



Mentoring of new teachers as a contested practice: Supervision, support and collaborative self-development



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Mentoring of new teachers is studied in terms of practice architectures.
- Three archetypes of mentoring are identified.
- Supervision: assisting new teachers to pass through probation.
- Support: traditional mentoring where a more experienced teacher assists a mentee.
- Collaborative self-development: professional growth through collegial mentoring.

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ABSTRACT

This article examines contested practices of mentoring of newly qualified teachers within and between Australia (New South Wales), Finland and Sweden. Drawing on empirical evidence from a variety of studies, we demonstrate three archetypes of mentoring: supervision, support and collaborative self-development. Using the theory of practice architectures, we show that (1) these three forms of mentoring represent three different projects: (a) assisting new teachers to pass through probation, (b) traditional mentoring as support, and (c) peer-group mentoring; and (2) these different projects involve and imply quite different practice architectures in the form of different material-economic, social-political and cultural-discursive arrangements.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Mentoring as a contested practice

The induction of new teachers in and across workplaces is a global challenge. In the last two decades, knowledge about early career teachers' difficulties in the transition to teaching has increased as empirical research has revealed the importance of

workplace mentoring as a supportive strategy for beginning a new job (e.g., Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Howe, 2006; Ulvik, Smith, & Helleve, 2009; Wang, Odell, & Schuille, 2008). Mentoring, whether it occurs formally or informally, is commonly practiced to assist early career teachers to situate themselves within the school community and the demands of their new position in the induction phase of the teaching career. However, there are different understandings about what mentoring is. Colley (2003, p.13) claimed that mentoring is 'a practice which is ill-defined, poorly conceptualized and weakly theorized'.

In our view, this confusion is not so much about a lack of theories but rather about a plurality of theories. Dominguez and Hager (2013) have identified three primary theoretical frameworks within

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mentoring research: developmental, learning and, social. Wang and Odell (2007) found 16 types of mentor–novice relationships which they categorized, using critical constructivist and social cultural perspectives on learning, into three main conceptions of mentoring: humanistic, situated apprenticeship, and critical constructivist perspectives. Mentoring has also been described, for example, in psychological terms (e.g. American Psychological Association, 2014), within the traditions of social psychology (e.g. Hu, Thomas, & Lance, 2008), from the theoretical views of business management (e.g. Higgins & Kram, 2001) or human resource development (e.g. D'Abate, Eddy & Tannenbaum, 2003), and from the perspective of social cognitive career theory (Yang, Hu, Baranik, & Lin, 2013).

In short, 'mentoring' is a contested concept. The term is used differently in different settings and for different purposes (Sundli, 2007; Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011). Understood as a social practice, mentoring is a specific kind of cooperative human activity in which characteristic actions and activities (doings) are comprehensible in terms of relevant ideas in characteristic discourses (sayings), and in which the people and objects involved are distributed in characteristic relationships (relatings). As evidence of the contestation over mentoring, we will show that mentoring is understood and conceptualized in different ways (sayings), enacted in different ways (doings), and that people relate to one another differently (relatings) in different forms of mentoring. In this article, we explore these differences, and the contestation over mentoring, by conceptualizing mentoring as a specific kind of social practice in terms of a theory of practice architectures (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008; Kemmis & Heikkinen, 2012; Kemmis, Wilkinson, Edward-Groves, Hardy, Grootenboer & Bristol, 2014; following Schatzki, 2010, 2012). By 'practice architectures' we mean the specific cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements found in or brought to a site that enable and constrain a practice: arrangements that make the practice possible.

According to this theory, practices of mentoring are enabled and constrained by particular practice architectures that, on the one hand, have much in common internationally, but, on the other hand, are bundled with other national or local practices that sometimes make mentoring practices in different countries rather different from each other. The theory of practice architectures thus steers our analyses toward the identification of local conditions that foster the particular kinds of mentoring practices that are in the ascendant in a given society at some particular historical moment.

Our view of mentoring is based on our longstanding mentoring research in three countries: Australia (in the state of New South Wales), Finland and Sweden. Based on a meta-analysis of our own and others' previous research, and of national (or state) policy documents, we will describe and analyze the contestation over practices of mentoring within and between these countries. The practices of mentoring in these countries share similarities and differences that are of broad international interest. Some of the differences are the consequence of varying attrition levels of new teachers in the countries concerned, and the ways various educational 'crises' are refracted through cultural lenses and political agendas specific to each country.

It is interesting that the neighboring Nordic countries of Finland and Sweden, though sharing some similar cultural issues and influences, have reached quite different solutions about how to improve new teachers' professional learning. In Finland, a nationwide program has been implemented, through which new teachers experience mentoring in peer groups where dialogue is emphasized and without formal assessment. In Sweden, mentoring has largely followed the classical arrangement of 'mentoring as support' in which individual mentors work with individual mentees. This is based on a political agreement from 1995 between teachers'

unions and municipal authorities stating that teachers have 'a right' to mentoring. However, this view was recently challenged by the implementation of a Swedish teacher registration reform that proposed to retain some elements of mentoring as support, while also imposing the evaluation of new teachers' competence against established teaching standards. This multiplicity, or conflict, of purposes is evident in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW), in which a long-standing program of mentoring as support of new teachers has persisted alongside new arrangements for probation and registration of new teachers. The new arrangements include 'mentoring' of new teachers by supervisors, who at the same time assess the performance of the new teachers against mandated professional standards. Within and across these three countries, then, we see tensions and contestation between different versions of mentoring.

The aim of this article is to demonstrate how three different archetypes of mentoring persist and contest in literature and in mentoring practice within and between nations. We will show, first, that there are contested purposes between (a) assisting newly qualified teachers to pass through the formal juridical requirements for probation, which we describe as mentoring as supervision, and/or (b) supporting new teachers in the development of their professional practices by more experienced teachers, which we describe as mentoring as support, and/or (c) assisting new teachers collectively to develop their professional identities, which we describe as mentoring as collaborative self-development. As already shown, these can be identified in different policies regarding mentoring in Australia (NSW), Sweden and Finland. Second, we will show that these contested practices of mentoring are made possible and held in place by different kinds of practice architectures. We will show that

- the meanings of 'mentoring' are contested, because mentoring is interpreted and justified in different kinds of discourses (cultural-discursive arrangements);
- the material arrangements for mentoring are contested, because mentoring is enacted in different kinds of activities and places (material-economic arrangements); and
- the social relations of mentoring are contested, because mentoring is organized in different kinds of arrays of roles and relationships between the people involved (social political arrangements).

Finally, as we shall also see, these different practices of mentoring are likely to produce very different kinds of dispositions in mentees, that is, different orientations towards themselves and others, and towards their professional work, grounded in different kinds of knowledge, capabilities and values.

1.2. *Understanding mentoring through the theory of practice architectures*

Mentoring of new teachers is a social practice. We define a practice as a form of socially established cooperative human activity that involves characteristic forms of understanding (sayings), modes of action (doings), and ways in which people relate to one another and the world (relatings), that 'hang together' in a distinctive project. The project of a practice is what people say when they sincerely answer the question 'What are you doing?' while they are engaged in the practice. The project of a practice encompasses (a) the intention (aim) that motivates the practice, (b) the actions (sayings, doings and relatings) undertaken in the conduct of the practice, and (c) the ends the actor aims to achieve through the practice (although it might turn out that these ends are not attained). Practices exist on many scales, with bigger,

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