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Mentors in Initial Teacher Education - Initiatives for Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

The background to the study is increased demands for skills in mentoring as one possibility to increase quality in ITE. A way to achieve the goal is professional development for mentors, but few studies are carried out to study such courses. As a case study, a formal course for mentors offered at university is presented and critically discussed. The central content in the course was theories about learning and mentoring and formulating an individual practical professional theory (PPT). The content aligns well with earlier research about mentoring and the mentors gave mainly positive comments about the content of the course and the form. What they questioned was the academic level approach when lectures were not relevant and academic writing became a problematic issue. In addition, the pre-requisites for participating in the course varied too much. A proposition is that design of course for mentors needs to have clarity about its aims, form and pre-requisites for participants, not to create expectations among stakeholders, which cannot be fulfilled.

Keywords: Course Design, Initial Teacher Education, Mentors, Professional Development.
JEL code: I24, J24, J44.

1. Introduction

The background to the study is increased demands for skills in mentoring as one possibility to increase quality in ITE. According to Hudson, Spooner-Lane and Murray (2013) there is a need to develop quality assurance for mentoring. One activity to support the development of quality is to offer formal courses for mentors. To achieve such formal education, there is a need to have an institutional "architecture" for training different roles a mentor can have, such as in Initial Teacher Education or in Further Education (Cunningham, 2007). In addition, mentors need to be informed about new technology which can be used during mentoring, such as on-line mentoring (da Graca, Reali and Tancredi, 2015).

The importance of mentoring in Initial Teacher Education in schools is described and argued for from different perspectives. One perspective is the need for practical training in relation to the (often) theoretical learning in university (Lunenberg, 2002). Another perspective is that mentors are a group who

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can be agents in development work (Feiman-Nemser, 1998; Hudson, 2010). With school as a basis and a relation to a university, mentors are both teachers who can enact development at schools and teacher educators who can enact development to support future in-service teachers. Of importance is that teacher educators at school (mentors) and teacher educators at university (supervisors) have a dialogue to get a similar perception of development, this dialogue often practiced while mentoring is carried out (Feiman-Nemser, 1998). In addition, as Jones and Brown (2011) and Ponte and Twomey (2014) argue, mentoring can be a rewarding relation for both all parts included, based on mutual exchange of experiences. To develop the skills needed for mentoring formal education have been found useful (Giebelhaus and Bowman, 2002).

A search for earlier studies about mentoring shows an extensive body of knowledge on different aspects on mentoring, such as relation between mentor and mentee, but few descriptions concerning formal or informal professional development of mentors in their work (Giebelhaus and Bowman, 2002; Langdon, 2014). To increase our knowledge about how mentors get professional development one formal course for mentors is presented and critically discussed. Several data collection are carried out, such as a document study, dialogue and interviews with contact persons for practice in Initial Teacher Education, hereafter ITE, and mentors. The findings show that the course have changed approach to become more academic. The mentors do not always approve of this change; instead, they prefer exchange of experiences and writing a paper about individual practical professional theory. The findings contribute to our understanding of professional development for mentors, especially the design of a mentor course.

The article continues with a definition of the concept mentor and earlier studies. After that, three data collections and findings are presented. The paper ends with a discussion and conclusion.

2. What is a mentor?

There are several concepts used for presenting teachers at practice schools working with student teachers. According to Wyre, Gaudet and McNeese (2016) (with reference to Crisp & Cruz, 2009) there are over 50 definitions of mentoring, but the aim of mentoring, preparing individual persons for roles and responsibilities, continues. Some authors prefer to call them mentors (Lunenberg, 2002; Hudson, 2010; Hudson et al, 2013; Hudson & Hudson, 2018) which, according to Hudson et al. (2013; Hudson & Hudson, 2018) is more accurate than supervisor as mentoring includes a stronger emphasis on relational aspects and includes a responsibility to build teaching capacity. Mentoring, in this study, is defined as a structured arrangement where the student teachers (mentee) meets an experienced teacher (mentor) in school during three practicum courses spaced over several years within a university based ITE. In Sweden, the practicum courses during ITE comprise in total 30 ECTS, that is, one semester. In addition, the student teachers can come and carry out a shorter data collections during subject courses at the practicum school.

3. Demand for skills but few critically discussed courses

The earlier literature is studied and presented from two perspectives. The first concerns skills needed as a mentor, the second concerns design of professional development courses for mentors.

The mentor role is more or less framed by the mentor being more experienced and that the mentee is either a person to become a teacher, or new as a teacher. How the relation is constructed varies. Feiman-Nemser (1998) underlines that it is not self-evident that teachers in a mentor role perceive themselves as school-based teacher educators. They can perceive that if there is any teaching, the teaching should be carried out by the university-based teachers (supervisors). Which perspective is used, both mentors and supervisors are teacher educators, or not, is also influencing how mentoring is perceived and organized. It can be perceived as a short intervention, a kind or problem-solving, supporting entrance to teaching or as an educative process. As Feiman-Nemser (ibid) argues, university-based teachers, school-based teachers and novices should be engaged in a joint inquiry. This inquiry is not necessarily limited to professional conversations; it can also include team-teaching and social activities. To further strengthen the mentors, meetings need to be organized where they can exchange experience. Most successful mentors belong to a group where experiences can be discussed. These groups also include university-based teacher educators. The mentors have to have a vision of good

teaching, but also how people learn to teach and that learning opportunities has to be offered differently during a process. This includes skills concerning the tools of mentoring – observation, co-planning co-teaching, joint inquiry, critical conversation and reflecting. This endeavor is a long-term effort to continue learning. In summary, a change from problem-solving for the mentee to an educative process aiming at continuous learning by inquiries, from telling the mentee to team-teaching and engaging in social activities, from mentee learning to learning process for both mentee and mentor, from mentee-mentor to mentee- school-based mentor-university-based mentor and finally perceiving mentors as teacher educators.

With reference to earlier research Lunenberg (2002) argues that teacher educators are ´good teachers´ but with additional competences. The teacher educators have to have the insight that student teachers are adult learners, they must also be aware of the need to bridging an eventual gap between theories and practices, behave like role models and explain their own didactical approaches and finally be able to reflect on two levels, their own teacher competence but also develop the student teacher´s reflection competence.

From earlier literature, Zachary (2011) has summarized competences for mentors, such as brokering relationship, facilitating, goal setting, guiding, listening, managing conflict, problem solving, providing feedback, reflecting, and valuing difference. Wyre et al. (2016) underlines that the mentor should feel comfortable in using the competences. Jones and Brown (2011) underline the necessity of using a relational model. Mentoring can be perceived as a closed relationship between an older, more experienced person, aiming at career development for the mentee, a rather hierarchical situation. The outcome is mainly directed towards the mentee. The authors argue for reciprocal relations where the mentor and the mentee make decision together and as much as possible perceive the exchange as mutual. The outcome is then directed to both mentor and mentee, both should benefit. In addition, Jones and Brown (ibid) bring in context in the reciprocal relation. Mentoring is often described as a dyadic relation, and the individual or organizational context is not taken into consideration, even though individual and organizational context is affecting the mentoring. Their (ibid) conclusion is that mentoring cannot be perceived as one intervention leading to a certain outcome. Instead mentoring is situated in a larger system, which in turn got several layers and subsystems, not linear, not stable. This is not to suggest "chaos", but to acknowledge that mentoring is about educating and acculturate a mentee into a system, an organizational culture. When context (as in a system model) is taken into consideration, the mentoring process and outcome will contribute to our understanding of mentoring.

Artis (2013) argue that there is a need to prepare both mentors and mentees in a formal way to achieve successful mentoring. This is underlined as mentoring is carried out during a limited time, as one occasional mentoring process either for career, or as in ITE, at a limited time during several years. The goals in mentoring for career could be set by the student, but in ITE there are goals in the curriculum. This does not limit the goal setting – instead the mentor and the mentee can co-construct additional, shorter goals due to the context. The important issue, according to Artis (ibid), is to empower the mentee by both thinking of their own long term development and being an agent in goal setting and follow up on the goals. Then the mentee becomes active and responsible for the mentoring. This creates a goal-driven relationship. Such a relationship could change mentoring from just giving advice and instead create a joint action plan to achieve the goals.

Some researchers discuss knowledge, competence as well as course design. When Lunenberg (2002) studied design of a curriculum for teacher educators, the teacher educators could be working in teacher education institutes as well as in schools. When constructing a course curriculum the plan was to support five characteristics in the course curriculum based on results from earlier studies. The content should stimulate teacher educators to make inquiries into own teaching; that they should participate in a discourse community; combine learning outside and support learning inside the classroom; to reflect, organize feedback; to document their own learning process and finally, to acknowledge that inspiration is a base for learning. After also considering different theories of learning, additional choices were made for the educational approach. During the course, primary sources and meaningful context were used for stimulation, to deepen theoretical knowledge and skills the teacher educators were stimulated to change perspectives and work with problem solving. In addition, assessment should be part of the course. The teacher educators set goals and assessed to what extent they have reached the goals (authentic assessment).

The educational approach was designed as three learning tracks and corresponding activities (Lunenberg, 2002) during two years (600 hours). One track was carried out in the teacher education institutes of the participants, such as inquiry in one´s own learning and teaching, reflection, feedback, using meaningful sources and authentic assessment. During this track, the teacher educators wrote a personal development plan with goals, used reflection and put into a portfolio and used authentic assessment. A coach followed this track. A second track was carried out in a formal course, outside their own institute, where the teacher educators were included in a discourse community where they could be stimulated to discuss perspectives and problem solving. Experienced teacher educators led work concerning communication, planning, reflection and assessment. The teacher educators also worked with collegial consultation in small groups with different themes (students with different backgrounds, co-operation between teacher educators and coaches in schools, coaching students and teamwork with colleagues). The work was presented in reflection reports. The third track was a virtual track for inspiration and ICT was used during discussions. During this track, the teacher educators compared their visions and the teacher education institute´s visions. The teacher educators worked in groups and the group chooses how to report the work (Lunenberg, 2002).

A conclusion Hudson (2010) draws from a study of perception of mentoring, is that there is a need for formal requirements for mentors and that competence development both is asked for and needed. According to Hudson et al. (2013), one of the five factors in Hudson's mentoring model (Hudson, 2010) is of special interest for mentoring, that is, pedagogical knowledge. Pedagogical knowledge can be defined as assisting, guiding and discussing and providing in areas as planning, timetabling, preparation, teaching strategies, content knowledge, problem solving, classroom management, questioning techniques, implementation of lesson, assessment and viewpoints about effective teaching. In a study by Hudson et al. (2013), interviewed mentees and mentors who had accomplished a mentor program focusing on relationship, school culture and infrastructure and the five factors for mentoring which are personal attributes, system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, modelling and feedback, problem solving and leadership, and finally, action research. During the course, the mentor´s commented for example that they were reminded that their everyday experience was new for the mentees. Both mentors and mentees were satisfied with the mentoring. The mentees commented for example that in earlier field experiences they had not learnt so much about pedagogical knowledge. The result also showed that of the pedagogical knowledge practices the mentors focused most on planning, preparation for teaching and developing classroom management strategies. What was less discussed were the mentor´s personal teaching philosophies and theories of learning. In a later study, Hudson and Hudson (2018) found that tensions appearing could be summarized as personal, pedagogical and professional. Sometimes personalities do not match, the mentees knowledge base is not sufficient or the mentee and the school code do not match. Most of the time the mentors could solve the situation with communication and empathy. If these experiences are documented they could be useful for others experiencing similar situations.

However, as Langdon (2014) argue, it is easier to learn new content, harder to enact the new knowledge in practice. Evan though mentors could be engaged and willing to learning, it could be troublesome to change perspective, and even harder to changes one´s practice. During a two-year study Langdon (2017) noticed that mentors with help of action research as intervention did transform their perception of the mentor role, from teacher to mentor, but to a varied degree. Langdon found both similarities and differences in the mentor´s approach. Two of them were interested in participating in the mentor intervention with action research, but they did not want to engage in a formal course at the university. One due to lack of confidence whether to succeed in the course, the other did not find that an additional qualification was motivated in her present career. One mentor was more inclined to continue a "problem-solving" attitude and keep the relation between mentor and mentee in focus, but the other could include own learning in the relation and had a more inquiry-based approach. One reason for this varying degree of transformation during learning, Langdon found, was the context for the mentors. That is, the pre-requisites varied, where one of the mentors had a visible and structured support at the school by the principal with managerial status and hours for the intervention and the other had support, but rather on a policy level.

As a summary of earlier studies, there are certain skills that earlier studies are highlighting such as ´good teachers´ but with additional competences, insight that student teachers are adult learners,

awareness of bridging an eventual gap between theories and practices, behave like role models and explain their own didactical approaches and finally be able to reflect on two levels, their own teacher competence but also develop the student teacher´s reflection competence (Lunenberg, 2002). In addition, some factors are essential, such as personal attributes, system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, role modelling and feedback (Hudson, 2010). Zachary (2011) has summarized competences such as brokering relationship, facilitating, goal setting, guiding, listening, managing conflict, problem solving, providing feedback, reflecting, and valuing difference. In addition, the mentors have to have insight about context on different levels, such as the actual ITE and the everyday life of the student teachers (Jones and Brown, 2011).

Content in courses design to developing mentors skills are more or less based on the skills mentioned above. Experiences from courses show that relational skills are important (Wyre et al. 2016). Both mentor and mentee readiness is needed; good intentions are not enough (Donnely and McSweeny, 2011). In addition, content of professional development program for mentors has to be adapted to the actual ITE (Wyre et al. 2016).

Based on earlier studies two questions were formulated in the beginning. The first concerns content and form for the offered courses at the selected university. The second concerned how the participants perceived the courses.

4. Data collection

The chosen university in mid Sweden has offered mentor courses since 2001 and up to date about 600 mentors have participated. In the end of 2016, it is estimated that there will be about additional 300 mentors who have participated in a mentor course. One reason for the increased amount of mentors with mentor course is a change in how practicum is organized. During 2014, the chosen university decided to participate in a test of new organization of practicum, with additional funding from national level. The test included a reduced number of practicum schools, increased amount of student teachers at each school, mentor teams with a leader based on that each practice school should have six mentors. In addition, all mentors should participate in a mentor course offered at university level. The recruitment of mentors at schools was based on individual skills (Nasser Abu Alhija and Fresko, 2014), subject knowledge and interest. The mentors come from different school forms like preschool, compulsory school and upper secondary school and participate in same groups. The organizers of K-12 selected preschools and schools where staff had relevant subject area and where there should be possible to mobilize a group of mentors, as mentioned, at least six. The ST participate in an integrated ITE during three to five years, depending on future school form. There are also a few ST participating in ITE where they study subjects first, and add one year of practical pedagogy.

The data collection consists of three parts. The first data collection concerns the course plans for the mentor courses, *Teachers and counseling*. The presentation of the courses is based on information on a website and the course plans from the chosen university. The first course plan Teachers and counseling SPE 129 and was used before autumn 2012 (Mälardalen university, 2007). The second course plan is *Teachers and counseling*, PEA 069 was designed spring 2012 and is still used (Mälardalen University, 2012).

The second data collection concerns comments from participants in the course. One group of answers emanates from general questions formulated from central administration and are sent from central level via Netigate (earlier) SUNET (since 2015) web, in the end of the course. The participants had some days to answer, and the answers are archived in the Netigate/SUNET web. The researcher got access to these files. In addition, during 2011, 2012, questions were formulated by the course leader. The questions were sent by e-mail to the participants in the end of the course and they had a few days to answer. The answers are saved in an internal file for the course at the chosen university, which the researched got access to. That is, these evaluation data are secondary data not original for this study or for research in the first place (Carlström and Carlström Hagman, 2006). Nevertheless, ethical rules like de-identifying answers and using the data for the actual study are followed (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). Via Netigate and the personal questionnaire, there are fifteen answers out of 80 for SPE during 2011 and 2012. Via Netigate and Sunet, there are seven answers out of 39 for PEA during 2013. In total, there are twenty-two answers. Due to technical problems, the questionnaire was not sent from the central level all terms, as it should have been.

The third data collection comprises answers from a questionnaire sent by the researcher. The answers are from contact persons for practicum in preschools and schools in organizations for K-12 in partnership agreement. The questionnaire concerned the context for the participants in the course, what terms and conditions they had during the course. All participants were informed about the general ethical rules, such as voluntarily participation, the aim of the study and that individual answer should be de-identified (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). There are thirteen answers out of thirty-three possible. The contact persons who answered came from both public and private organizers. All school forms are represented, such as preschool, compulsory school and upper secondary school. Apart from written answers, oral comments were given during a group meeting with the practicum team and the contact persons, where the researcher presented this study.

All texts are read in their complete versions, as items. The first two questions, about the course and the perception of it, inspired the first reading. As it became clear from the evaluation answers that the prerequisites for participating in the course were important, this issue became a third question and an original data collection was carried out. The texts have been summarized based on the questions, a condensation of meaning (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2014). No observations were carried out during the courses.

The results from the first, second and third data collection has been presented to the practicum team at the chosen university and the contact persons from the organizers of K-12. The course leaders in the mentor course, the current PEA, are staff in the practicum team.

A limitation of the study is access, or even prevalence, of data for the second and third data collection. There were no problems with getting access to the course plans for the courses. However, due to the low response rate for questionnaire for the course SPE and PEA, it is not possible to say that the answers are representative for mentors in general, or the organizers of K-12. The centrally designed questions are not related to the course goals and that can affect the response rate from the courses. The response rate from the extra questionnaire sent to participants in SPE was not high either. A conclusion from the data collection is that the evaluation system for the courses has not functioned. The answers are for courses offered some years ago and it is likely that course development has been carried out. Nevertheless, the course design is the same. Lastly, the response rate regarding the questionnaire designed especially for this study is not high. Comments from the contact persons to the low response rate during a meeting are that it is a high turnover in the group of contact persons and newcomers do not know what to answer, others refer to the workload and an e-mail with questions is not given priority. As it is the response rate, which is low, additional questions sent by mail might not give better result. Instead, observations during the courses and questions directly during the course could be a better way.

5. Course plan

The course offered at the chosen university is a formal course, giving 7,5 ECTS credits. The estimated workload is four weeks of work, which is 160 h. The target group is teachers, school leaders and team of mentors who mentor or want to mentor teacher students during their practice in ITE. The participants need to have a teacher exam or equivalent. The course is free for students and the teaching language is Swedish. The course plan is designed according to 'Bologna style' with central content, learning goals and description of examination and how the learning process should proceed. The course is carried out part time studies during one year. During the one year process, there are meetings every 6th week with lectures and discussion. In addition local study groups are created to support group learning. Finally the participants write a paper presenting their individual practical professional theory (PPT) concerning mentoring.

The course plan presentation starts with the aim of the course, followed by content, learning goals and examination. In the end, there is a summary. SPE129 is further on abbreviated as SPE and PEA069 is abbreviated as PEA.

The aim of the course is to support the participants to develop their mentoring skills. Nevertheless, there are some differences how the aim is written. For SPE 2007-2012 'the students should get knowledge about theories behind different mentoring strategies and by this make informed decision of mentor strategy. Individual practical professional theory shall be documented and used as tool for analysis for different mentor strategies. In PEA 2012 – on going, the aim is shorter and more specific, 'To

develop strategies to stimulate and support the student teacher during practicum at practice preschool/school'.

During the course, the participant should achieve learning goals. In SPE they should account orally for theories of mentoring, orally and written identify and analyze own strategy for mentoring, orally and written describe own individual practical professional theory and reflect on how it affects own strategy for mentoring, independently document and account for own strategy for mentoring and account for knowledge about mentoring in an individual portfolio. The portfolio is no longer used in PEA and the learning goals are concentrated to that the participants should formulate and individual practical professional theory and analyze its base on theories about learning, account for knowledge about theories behind mentoring and formulate, analyze and assess the strategy for mentoring based on own individual practical professional theory. In PEA, the emphasis seems to be on writing and not, as in the earlier SPE, a blend between oral and written presentations. The content of the writing is focusing their individual practical professional theory in relation to mentoring.

The content of the course shows both similarities and differences. This is, of course, partly an effect of changes in the learning goals. The similarities are that for both SPE and PEA the content comprises practical professional theory, theories about mentoring and strategies about mentoring, professional dialogue and the role of the mentor and the mentor team during practice. What differs is that in SPE the content included mentoring as form and process, exercises under supervision and documentation in portfolio. This content was not passed on to PEA, but instead PEA includes theories about learning and scientific writing. Thereby the documentation via portfolio is not used anymore.

In the end, there was an examination where the participants could Pass or Fail. In SPE the participants should present the portfolio orally and written. This is all in accordance with the central content and the learning goals. This was changed and in PEA the participants should write a) a shorter paper about individual practical professional theory, and b) one shorter paper about mentor strategy and finally a paper with a reflective summary of a, b and use of compulsory literature. As in SPE, this is all in accordance with the central content and the learning goals.

In summary, in comparison with earlier research about mentor skills content like relation, communication, roles, learning and the issue about an individual – dyadic relation (Lunenberg, 2002; Jones and Brown, 2011; Wyre et al. 2016), the content for supporting skills seems to be addressed in the course. However, there seems to be an absence of a triad relation, mentor – student teacher- supervisor. This could be an effect of downplaying the issue of 'being in a system' (Jones and Brown, 2011), or their role in the ITE (Lunenberg, 2002) such as being a teacher educator (Feiman-Nemser, 1998). There is an emphasis on relation and communication in the course, less about pedagogical knowledge such as planning, timetabling, preparation, teaching strategies, content knowledge, problem solving, classroom management, questioning techniques, implementation of lesson, assessment and viewpoints about effective teaching (Hudson et al. 2013).

6. Mentor´s perception of the course

The presentation of mentor´s perception of the courses is divided into two parts. The first part presents the perceived contributions of the course and the second part comments on the process during the course.

6.1 Contributions of the course

The comments from SPE show that the participants have thought about their role as mentors, 'I have reflected about my role as a pedagogue, about our team work and all activities, I have also started to structure for the new teacher students, I look forward to meet them and I feel a responsibility concerning my role as a mentor'. Several comments also concern that the course have given opportunity to reflect, 'I have become more secure and more professional because of the reflection time, I can formulate my thoughts and my teaching'. There is also a feeling of being empowered, 'empowered in my role as mentor, have support to carry out also difficult dialogues, that it is important to allocate time for dialogue'. Even though most mentors in the courses are already active as mentors they can perceive that they get a better overview of ITE, they understand where practice is placed during ITE, 'I understand the context of practice now as we have studied where practice is placed within ITE'.

Just like in SPE the mentors participating in PEA, found that their role as mentors became more clear, 'developed my professional role, empowered me' or, 'became more clear how I should work as a mentor, how to ask questions and what kind of dialogue should be carried out'.

6.2 Process during the course

During the process, there are parts that the mentors find more or less relevant in SPE. The expectations of 'a lecture' are not always fulfilled. The content of a lecture can be perceived as not relevant, 'not relevant because not talked about the issues during the course, such as the literature', and too short, 'five minutes intro and then discussions in small groups is not lecture, the lectures should have been longer and more structured'. As the course is on academic level, there is an expectation in the course design for academic/scientific writing. The mentors have mixed feelings to academic/scientific writing, 'intro to scientific writing is not necessary, we know that', while another argue that, 'intro to scientific writing in a lecture must be more structured; some of us are not used to scientific writing'. The differences in a group concerning academic writing can even cause tension, 'became tense with lecture about scientific writing as some already know and some have not studied for a long time, what was the meaning with scientific writing'.

On the contrary, there were other parts in the design of SPE, which suited the mentors better. The design with exchange of experiences, time for discussion was appreciated, 'I have a lot of new sights, interesting to be able to sit and discuss without being interrupted' or, 'it has forced me to reflect on what I do as a teacher, and why, it has contributed a lot to my development, the group discussions have been appreciated, the knowledge I have is both useful for student teachers and for my pupils and for me a team leader – which I did not think about earlier', or 'I have more strategies to meet student teacher and give them better introduction to teaching, many interesting discussions and exchanges of experiences, knowledge about professional dialogue and the importance of for example body language'. Finally, the mentors had to write about their individual professional practice theory, which was appreciated, 'one major contributing was the importance of writing an individual professional practice theory, to write what and why I do whatever I do, also to consider earlier experience, what is it that affect my acts and my values'.

As in SPE mentors brought up the issue of 'a lecture' in PEA. But in this course the perceptions were more mixed with comments like, 'interesting', 'good to have a chance to ask questions', 'well done' or, 'good, made it easier to understand the literature', but also 'were no actual lectures as I perceived it, mostly individual work'. The expectation of scientific writing was also brought up, 'unclear and late directives need example of how the output could look like, hard with scientific writing when you have worked many years'.

As in SPE the form with discussions and reflection was appreciated in PEA, 'given opportunity to discuss own thoughts and knowledge together with colleagues from different school forms' or 'opportunity to formulate my own work, but complicated to formulate 'one' professional theory as student teachers/pupils have different needs'. The course could also cause a change of perspective, 'fantastic to experience the learning process for me and the others and feel that the material becomes your own, caused a difference in my perception regarding the students and the dialogue' and that learning is continuous, 'interesting to carry out assignments that 'will never be entirely ready', a new way of thinking'.

In summary, the course plans for both SPE and PEA seems to be relevant for the participants work, according to their comments. In comparison with earlier literature the content is relevant for developing mentor skills such at the relational aspect (Artis, 2013), reflection (Feiman-Nemser, 1998), learning theories and personal philosophies (Hudson, 2013). The form with discussions and reflections is also perceived as positive and the final exam, to write about own individual professional theory gives reason to reflect (Lunenberg, 2002). To combine the individual professional theory with mentoring strategy seems to function. The course is focusing on the individual mentor and the dyadic relation, not any relation to supervisor at university (Feiman-Nemser, 1998), but it has also contributed with needed knowledge about practice during ITE. A comment suggested that the process during the course can be developed by clear expectations during the course and the examination and clarify the importance of scientific writing. Some mentors from both SPE and PEA commented that the conditions for participation differed too much. The differences concerned access to substitute teacher, payment for literature,

payment for travel costs, amount of hours in duty for the course (between 40 and 80), whether the hours are specified for participation, study literature, documentation and travel time and finally whether the mentors have to pass during the course to benefit from the available hours and payments. To follow up these issues, a study was carried out concerning terms and conditions.

7. Contact person´s perceptions of terms and conditions

The presentation of the terms and conditions is based on the answers from the questionnaire to the contact person´s regarding recruitment, conditions and expectations of fulfilling the course.

The course has mentors as target group, but as it is a general course offered at the university, others can apply. Some mentors chose to apply on their own; others have discussions first with the school leader, the central contact person or the mentor team at the unit. If there is a selection, there are certain criteria such as teacher exam, teacher certificate in relevant subject, at least three years as a teacher and permanent employment. Other criteria could be that the mentor has showed interest and engagement concerning mentoring student teachers.

The partnership agreement between the chosen university and the organizers of K-12 stipulates that the mentors should have a mentor education. The partner university offers such a course. Comments from the contact persons showed the course was perceived as positive both for the organizers of K-12 and the individual mentor. To pass the course is a merit during discussions about salary. It is also considered as relevant further education, which in turn, enables both the individual mentor and the unit to receive student teachers. In a longer perspective it can also contribute to recruitment of new staff. At the same time, it is not enough to pass; the knowledge and skills have to show in work.

The earlier comments from participants in SPE and PEA showed that there are differences in the conditions for participants. The contact persons conformed this. For some mentors all literature is paid, as example up to 1 500 Skr (150 Euro), or the literature is bought to the unit. Travel cost is paid if the course is not offered in campus at the chosen university (which it usually is). In some cases, mentors have reduced duty when participating, for other there are no hours allocated at all. There is a comment that teachers have a certain amount of hours during the year in their duty for further education and this participation is included in that. For those who get reduced duty it could be three days or a substitute teacher working 80 h instead of the teacher. Sometime the hours are specified into reading, documentation and travel time.

To participate does not guarantee that the mentor pass the course. In some cases it was unclear whether the organizer or someone else follow up whether the course is completed. Some of the contact person had not followed up these issues, instead they answered that mostly the mentors did not have to pass to get the benefits. There are comments that the issue of completing the course has to be raised as some mentors can listen to lectures without having any ambition to finish the course.

In summary, the answers confirm that the terms and conditions for the participants differ between the participants in the mentor course. They differ for example in terms of recruitment, payment for literature, transport cost and payment in working hours. It also differs in what respect the course give merits to the participant, which can be one reason why some participants are not completing the course. The terms and conditions in this case concerns the relation between mentor, colleagues, the principal and the organizer of K-12. These relations and pre requisites have seldom been in focus in earlier literature. However, some information has been given, for example duration of the course, such as the two-year course during 600 hours presented by Lunenberg (2002). The context for mentor´s work and possibility for developing mentor skills was also found to be important by Langdon (2014).

8. To finish the course

As a complement to the answers from the contact persons, a follow up of the amount of mentors who passed during the latest years was carried out using register at the chosen university. Among an estimated 300 new mentors at the end of 2016, 225 participants passed the course. 75 participants did not write the final paper, the paper did not pass and was not completed, or they dropped out from the course. During the presentation of the results for this study for the practicum team and central contact persons, a discussion started about how important fulfilling a course is. One argument to not fulfill was that it is enough to participate as there is learning during the course, it is not necessarily a need to get

the ECTS. Especially as the final paper expects academic, scientific writing, which is perceived as a challenge. Arguments for fulfilling the course were that it is an agreement with the unit and the employer that the course should be completed, and the written text is a first step of showing knowledge, the second step is to show knowledge and skills in practice, which is mentoring student teachers.

9. Discussion

The aim with this study is to increase our knowledge about how mentors get professional development to increase their skills in mentoring. The background is an increasing expectation for developing quality in ITE, not the least during practicum. One of the target groups in this quality work are mentors and they are expected, both as individual and as a group, to develop their skills.

The first question concerned courses offered to get expected skills for mentoring at the selected university. The result from the local data collection showed that the central content in the course encompass formulating individual practical professional theory, theories about learning, account for knowledge about theories behind mentoring and finally critically discuss strategy for mentoring based on own practical professional theory. The participants are supported to create learning groups and exchange experiences during the process. This is a content and form of learning which is similar to courses presented in earlier studies (Feiman-Nemser, 1998; Lunenberg, 2002; Hudson et al., 2013). However, there are some differences. The course is limited in time and that can be a reason why there is no emphasis on trying out new skills during the mentor course. Another reason could be a change of perspective as the local course was revised, to a more academic oriented course with for example academic writing. Maybe an additional change can also be referred to the academic orientation; that an earlier oral examination changed to an entire written examination.

The second question concerned the participant´s perception of the course. The writing of an individual practical professional theory is based on skill in academic writing and knowledge of theories of mentoring and learning. This change of perspective can have affected whether participants are completing the course or not. It is likely that some participants did not manage to fulfill this requirement, even though the majority as a group did complete the course. The dropouts might concern the university offering the course to a higher degree that in-service teachers and their leaders, as some participants commented that the participants anyway learn during the process. To complete to get credits is not always an individual goal. The findings from Langdon (2014) are in the same direction; a formal course is not always wanted or perceived as needed.

The third question concerned the pre requisites for participation in the course. The recruitment of the participants differed, as did the expectations. In some cases, there was no follow up whether the participants passed the course or not. I became clear that the participants could get more or less support from organizers of K-12 and own unit. As Langdon (2014) found support could differ as well as the approach to critical reflection and learning at the own unit.

A review of earlier studies showed that there is certain knowledge, skills and even attitudes that are sought for and discussed by authors from different countries. They can be grouped in a variety of ways, and one is to group them in knowledge about the ITE context in general and the local profile especially, pedagogic knowledge about certain subjects and how to teach them, pedagogic knowledge about adult education, knowledge about own individual practical professional theory, the STs situation and communication during mentoring. This can be summarized as organizational and relational knowledge and skills. One aspect, which could be highlighted, is administrative skills, as, at least in Sweden, mentors have to document how the ST is progressing. This documentation is the base for meetings between ST and mentor, and in addition supervisor from university. This administrative competence is less in focus in earlier literature. One reason could be that this documentation can be related to assessment, and as Hudson

The consequence of the agreed upon needed knowledge, which is more or less agreed about in several countries, is that the content of courses in earlier studies encompass all, or part of, the mentioned knowledge as content. What differs is for example the recruitment of mentors, amount of hours for the course, to what extent the mentors try out their new skills during the course and whether the course is a part of formal higher education or contract education. A tentative suggestion is that similarities can be due to a widespread discussion about for example need for critical reflection among mentors and the context for national ITE can be a reason for some of the difference.

10. Conclusion

As a way to support increased quality in ITE, a suggestion is development of mentor´s knowledge and skills. One way of doing this is to design formal mentor courses. Earlier studies have described a few courses, often not in detail. Findings from studying course plans for a mentor course, comments from participating mentors and contact persons in practicum showed that formal courses are appreciated, but expectations for transformation of mentor knowledge and skills differ. The findings also showed that pre requisites for participation differed among the mentors.

There are two conclusions to be drawn from the findings. One conclusion is that there is a need on national policy level to clarify the need for courses for mentors. Another conclusion, on organizational policy level, is that any formal course for mentors needs to have clarity about its aims, form and pre-requisites for participants, not to create expectations among stakeholders, which cannot be fulfilled.

In addition, a follow up study is needed concerning alignment between courses for mentors and courses for supervisors from university concerning common language and strategies for teaching and learning.

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Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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