

School leaders' views on mentoring and newly qualified teachers' needs

Eva Sunde* & Marit Ulvik*

Abstract

School leaders are in a position to make decisions that influence beginning teachers' first year in school. The leaders' attitudes to new teachers and mentoring have an impact on such teachers' professional possibilities. Through open-ended interviews, this qualitative study investigates how school leaders perceive newly qualified teachers' needs and mentoring. The data analysis reveals that their views vary. While some see the beginning teacher's need mainly as a need for information about practical solutions, rules and routines, others want to support the teacher's professional development. Generally, the mentor role is perceived as being concerned with informing and guiding. The mentors chosen are mainly teachers with senior positions and experience in teaching. Few of the school leaders view being a mentor as a professional activity or perceive education for mentors as necessary for mentoring. The consequences of the school leaders' perceptions of mentoring new teachers will be problematised in the article.

Keywords: school leaders, beginning teachers' needs, mentoring

Introduction

Over the last couple of years, greater political attention has been paid to supporting newly qualified teachers (NQTs). The need for support during the first year in the profession is recognised in the literature (OECD 2005; Rippon and Martin 2006), and mentoring has become the key strategy (Jones 2010; OECD 2005). Mentoring seems to hold the potential to transform the teaching profession, revitalise experienced teachers, and lead to school development (Hargreaves and Fullan 2000; Hobson et al. 2009); it is thus not only beneficial for new teachers. Yet the influence of mentoring depends on the quality of the mentoring and on support from both the school culture and school leaders (Hobson et al. 2009; Wang, Odell and Schwillle 2008). This article focuses on school leaders as contributors to new teachers' induction since improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools is one of the leaders' most important responsibilities (Printy et al. 2008). They are in a position to suggest modifications in order to improve teaching practice and shape teachers' professional development (Schleicher 2012). The main research question in the study is: *What is school leaders' perception of beginning teachers' needs for support and what are their views on mentoring?* The findings will be discussed in the light of research on new teachers and on mentoring. The study is

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based on interviews with nine school leaders in secondary schools in Norway with the aim of obtaining a deeper understanding of the leaders' views connected to NQTs and to mentoring as a tool for professional development.

Background

Knowing that the first year of teaching is a critical and vulnerable time (Langdon 2007; Rots et al. 2007), the induction phase seems to be a phase in professional development that requires the attention of school leaders. We know that many NQTs leave the profession during the first years (Achinstein 2006). This is the case in many Western countries, including Norway (Achinstein 2006; Kersaint et al. 2007; OECD 2005; Roness 2012). The main reasons for leaving are said to be the initial teaching experiences, the working conditions, and insufficient support (Achinstein 2006; Rots et al. 2007).

The reason for contacting school leaders in this study is that their structural decisions influence the lives of beginning teachers. Leadership is recognised as essential for developing and maintaining integrated professional cultures where the needs of beginning teachers are addressed (Schleicher 2012). A shared vision and a purpose that encourages creative diversity, combined with a commitment to build professional communities of learners, characterise school leaders who create positive induction experiences for beginning teachers (*ibid.*). Important factors in this respect are making time for reflection and having an inquiry-based approach to teaching. Following Hobson et al. (2009), school leaders act as agents when they give preference to and legitimise certain practices. They reframe and reinforce beginning teachers' conceptions of themselves as teachers. School leaders' choices concerning who shall be mentors and who are to be mentored may affect this practice.

Like other workers, teachers want to be well informed, and they want to participate in collaborative, cooperative and consultative decision-making. Further, they want to participate in the development of school goals (Churchill and Williamson 1999). When beginning teachers are invited to participate in discussions of the goals, teaching can become a profession of learners who engage in inquiry, reflective practice and continuous problem-solving, and at the same time build leadership capacity (Fullan 1995). Researchers claim that it can be difficult and challenging for beginning teachers to define themselves as teachers (McCann and Johannessen 2004; McNally et al. 2008).

According to Storhaug and Sand (2011), beginning teachers are received in two different ways in schools. While new teachers are in some schools seen as resources who may contribute with experience, inspiration and new knowledge, in other schools they are seen as unqualified when they start teaching. There is a connection between the school's organisational culture on one hand, and the way new teachers are met and in what way their knowledge is valued and asked for on the other (*ibid.*). School leaders know that for NQTs there will be planning, preparation, reflection,

organisation and reading processes that the beginning teachers might not be aware of. The leaders also know that the relative isolation of teachers' work in classrooms can be a potential barrier to advancing practice (ibid.). A teacher's work is never-ending in nature, and the lack of boundaries around teachers' work is seldom challenged. One consequence may be that beginning teachers come into teaching 'the hard way'. By having a mentor, the isolated teacher may become less isolated, and learning 'the hard way' may become less hard (Hobson et al. 2009). The negative issues beginning teachers' experience may be outweighed by the support and strategies that advance their learning as teachers (ibid.).

Teachers have traditionally not had an induction in the manner of other blue- and white-collar occupations (Ingersoll and Strong 2011). If their challenges are not addressed, the teaching quality may be affected. Teachers are more likely to remain in teaching when an induction programme is in place and the work environment is conducive to participate in decision-making concerning teacher and student learning (Ingersoll and Smith 2004; Kardos et al. 2001). Policy documents often describe schools as learning organisations. The term "learning organisation" describes organisations in which human beings increase their own learning and growth (Koffman and Senge 2007). In schools it is the teachers' experiences that determine whether the organisation functions as an arena for learning.

The workload in schools can be overwhelming, and not only for beginning teachers. Nevertheless, school leaders can contribute to school cultures that support new teachers' inquiries, and they can enable them to provide effective learning that will be of importance (Hobson et al. 2009). Together with the teaching profession, school leaders have the responsibility to induct and support beginning teachers into teaching. By promoting learning cultures that model sound pedagogical practices, school leaders may strengthen the early phase of a teacher's career. School leaders may also ensure that the system does not increase the teachers' workloads. Novice workers require emotional, social and educative support to be successful (Harrison, Dymoke and Pell 2006). The need for support arises on different levels; beginning teachers need information, and they need to discuss and reflect on experiences for which there is probably no correct answer (Helleve and Ulvik 2011).

During the initial phase, new teachers often experience a practice shock that might put them in a survival mode (Fuller and Bown 1975; Smethem 2007). The practice shock can be interpreted as a mismatch between ideals and reality. Mastery experiences at the beginning of their careers can help teachers develop resilience and sustain them through difficulties that they may encounter in the future (Rots et al. 2007; Smethem 2007). Strengthening teachers' positive experiences during their first years could make them more open-minded and committed, encouraging them to continue in the profession (Hoy and Spero 2005; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2007) and, as a result, improve their teaching. Their classroom experiences, the school culture they encounter and the kinds of jobs they obtain shape their identity

(Day, Stobart and Kington 2006). What new teachers experience, however, is sometimes that they are given the ‘worst’ jobs (Smith, Helleve and Ulvik 2013), and what they learn in teacher education is not always supported by the schools (Achinstein 2006). Further, support offered through fixed induction programmes tends to consider newcomers as helpless and in need of guidance regarding the tradition of the school (Langdon 2007; Ulvik and Langørgen 2012).

To support new teachers, mentoring seems to be a common solution and one of several strategies that may be deployed in order to support beginning teachers. Internationally, a mentor in a school is understood as a more experienced colleague who supports new teachers in the first phase of the profession (Harrison et al. 2006). However, mentoring tends to focus on making teaching manageable more than improving teaching and learning (Fresko and Alhija 2009; Jones 2010), even though the mentor role described in the literature involves more than experience and guiding new teachers into the profession (Ulvik and Sunde 2013). Being a mentor implies facilitating professional development, being able to analyse teaching, understanding adults’ learning, and promoting critical reflection (ibid.). In a changing society, teachers have to learn to teach in new ways, not only to follow the tradition (Hargreaves and Fullan 2000). Further, it seems that mentors are more likely to employ effective mentoring when they have been prepared for the role (Hobson et al. 2009). To improve teaching and learning, both beginning teachers’ emotional and professional needs as well as their students’ needs should be addressed (Timperley 2010), which is the overall aim of mentoring.

However, mentoring can be used to support more than just new teachers. In a changing society, there is a need for continuous professional development since all teachers have to adapt to changes and face pressure to meet requirements from ‘above’ (Ballet and Kelchtermans 2009). Professional development does not happen by itself. It is an inner process that builds on models such as Kolb’s learning-from-experience model (1984) and Korthagen’s ALACT model (2001), in which reflection plays an important role. To facilitate these processes, we see mentoring NQTs as the first step in an extensive process that concerns the whole school culture.

The study

Context

The current study was conducted in Norway in 2011. Mentoring was then brought up to date because all new teachers from the autumn of 2010 were supposed to be offered mentoring during their first year in school (White Paper 11, 2008–2009). The school leaders were responsible for implementing the arrangement in local schools. Moreover, to support this offer, the government funded formal mentor education with academic credit points (ECTS) administered by teacher education institutions.

In spite of what is stated in the White Paper, many new teachers in Norway are still not offered mentoring. If they are, the mentor is often an experienced teacher or head of the department (Harsvik and Dahl Nordgård 2011). More than half of the mentors are not educated in mentoring. There are no requirements with respect to the content, and mentoring is supposed to happen within existing frames (ibid.).

A previous study examined mentor students' perception of mentoring and the outcome of a specific mentor education (Ulvik and Sunde 2013). The findings revealed that the participants' school leaders appeared to be indifferent to mentor education and, even if the mentor students received eight days off from work during the year, they were not expected to bring anything back to the school. From the mentor students' perspective, the school leaders' engagement was required. In the current study, we wanted to see the mentoring of NQTs from the school leaders' perspective.

The sample

This research project examines the perspective of school leaders who had given their approval for one or more teachers from their schools to undergo mentor education during the 2010/2011 academic year. The sample of the study consists of nine school leaders – six males and three females – mainly from upper secondary schools. They were all school leaders in the same county in Norway, and were leaders at different levels in the schools. To participate in the aforementioned mentor programme, teachers need to obtain the consent of their leaders in order to apply. By choosing leaders who had actually given their consent, we expected to meet leaders with a positive attitude to mentoring.

Methodology and analysis

To understand the school leaders' perspective, a qualitative approach was selected (Hatch 2002; Borko et al. 2008). The research instrument in this new research field was a semi-structured interview. To answer the main question about the school leaders' perception of beginning teachers' needs and the use of mentoring, we asked them how they perceive NQTs' need for support and how new teachers in their schools have been supported. Further, they were asked about mentoring, which qualifications they think mentors need and who they choose as mentors. Many NQTs in secondary schools in the area in question start in temporary positions, and as substitute teachers they are rarely offered mentoring. We therefore also asked the leaders who they choose as mentees. The questions were designed to address how school leaders in secondary schools understand the political intentions in the White Paper 11 (2008–2009), which recommends mentoring for beginning teachers. In the interviews, the pre-designed questions were followed by probing questions to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. The interviewer is known to some of the interviewees as a teacher educator involved in a partnership project with schools.

The interviews took place in the school leaders' work places and lasted 1 to 1.5 hours. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The two researchers in the project then analysed the data separately by reading through the interviews and via an inductive analysis (Hatch 2002), moving from the particular towards the more general and suggesting tentative categories before developing the final categories through a moderation process. The findings were presented to and discussed with colleagues in our research group.

The informants received information about the study and volunteered to participate. They were also informed that their responses would be handled with confidentiality. In addition, the project was reported to and accepted by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) in advance.

Findings

Even though the two research questions are intertwined, we first present the school leaders' views on NQTs' need for support before presenting their views on mentoring.

School leaders' perception of NQTs' need for support

In general, the leaders understood beginning teachers' need for support in terms of information concerning 'how we do it in our school', as well as practical solutions:

In my opinion, beginning teachers must learn about the system, practical solutions, rules and routines.

It is important that new teachers understand their role and their duties.

Others wanted to stimulate beginning teachers, as understood from this quote: "I think that new teachers must find themselves and their place in the school".

Even in this small group of school leaders we found different attitudes and answers to the research question. Some expected new teachers to join the school culture, others to find their own way into teaching.

Leaders in the first group seem not to ask for progress, improvements, new thoughts or inspiration. As a result, newcomers are supposed to follow the tradition and be like the other teachers in the school. One way of understanding the position is that these leaders expect the beginning teachers not to 'disturb' the everyday life in school. On the other hand, the expression "to find themselves and find their place" may reveal an understanding of the fact that beginning teachers actually need time to find their own way in the teaching profession. One could also gain the impression that this is something the teachers must do themselves.

Further, school leaders are under pressure and, as long as mentoring is only an intention, some of them do not prioritise it, something the following quote illustrates:

In my school we prioritise the national curriculum and digital competence. We do not have any plans for mentoring, but it has been discussed.

However, even if mentoring is not accompanied by resources, other leaders see it as important and try to offer support to new teachers. One of the leaders explains:

We have a sort of mentor arrangement among colleagues that is not compensated for. It is a kind of buddy system, which is offered to all newly employed teachers.

Mentoring is also regarded as a way to impact retention:

New teachers must be included in the profession as painlessly as possible, so that they can stay in the profession as long as possible.

Here new teachers' induction is seen in a long-term perspective and beyond what is beneficial for the individual new teacher.

School leaders' perception of mentoring

If mentoring is perceived as guiding new teachers into the existing culture, it is not surprising that the findings reveal that school leaders value experience when it comes to mentor qualifications.

Mentoring seems to be about transmitting knowledge from one who knows to one who does not know. The following answers are typical:

To be a mentor you must understand the work in school and understand how the school organisation works.

In my school we choose experienced teachers as mentors – the ones who are able to work independently.

I have not reflected on the idea that mentors need more competence in mentoring beyond being an experienced teacher.

Some of the leaders, however, claim that being experienced is not enough to be a good mentor, and even problematise experience:

As mentors I choose teachers with a sense of humour. They must be clever, both professionally and socially. I will not choose teachers who are inflexible in their thinking but teachers who are open-minded.

In my opinion, personal competence is essential [...] experienced teachers are sometimes those who are not open to change.

I think that personal suitability is important for mentors. The best is when a person has both personal and formal competence, but the mentor's interest in mentoring is the most important qualification. In my school, we prefer to use teachers who are personally engaged in their work as mentors.

These leaders search for mentors who are not only experienced teachers, but also personally suited to the role. Mentoring is then not only about telling; there are also relational aspects involved.

All of the school leaders had teachers in their staff who participated in or had finished mentor education. None of them saw mentoring as something that needs a specific education. Yet some of the leaders thought that education might probably be a good thing. One of them stated: "I do not know whether there will be any difference if the mentors are educated or not, but I think it will probably be better with an education than without". Another said: "I want to support the old model with colleague based mentoring", and thereby emphasised mentoring as a mutual activity.

For the majority of the leaders experience is perceived as crucial for being a mentor. Mentoring is also about socialising new teachers into the profession, and in that respect experience might be valuable. Mentor education connected to mentoring NQTs is still new in Norway and so it might be difficult to know what difference the education will bring. As a follow-up question, we asked the leaders why they let their teachers participate in mentor education. Some want mentors to learn more about what a new teacher should know, others acknowledged teachers' need to develop their competence and allow those who are interested in mentoring to attend the education if they want to and if it is possible to arrange for education without disturbing the regular work in the school too much. The leaders tend not to understand mentor education as something the school as a whole can benefit from.

When the school leaders were asked about who should be mentored in their school, most of them answered as follows:

Mentoring is for teachers who have a full-time position and are engaged for a year or more; not for those in temporary positions.

A few school leaders opened up to the idea of mentoring all new teachers, as expressed in the following:

In my school the teachers who are entitled to mentoring are the newly qualified and newly employed – but those who have been engaged for 2–3 years may qualify as well.

The impact of central policy measures on educational practices in schools is never completely straightforward, and there is a little irony in the fact that mentoring is

made available to permanently employed teachers, even though it is temporary teachers who are most vulnerable.

Summary of the findings

To sum up the findings, the school leaders interpret beginning teachers' needs as being either practical or both practical and professional, and they tend to want new teachers to follow the tradition. Consequently, experience is becoming an important qualification for mentors. In addition, some of the leaders emphasise personal suitability. Mentor education seems less important. Some leaders state that mentoring is for full-time, permanently engaged teachers, while others also offer it to teachers with part-time engagements.

Discussion

Through this study we wanted to gain an understanding of how school leaders perceive mentoring according to NQTs' need for support. The school leaders express varying understandings of new teachers' needs and different views on mentoring, and consequently provide different choices and possibilities for beginning teachers. In some school leaders' views, new teachers most of all need to be informed about the practical side of teaching and how things work in the school. Information about rules and routines, however, constitutes a limited understanding of mentoring, and is only part of what beginning teachers need to know when they start working. The school leaders, for example, did not mention beginning teachers' need for emotional and social support which is emphasised in the literature. Initially, when teachers strive to find their own way as professional teachers (McNally et al. 2008) mentoring can be one possible way of supporting them. The support may be experienced as useful and positive when the mentors are able to 'read' the beginning teachers' needs, value their earlier experience, and combine their own experience with personal competence. The mentors chosen by the school leaders may well have these qualifications.

Nevertheless, the school leaders tend to focus on information about daily life in school and the mentors' teaching experience more than e.g. the mentors' personal competence. Most of the mentors were chosen because of their senior working positions. This may cause problems, not only because the mentor and mentee have unequal power but also because the mentor in a senior position (e.g. head of a department) has the possibility of making decisions that could affect the beginning teachers' working life. Even if experience is questioned, in the data there is a tendency of school leaders seeing experience as the most important qualification for mentors-to-be. Many good mentors are found among experienced teachers, and experience will always be an important mentor qualification. However, being a mentor also requires, as we see it, theoretical knowledge and personal characteristics. Whether a good teacher automatically becomes a good mentor is problematised in the literature

(Bullough 2005). The supportive, emotional and professional dimensions of mentoring seem not to be given high priority by the school leaders. For some of them, it seemed important to have beginning teachers socialised into the workplace and to ensure that they “understand their role and their duties”. These leaders want the new teachers to learn ‘business as usual’, ‘the way we do it in our school’, more than asking for beginning teachers’ possibly fresh knowledge and new ideas. Most of the school leaders perceive mentoring as information concerning how we do it in our school. Mentoring for NQTs appears not to be seen as a prioritised task, but as something that takes place automatically in the daily routine.

Another way of thinking about mentoring is to think of it as a potential gain for the whole school (Hobson et al. 2009; Ulvik and Langørgen 2012). In such schools, it is seen as a collective responsibility to support new teachers in developing their occupational competence. The school leader is essential when it comes to establishing a connection between the organisational culture in the school and how the needs of beginning teachers are addressed, including how new teachers are met and how their knowledge is valued and asked for. Negative issues in beginning teachers’ experiences can be outweighed by support and strategies that advance their learning as teachers. A major challenge in beginning teachers’ experiences is the process of defining their teacher persona for themselves. Each new teacher’s learning agenda is intimately bound up with their personal struggle to craft a public identity. Teaching can be an isolated experience, and mentoring may reduce beginning teachers’ fear of the workload, which can be overwhelming. In teaching there is always work to be done, and mentors may support beginning teachers in how to handle the never-ending nature of teachers’ work. Without mentoring, the first vulnerable years of teaching may be a potential barrier to advancing practice in teaching. Mentors guide beginning teachers with regard to what to give preference to and what to let go of, and towards the realisation that one’s expectations are not always met. Questions related to what should not be part of teachers’ work may usefully be included in discourses in both teacher education and schools.

New teachers need to realise the importance of their work (McCann and Johannessen 2004) and acknowledge that students’ bad experiences in school are evidence of the need for good teachers. New teachers need support to understand disturbing episodes during the school year as shared experiences and not as personal obstacles, aggravations or attacks. However, at least in upper secondary schools in Norway, many teachers start out as part-time workers and as a result are not offered mentoring. The mentees chosen in this study are mostly fully employed teachers. The school leaders’ different answers to the question of who should be the mentees can be seen as more excluding than including. We know how it is for a beginning teacher to start working in a school without mentoring, as this has been the case for most of them up until now. But we do not know what difference it would make for beginning teachers to be mentored by mentors with an education in mentoring or not.

This question needs to be followed up in further studies. Choices concerning the selection of future mentors and their qualifications will, however, affect the professional future of beginning teachers in one way or another. If school leaders want a beginning teacher to develop into 'a professional teacher', the new teacher could benefit from a planned support system where opportunities for bonding with other new teachers are made available.

When it comes to the question of mentor education, the impression is that experience in teaching is regarded as sufficient for mentors by most of the school leaders. Teachers who are engaged as heads of departments and school inspectors are often chosen as mentors for new teachers. School leaders are in a position to influence structural decisions over a wide and varied range of issues, including decisions that influence the lives of teachers and students within each school. According to extensive research, leadership is second only to classroom teaching among school-related factors that influence teacher and student outcomes (Leithwood et al. 2004). The absence of good leadership has the potential to affect beginning teachers negatively since the discourse of the school has a powerful influence on teachers' identities and practices. Mentors' emotional, social and educative support, as well as educative strategies, may advance new teachers' learning and balance negative issues in school. However, with respect to mentor education it seems that educated mentors function better than mentors without an education (Hobson et al. 2009).

The school leader and the school staff have to understand and deal with the daily life of teaching. They are responsible for new teachers' learning and induction upon which they have a regular impact even if they are engaged in these processes to various degrees. The potential to strengthen sound induction practices has the greatest influence when school leaders provide expertise, qualifications and opportunities for professional development to beginning teachers. Collaborative moderation processes hold the potential to improve induction programmes and facilitate the greater consistency of quality induction experiences. This requires that school leaders have knowledge and understanding of teacher growth and development and professional development models. School leaders are seen as the final arbitrators of teacher quality. Their role is to give preference to and legitimise certain practices in schools. They reframe and reinforce novice teachers' conceptions of themselves as teachers. The leadership and discursive practices in schools influence teachers' learning and practices, in particular the practices of beginning teachers. The early phase of a teacher's career is strengthened if the school leaders promote learning cultures that model sound pedagogical practice, when induction programmes are in place, and when the work environment is conducive to participation in decision-making with regard to teacher and student learning. One way of improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools is to be attentive to teachers' need for support and to create collaborative school environments in which beginning teachers thrive. School leadership is recognised as essential to the

development and maintenance of integrated professional cultures where the needs of beginning teachers are addressed. School leaders may support positive induction experiences for beginning teachers when they invite them to share visions, encourage creative diversity, and build professional communities of learners. By providing time for reflection and for establishing an inquiry-based approach to teaching, the leaders support all the teachers in the school. They may or may not establish school-wide structures and cultures that support beginning teachers' well-being and effectiveness in different professional life phases. Either choice will make a difference to beginning teachers. The leaders' choices of who shall be mentors and who are to be mentored are affected by their practice.

NQTs become members of the teaching profession in one way or another, whether they are engaged in a formal induction programme or not. Beginning teachers' identities will be a product of their own beliefs about good teaching, their initial teacher education qualification, and their work environment. For many beginning teachers, it seems that the school leaders undervalue the process of enculturation into the profession. We want to challenge policymakers, school leaders, and teachers to provide beginning teachers with induction experiences that are grounded in collaborative school-learning cultures where sound induction and school-wide, effective pedagogical and ethical practices are modelled. Leadership, school cultures, and appropriate role modelling are prerequisites for a high-quality induction. The school leaders should then acknowledge beginning teachers' need for emotional, social and educative support. By offering mentoring, leaders may create conditions (e.g. build structures, use resources) that provide new teachers with content knowledge and associated pedagogical skills. This is as far as we have come today, but the relationship between beginning teachers' first year in school and the school leadership warrants even further investigation.

Conclusion

The school leaders tended to see new teachers' needs primarily as a need for information. Mentoring was consequently perceived as information and guidance regarding the tradition, which could be characterised as a limited understanding of mentoring. By seeing NQTs as unqualified more than as a resource, the school might miss an opportunity to learn from the newcomers. Mentors' qualifications seemed to be taken for granted, and the school leaders did not seem to value mentor education. In this study, the mentoring relationship as a joint collective inquiry into teaching and learning in schools did not receive much attention. As a result, the positive effects of mentoring for the mentor, the mentee and the school as a whole might not be promoted. Further, mentoring as a way of improving teaching and learning is not fully utilised.

Formal mentor education directed to mentoring new teachers is a new field in Norway which could explain why mentoring is rarely demanded or asked for by the

school leaders. The school leaders choose practical solutions when selecting mentors, but their choices could also implicitly reveal what they think of mentoring. School leaders are central when it comes to securing quality mentoring and close teamwork in a school. They are in a position to strengthen the early phase of a teacher's career if they know how to promote learning cultures that model sound pedagogical practices. The connection needs to be developed more in the future.

We would like to add that we do not ascribe persistent problems to school leaders' lack of competence or will. To some degree, we recognise that practising leaders are being asked to do things for which they have not been prepared or given resources to put into effect. Improving the quality of teaching and learning is a complex matter related to multiple school, classroom and personal factors, and requires the adoption of new perspectives and the acquisition of new skills. With a view towards these facts, this article is intended to enhance policymakers' focus on beginning teachers' need for mentoring and the school leaders' reflections and actions in the preparation of mentors and mentoring. We also emphasise that this is a small study that involves a few school leaders. To verify the conclusions we would need to investigate these issues on a larger scale.

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