how much experience and competence they had with teaching and school life. When mentoring, they also began to understand that they were leaders.
A hero leader – that has fallen off. As a mentor, you must have a much lower profile and use your own know-how and your attitudes as a background. I think that my thoughts about leadership have changed, particularly because of this mentor training. (Mentor7)

If you compare being a mentor to a more traditional boss position, the major difference is that you do not say how to do something. You merely say that the mentee will see that it is a process. Thus, interaction is fairly important in this role. (Mentor6)

We can conclude that becoming a mentor is a long process. Even though all mentors in the pilot group had lengthy teaching experience, the process of creating a new professional identity took time. We discovered that mentor training is needed for conceptual change and finding new and relevant ways to support the professional development of mentees.

The mentors’ biggest problem was how to find time for mentoring and visiting new teachers’ classrooms. So far, there is no official system in Finland and all mentoring practices are designed on a case-by-case basis. The leadership role required mentors to build new concepts. Leadership is based on interaction and support, not giving direct answers or commands.

7. Lessons learned

In trying to find new solutions in terms of organising support for new teachers, there have been pilot projects regarding mentoring for new teachers in Finland. One has focused on how to ensure the professional community supports all teachers’ work and uses group mentoring to facilitate new teachers’ development (Jokinen et al. 2008). The pilot described in this chapter, the latest project, aimed to create a programme to support new teachers through the use of a senior colleague as a personal mentor (Niemi and Siljander 2013).

The first training cycle of mentors was conducted after the special group of 13 teachers was organised in 2013–2014. A group of 22 experienced teachers participated in the mentoring course. The training was organised according to the handbook’s principles. All teachers had mentees, and they started to adopt new identities as mentors. The feedback from mentors and mentees was excellent. Both mentors and mentees also expressed their delight because they had learned so much from one another. Both groups also had a unanimous message: Induction and support for new teachers are greatly needed.

Even though the programme was successful, we still have concerns about the future.

Integration with the education system
Projects and pilots are important for opening up new mentoring scenarios and creating new knowledge for the sake of providing new teachers with support. Yet, projects cannot solve the real problem in a larger sense. Induction requires national and local structures. In the Finnish case, induction should be negotiated and accepted nationally
by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish National Board of Education, municipal authorities, the Teacher Trade Union and universities’ teacher education departments. There is an urgent need to integrate the induction of new teachers into the structure of the education system.

**School leaders’ support**

The pilots strongly confirm the NTC’s view that principals’ support is a key factor. Mentors do not work for principals, but school leaders play an important role in organising mentoring at a local level. Each new teacher should have an induction plan in which mentoring plays an essential role. Mentors could also be a huge resource for principals and school communities in school development.

**Time and space for mentors and mentees**

Mentors should have an agreement to serve as facilitators for new teachers. The basic requirement is that they have training for that job. They also need a contract that defines their rights and responsibilities, as well as a salary and rewards due to mentoring, irrespective of whether they are full-time or part-time mentors. Further, mentees need an agreement that allows them to participate in an induction programme and define how it is integrated into their work. Without time allocation and practical arrangements, induction is not sustainable. Teachers’ and mentors’ professional development requires continuity, and this should be taken into account when organising induction.

**Co-ordination between pre-service, induction and in-service training**

In the Finnish education system, teachers are educated in universities’ teacher education departments. Universities also have further education centres for graduated teachers. Co-ordination between pre-service, induction and in-service training is necessary to provide relevant support for new teachers.

**Listen to new teachers’ needs**

In induction and mentor training, we must know what the national objectives for teachers’ work and school outcomes are. We must also know which aspects of education teachers need help with. In addition to these system-level issues, mentors must see that every new teacher is unique and must be met individually.

**The focus on student learning**

Induction is provided to new teachers, but the ultimate aim is for students to be exposed to high-quality teaching. Induction is not a separate part of the education system. It targets the provision of high-quality education to all students. Competent mentors can improve teacher performance and well-being, which increases student well-being and learning outcomes.

Every country has its own educational objectives and challenges. Education in Finland has enjoyed a strong international reputation because of the high learning outcomes among 15-year-old students in terms of PISA measurements.
The weakest link in Finnish teacher education is induction, which is practically missing. New teachers face so many complicated school conditions and demands in the Finnish education system that, in spite of their high-quality pre-service education, they need support when starting their teaching careers.

References


OECD. (2010). PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do: Student


