



## Key focus areas and use of tools in mentoring conversations during internship in initial teacher education



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### HIGHLIGHTS

- We examine and compare mentoring conversations in two conditions.
- Key focus areas in mentoring conversations differ between the two conditions.
- Presence and use of tools differ.
- The importance of the Lesson Study booklet as the primary tool in the intervention.
- Extended collaboration between university lecturers and mentor teachers.

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### ABSTRACT

Internship is assumed to have an impact on student teachers' learning. In this paper, mentoring conversations during internship in two different conditions are analysed through 'thin descriptions'. Comparisons between a Business-As-Usual condition and a Lesson Study approach condition show differences between focus areas and tools present. These differences are discussed with a point of departure in activity theory where mediating tools is a central concept, arguing that teacher education institutions and mentor teachers need to collaborate in developing useful tools stimulating student teachers to make enquiries into the core issues of teaching.

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### 1. Introduction

The quality of teacher education receives great attention throughout the world. A main challenge is how teacher education in the 21st century can support becoming teachers so they are able to handle the complexities of teaching and create positive learning environments for diverse children (Ball, 2013; Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012; OECD, 2011). The notion of reform minded teaching presupposes that teachers no longer can teach the way they themselves were taught, and expects teachers to be active participants in continuous school reforms. An international trend is

to stimulate teachers to be researchers in their own schools and classrooms. To gather, interpret and use data about pupils' learning continually will support teachers in rethinking and improving their practice (Cochran-Smith & Power, 2010; Munthe & Rogne, 2015; Wang & Odell 2002). Powerful teacher education programmes are described both by coherence and extensive periods of field experience (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2007; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). A central issue for teacher education is to confront how to foster learning about and from practice *in practice*, Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) claim and argue that clinical experiences should be carefully mentored. This article addresses mentoring during internship in initial teacher education and how mentor teachers and university lecturers collaborate to develop and use Lesson Study as a practical intervention to focus student teachers on the complexity of teaching.

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### 1.1. Internship – approaches to learning teaching

Internship is an important part of most teacher education programmes and is assumed to contribute to student teachers' professional learning. How internship in teacher education is organised vary between countries, contexts and systems (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010). Though differences between organisation and duration, a common theme across contexts is that student teachers tend to consider their field experiences as crucial when learning teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Hobson, 2002; Ottesen, 2007; Patrick, 2013; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001).

Studies of internship have pointed to student teachers rather quickly given the responsibility for teaching whole sessions (Edwards & Protheroe, 2003; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Ohnstad & Munthe, 2010) without the involvement of teacher mentors in planning or other kinds of preparation that is usually regarded as necessary for quality teaching. Research on novice teachers has described them as preoccupied with surviving and delivering their lesson plans, in contrast to attention towards the learning of their pupils (for instance Fuller, 1969; Maynard & Furlong, 1995; Richardson & Placier, 2001). A study on interns taking part in a teacher educational programme in the U.S. (Conway & Clark, 2003) found that both outward and inward oriented focus could be observed in interns' development. The outward oriented concerns related to pupils' learning and subject matter knowledge, while the inward oriented concerns included preoccupation with survival and self-reflection. In line with Darling-Hammond (2010), these authors suggest that teacher education programmes can make a difference in prospective teachers' professional development.

What students learn during internship and how they learn is debated. Already Dewey (1904/1965) made a distinction between apprenticeships approaches where student teachers are socialised into existing beliefs and performance patterns and to more critical or enquiry based approaches where transformation and improvement is the main concern. Zeichner and Teitelbaum (1982) argues in favour of an enquiry-oriented approach to field-practice in teacher education as opposed to the 'historically dominant apprenticeship nature of student teaching' (p.112). This is also supported by Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) who state that the role of enquiry is critical when the goal of teacher education is a lifelong ability to learn *from* teaching, not just learning *for* teaching. Learning from teaching implies that enquiry ought to be regarded as an integral part of the activity of teaching, and classrooms and schools should therefore be treated as research sites. Patrick (2013) claims that the apprenticeship model of professional experience still dominates teacher education. A shift from apprenticeship models to collaborative partnerships, both in the relationships between schools and universities and in the relationships between mentors and pre-service teachers is further argued for. Teacher education programmes need to devote more attention to developing partnership with schools and to help teachers become better equipped to mentor pre-service student teachers engaging them in enquiry and critical analysis necessary for practice centered professional learning (Bradbury & Koballa, 2007, 2008; Caroll, 2005).

### 1.2. Mentoring

Mentoring is described as 'the mediation of professional learning', where mentors constantly engage in mediation between persons and content in value-laden contexts of practice (Orland-Barak, 2014). However, in the specific context of teacher education clarity about what mentoring is, how it occurs or who mentors are is scarce. Most definitions suggest a hierarchical relationship in which the mentor is more experienced than the mentee, or that the

mentor has or can provide knowledge and skills that the mentee wants or needs (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010).

The literature frequently addresses the role and function of the mentor as significant for quality mentoring. Little (1990) distinguishes between mentoring as social support that puts newcomers at ease, and professional support that advances knowledge and practice. Feiman-Nemser and Parker (1993) further identify mentors as local guides, mentor as educational companions and mentor as agents of change. Their study describes mentor teachers functioning both as local guides and educational companions, while none of the mentor teachers talk about themselves as agents of cultural change. Mentors as local guides, assimilating student teachers and novices into existing practices are also identified as dominating mentor roles in more recent studies (Patrick, 2013; Wang, 2001; Wang & Odell, 2002). Similarly Orland-Barak (2014) points to the matriarchal and patriarchal functioning of mentoring. The matriarchal function is about personal caring, emotional support and nurturing, while the patriarchal function is reflected in roles such as guiding, instructing and challenging the novice.

Wang and Odell (2002) connect the different functions of teacher mentoring to learning perspectives and summarise these as a) the humanistic, b) the situated apprenticeship, and c) the critical constructive perspective. The humanistic perspective emphasises the importance of emotional support in socialising novices into the teaching profession. A situated apprentice perspective emphasises mentor teachers as important sources of technical support for novice teachers, seeing the mentors as experts with strong practical knowledge of teaching. The critical constructivist perspective argues that a mentor-novice relationship should be directed towards critiquing existing knowledge and practices. The prevailing image of mentoring aligns with humanistic or situated apprentice assumptions. Mentor teachers should engage novices in examining their beliefs about teaching and learning to teach and to challenge them to construct new images of practice. Even though the critical perspective aligns with the goals of transforming teaching, this perspective fails to recognise principles of quality teaching and pays little attention to the principles and assumptions underlying different kinds of teaching practice (Wang & Odell, 2002). Systematic enquiry can only have a limited role in ITE, Furlong (2000) argues, as student teachers in the earliest stages of their professional development have neither the time nor the breadth of experience to explore their own teaching. Still, he argues in favour of enquiry-based approaches, but underlines the impact of contribution from teacher mentors and tutors from the universities in the processes.

#### 1.2.1. Content in mentoring conversations

Mentoring conversations is a special kind of professional conversation regarded as a core activity in knowledge construction (Orland-Barak & Hasin, 2010). Dominating topics in mentoring conversations can be indications of what kind of knowledge that is seen as important and relevant for student teachers when learning teaching during internship. Teaching strategies, instructional and organisational competence is identified as dominating topics (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Edwards & Protheroe, 2003; Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1993; Hawkey, 1998; Ottesen, 2007; Sundli, 2007). A preoccupation with immediate issues of practical performance rather than enquiry into or expansion of a rationale for that performance is found to be the main focus among mentor teachers (Timperley, 2001; Wang & Odell, 2002). Hennissen, Crasborn, Brouwer, Korthagen, and Bergen (2008) find that topics in mentoring dialogues mainly fall into three categories, 'instructions and organisation', 'the pupils and the class' and 'subject matter'. An additional category is described as 'miscellaneous', covering topics

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