Formally Educated Mentors in Norway

Possibilities and Challenges in Mentors' Support of Colleagues' Professional Development

Ingrid Helleve[1*]

[1]University of Bergen

Abstract

Compared to other countries Norwegian teachers participate less in professional learning activities (OECD, 2008, 20013). Simultaneously, Norwegian teachers are offered possibilities to participate in formal education for mentors where they are supposed to learn how to support other teachers in their professional development. The aim of the article is to investigate what possibilities and challenges different participants encountered when a group of educated mentors were given the possibility to create a project in their own school where they were expected to support their colleagues' professional development.

Keywords: educated mentors; support; peer mentoring; professional development

* Principal contact:
Ingrid Helleve
Department of Education, University of Bergen, Norway
Tel.: 55 58 48 29
E-mail: ingrid.helleve@uib.no

Introduction

How to support teachers in their professional development is an often-asked question (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 2011, p. 82). The concept *professional* is used several times in the Norwegian Whitepaper 11 "*The teacher, the role and the education*" (MER, 2008, p.14). This political document claim that teachers are supposed to develop a professional identity. The whitepapers TALIS (OECD, 2008; 2013), state however, that Norwegian teachers to a small extent participate in professional learning activities compared to teachers in other countries. The survey shows that collaboration between Norwegian teachers is extensive, but mainly limited to practical solutions, co-ordination and sharing plans, rather than deeper discussions enhancing professional development. The researchers point out two potential consequences. First, that collaboration concerning practicalities does not support teachers' professional development. Second, that it does not contribute to development of schools as *learning communities* (Helleve, 2010). Teachers are offered short courses outside school for individual participants. The research report concludes that Norwegian teachers need support and structure to enhance professional development.

Simultaneously, Norwegian teachers are offered formal mentor education. The aim is to educate mentors who can support newly qualified as well as experienced colleagues in their professional development (Helleve, 2010). Formal mentor studies differ from other studies beyond education for teachers. Such studies are normally directed against pupils' learning, whereas the aim of mentor education is that experienced teachers should learn how to support other teachers' professional development. According to Molander & Terum (2008, p. 18), being a professional, means to be able to handle a task in a qualified, correct or ideal manner. The concept reflects specific qualities recognized through the ways the professional is conducting or performing the specific job. Consequently, a new profession has emerged inside the profession in Norwegian schools (Smith and Hansen, 2012). Hargreaves and Fullan (2000, p.55) argue that in the current century mentors should learn how to challenge and change the teaching profession. Accordingly, formally educated mentors should be potential resources for schools in building learning communities (Helleve, 2010). From Norwegian political authorities, little has been said about the mentors' roles in schools, or what the frames and conditions for mentoring should be like. This may lead to uncertainty, but also foster opportunities. As a teacher educator and researcher, I wanted to find out how a group of educated mentors would facilitate a project that was supposed to support their colleagues' professional development if they were given the opportunity. I decided to contact one school and ask if they wanted to participate in an intervention study. They responded positively, and a six-month project was initiated. The aim of the study is to answer the question of what possibilities and challenges different participants encounter when mentors are supposed to support their colleagues' professional development?

Mentoring as support for professional development

According to the Norwegian researchers Lauvås and Handal (2000, p. 34) peer mentoring is one of the most important precautions for professional development in schools. Inspired by socio-constructivist and socio-cultural perspectives on learning they argue for collective reflective processes where new knowledge is developed. Shared meaning makes a foundation for co-operation and collaboration (Lauvås and Handal, 2000, p. 277). Lauvås, Lycke and Handal (1996, p. 17) argue that peer mentoring makes it possible to break old patterns and support professional learning for newly qualified as well as experienced teachers. Several studies show that peer mentoring can be an alternative means for supporting teachers' professional development (Heikkinen, Jokinen, and Tynjälä, 2012, p.15). In education as well there is a growing understanding of the fact that mentoring

is not only a concern for the newly qualified, but also for experienced teachers. Hargreaves and Fullan, (2000, p. 55) claim that mentoring needs to be transformed from something that is arranged for students and novice teachers to an integral part of school culture in order to form strong relationships between experienced and newly qualified colleagues (Wang, Odell, and Schwille, 2008, p. 146).

Having finished teacher education teachers receive little or no feedback on their practice, and make changes mainly through trial and error (Beijard et al., 2007, p.105; Hargreaves 2000). Kelly (2006, p. 519) argues that the most important influence factors in the process of teacher learning or knowing-in-practice are the ways in which the working practice of the school engages them to think.

Mentor education

Many countries have long traditions, often linked to an induction program, for mentoring newly qualified teachers (OECD, 2005; Langdon, 2007). Less common is organized education as in Norway, that provides a formal competence (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, and Tomlinson, 2009, p.212). Through Whitepaper 11, which focused on mentoring for novice teachers (MER, 2008) Norwegian politicians argued that all newly qualified teachers should have a mentor. Accordingly, the government has funded formal mentor education with academic credit points. Teacher education institutions administer the courses. Internationally, formal academic education for mentors is an unusual enterprise (Helleve, Danielsen & Smith, 2015, p. 313). Within the OECD-region mentor education is desirable, but not widespread (OECD, 2005). What should mentors know, and why? If the aim is to support and challenge experienced as well as newly qualified teachers, in line with Hargreaves and Fullan (2000), mentoring programs should prepare mentors to become change agents for the whole school community. Mentors should not just learn how to support others but also how to transform the teaching profession.

Norwegian researchers state that formal mentor programs provide mentors with a new knowledge base, one that is different from the base they had gained as teachers (Ulvik and Sunde, 2013, p. 756). Their study shows that when the mentors started their education, they focused on themselves as teachers and their own learning process. What the teachers claimed by the end of the study, was that the program had contributed to an understanding of themselves as facilitators of colleagues' learning. The researchers conclude that this process might be compared to the process newly qualified teachers go through. Furthermore, they maintain that mentors' experiences, awareness and a new conceptual framework made it easier to support other teachers' professional development. Professional development for mentors would be to act as leaders of other teachers' professional learning.

As a teacher educator in the local mentor-education context, my role was to act as a mentor educator. The curriculum is founded on two cornerstones; theoretical input and practical experience, i.e. peer-mentoring and feedback on communication. Mentors are supposed to acquire a conceptual language and framework for mentoring, as well as to develop practical skills in communication in mentoring. Based on cases from their own practice mentor students act as peer mentors for each other and get feedback on their communicative skills. The main aim of the courses is to educate mentors who can support novice teachers in the critical startup period of their career, but also to act as mentors for experienced colleagues' professional learning and professional development (Opfer and Pedder, 2011, p. 377).

To sum up; on the one hand the local national context is characterized by formal education promoting mentors to become change agents who can support colleagues' professional

development, and on the other hand by a national policy that is vague when it comes to the question of what kind of role mentors should play in schools in future. The tension between the aims of the formal education and the national policy creates many questions that I as a teacher educator and facilitator of mentor education was curious to get the answers to: What would happen if mentors were given the opportunity to act as leaders and supporters of their colleagues' professional development? What kind of activities would they choose? How would their colleagues respond? Would the mentors be able to create sustainable learning communities? What could I as a teacher educator and facilitator of the mentor education program learn? This lead to the research question which are: What possibilities and challenges do teachers, principal and mentors encounter when educated mentors are supposed to support their colleagues' professional development?

Theoretical framework

Professional development should be sustained, ongoing and include participant-driven inquiry, reflection and experimentation (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 2011, p. 81). Wilson, Rozelle, and Mikeska (2011, p. 385) define effective teacher professional development as: "sustained and long-term (allowing for teachers to repeatedly try new strategies and to reflect on what worked and did not) and focuses on records of practice, including student work".

According to Wilson and Berne (1999, p. 175) it should also connect to and derive from teaching and learning experiences. Opfer and Pedder (2011, p.377) make a distinction between *teachers' professional learning* and *teachers' professional development*. Teachers' professional learning opportunities are embedded in professional development opportunities that have the features of "learning communities", in which teachers learn from and with their peers. Through collaborative, ongoing reflective practice (Schön, 1983; van Manen, 1991) teachers' professional learning moves teachers from isolation to interaction and personal engagement in communities in which they can analyze and improve their own practice (Shulman, 2004).

The concepts *community of practice* and *community of learners* are often used to describe educational contexts. *Communities of practice* are characterized by common engagement, tasks and a shared repertoire. Participation, identity and learning are closely linked. Learning, meaning and negotiating identity are features that are deeply rooted in the cultural context. A school is an example of a community of practice where certain goals are defining what should be understood as important. Newly qualified practitioners realize what is valuable for teachers within the community (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Because of the tangled nature of dilemmas, challenges and problems in teaching it is fruitful to look at educational contexts as communities.

The concept *community of learners* differs from the *community of practice* metaphor. A community of learners is characterized by the importance of interaction between peers, and the necessity of an instructor who can initiate and guide the learning process (Brown, 1994; Brown and Campione, 1994; Mitchell and Sackney, 2000; Rogoff, 1994; Rogoff et al., 1996; Wubbels, 2007). Through access to a learning community experienced as well as novice teachers could have an opportunity to "offer each other moral support, intellectual/academic help, and solid friendship" (Noddings, 1992, p. 179). When it comes to the concept *community of practice*, learning is primarily driven by communication between the participants, while in a *community of learners,* guidance from outside is acknowledged. Facilitators can ask questions and stimulate to reflection. External input from other communities, formal theories, and literature is needed to support teachers' professional development. Professional learning is depending on external input. Teacher education institutions can act as facilitators for schools and contribute to development of learning communities.

Consequently, combining the understanding of the concepts *community of practice*, teaching and *community of learners* makes a foundation for continual reflection that is necessary for school development and teachers' professional development (Helleve, 2010).

Context of study

The context is an upper secondary school in Norway. The reason for choosing this particular school for an intervention was that they had more educated mentors than any of the other 20 participating schools. During a period of a couple of years as many as 14 teachers out of a staff of 55 were educated as mentors. In spring I arranged two meetings with the mentor group and the leader team of the school where the plans for a project were made. The mentors were all eager to run the project. Their role should be to lead and organize the project, but also to participate in the peer-mentoring activities. I gave a lecture on peer mentoring in spring for the whole staff. Early in the fall semester the teachers had to decide whether they wanted to join the groups or not.

Tabell 1: An overview of the staff

	Number
Staff	*55*
Teachers in peer group mentoring	*24*
Teachers who practiced classroom observation	*9*
Mentors	*14*
Non-participators	*18*
Principle	

During spring the mentor group had three meetings where they made plans for the project they were going to run next fall. They worked in groups and plenary sessions with three questions: What kind of activities would they choose for their colleagues to promote professional learning? How did they want to organize the project, and *why* did they choose these activities? The mentors chose two different activities; peer-group mentoring and classroom observation because they argued that these activities were best suited to support professional learning. Those who wanted to observe each other should be organized in groups of two or three. The mentors should act as organizers and leaders, but also as participants. The peer-mentoring groups should consist of five to six teachers. The members were supposed to bring a real problem on which they wanted mentoring. *One* should be selected and discussed according to strict organizational rules. Mentors should act as group leaders. They wanted the project to be voluntary for the teachers. Peer-mentoring sessions should take place during four hours on five Wednesday afternoons; classroom observations would also occur in between these meetings. One day for all teachers to participate in peer-group mentoring was also planned. When it comes to observations the teachers who were interested in participation had an initial meeting with representatives from the mentor group where they were introduced to the idea of one-to-one mentoring and classroom observations. Mentors and teachers agreed that the teachers should decide who were going to be their partners and when they were going to meet. Focus should be on challenges the observed teacher was aware of and wanted to change supported by feedback from

the colleague. The pairs usually had a meeting before the lesson started. The teacher who was going to be observed had decided the focus-point. The observer took notes during the lesson and in the meeting they had afterwards.

The mentors were looking forward to the project, but they felt humble and a bit scared regarding acting as leaders of their colleagues. The principal had been educated as a mentor herself many years ago. Consequently, she knew what it meant for a teacher to be supported by others. She felt proud that so many teachers had chosen to become mentors. According to her, professional development and school development are closely connected. Instead of sending teachers to external courses the principal wanted to increase the competence through peer mentoring. The problem, according to the principal, was to find time among all the different requests from the educational authorities.

Methodology and Procedure

The genre of the study can be described as participatory research (Borko, Liston, and Whitcomb, 2007, p.5) or participatory action research (Cresswell, 2012). The point of participatory research is to examine practices and understand the perspective of the participants from the inside. According to Cresswell the main characteristics of action research are: a practical focus, the educator-researcher's own practice, collaboration, a dynamic process, a plan of action and sharing results. The study had the practical issue that I as a teacher educator would collaborate with the different actors in the school and be informed about the possibilities and challenges educated mentors would meet in their local context. The researcher spirals back and forth between reflection about a problem, data collection and action. Cresswell underlines that the plan of action may be to inform important stakeholders. In this case the facilitators of the mentor education. Borko et al. (2007), as well asserts that the knowledge generated through participatory action research primarily is intended to understand and improve practice, but that this knowledge also is useful beyond the local context to communicate the complexity of teacher education to a larger community of educators and scholars. In the current study the local context of mentor education and the role of mentors are highlighted by i.e. the national policy on mentoring.

Data-collection

Tabell 2: An overview of the collected data-material

Instrument	Data-collection	Number
Questionnaires	*Teachers who participated*	*24*
	Non-participators	*11*
	Mentors	*11*
In-depth interviews	*Teachers who did class-room observation*	*3*
	Mentors before and after the intervention	*3*
	Principal- before and after the intervention	*1*
Field-notes: Reports from meetings	*Observations from meetings and peer-mentoring*	

The data used in this study are reports from meetings between the leader group and mentor group, and my field notes from my observations. In-depth interviews were conducted with the principal and three mentors before and after the project started and ended. Focus of these interviews was expectations and experiences with the project. The mentors were asked about their motivation and learning outcome from participation in mentor education. Further they were asked to evaluate their own role as mentors in the project and their colleagues' learning outcome. Three in-depth interviews were conducted with teachers who had observed and been observed in classrooms searching for their experiences. They were asked about how they had organised the observations, what topics they had focused on, and how they evaluated their learning outcome from observations and peer-group mentoring. A questionnaire focusing on mentors' experiences with their role, which 11 of 14 mentors answered, was completed after the project was finished. Focus in the questionnaire was the same as in the interview; motivation for mentor-education, learning outcome and evaluation of the role in the project. 24 questionnaires concerning experiences and learning outcome with peer-group mentoring were filled out by the teachers who participated. All the participants were encouraged to say something about future expectations for mentoring in their school after the project had finished. The respondents' experience as teachers ranged from 0.25 years to 35 years. Those who chose not to participate were asked to answer why they made this decision. 18 teachers did not join the project, and 11 of them chose to provide what they regarded as the most important reason through a questionnaire.

Data analyses

Data was collected in different ways and included questionnaires, interviews and field-notes. During the analysis-process I read through the data from various sources. Results from questionnaires and interviews were coded into categories and themes. Interviews and questionnaires were analysed by my colleague who had validated the questionnaires, but not participated in the data collection. In the analytic process, we moved from the particular to the general through codes and categories. The two researchers analysed the data separately and developed categories through a moderation process (Kvale, 2001). The results have been discussed with representatives from the mentor group, who acknowledged the findings. The presented categories of findings are illustrated with quotes that emerged through the moderation process involving the two researchers. The numbers of participants that have responded to the questionnaires are reported in brackets.

Validity and reliability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) member checks in the sense of communicative validation of data and interpretation with members of the fields under study, is one way of increasing the credibility of the study. There are many pitfalls connected to construction of a questionnaire. Fowler (1998) says that the largest bias is the formulated questions. To get a reliable and valid instrument, the questionnaires were validated through a validation process. First, they were presented to and discussed with the mentors during the developmental process of the questionnaire. Second, they were sent to a colleague in teacher education who read the questionnaire and gave response. Throughout this validation process the questionnaires were further developed and adjusted to their final versions (see Appendix).

The objective of a reliability-test is that a later investigator, following exactly the same procedures as described by an earlier investigator, and conducted the same way, should arrive at the same conclusions (Yin, 1994). The fact that the study is situated means that it would be impossible for anybody else to conduct the same research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a replication cannot give the same result. Instead of demanding that an outsider should gain the same results they argue for what they call dependability, or consistency, the right question to ask is whether the results

are consistent with the data collected. This is best done through the researcher's reflections upon his or her position, triangulation, and a detailed description of how data was collected, categories were developed and decisions were made throughout the inquiry (Merriam, 2002). According to Shulman (2000) one way researchers in the action research genre can ensure quality and rigor is by considering their work to be community property and therefor available to others for review.

Ethical issues
The boundaries between research and practice in participatory action research can be characterized as blurry. This means that my role as teacher educator, practitioner and a researcher faced these challenges. I took the initiative to set the project in motion, but the mentors planned and completed the activities. Challenges include the researcher's position relative to the participants and how to analyze the data (Borko et al., 2007; Smith, 2012).

In this research, I was positioned as a researcher and a teacher educator who had initiated a project with a defined agenda. Collaboration with participants is a central feature of action research that may lead to ethical issues. Cresswell (2012) claims that researchers in action research should adopt ethical agreements with the community research partners. Collaborative studies, by definition, require close collaborative relationships (Hatch, 2002). Some of the ethical challenges are to continually negotiate the purpose of the study. I met all the staff-members in the school twice and leader- and mentor group several times during the project. First, we met to establish a common understanding of the aims of the project. Later we met several times to negotiate and evaluate the process.

All the participants in the school were informed about the fact that the mentor project was also a research project, and that it was voluntary to participate. Some teachers chose not to participate.

Findings
The aim of the study is to answer the question of what possibilities and challenges different participants encounter when mentors are supposed to support their colleagues' professional development? First, teachers' and the principal's perceived possibilities and challenges are presented and second, mentors' perceptions of the same questions.

Teachers' and principal's perceptions of possibilities and challenges
All the teachers who participated in the project were satisfied with the possibility for professional learning activities the educated mentors presented them through the project. What the teachers who visited each other in the classroom claimed to be the most useful part of the mentor process was the consciousness they developed of challenges they were only slightly aware of beforehand.

One of the observed teachers said:

"I think there is an effect that is bigger than you can understand, e.g. compared to external courses. I think that, gradually, you will become a better teacher. You will improve what you need to do better and even change your attitudes when something doesn't work. This is an ongoing process, but I am sure that it makes you a better teacher."

Teachers who participated in the peer-group mentoring experienced that their own problems were illuminated from different perspectives, something that gave them new ideas concerning how to solve or handle their own problems (9). Due to the strict structure and protected time of the peer-group mentoring sessions they had to stay focused. The problems they discussed were specific to the

teacher who "owned" the problem, but still general and recognizable to the colleagues who acted as critical friends. Some mentioned that they had learned to know their colleagues better (4). Two of the teachers said that group mentoring had made them more self-confident. The reason was that listening to other teachers' challenges had taught them that what they did in their own classes worked fairly well.

The most frequently mentioned challenge was that teachers who did not participate in the project were allowed to spend time on individual work and could decide which fields to focus on. Most of the teachers were sceptical to future mentoring activities because of lack of time.

The most frequently mentioned reason from the teachers who did not participate was extra workload and lack of motivation.

The principal had realized during the project that the educated mentors represented an important resource for the school. She saw that that they were able to take even more responsibility than they had done in this project. Educated mentors are key instruments in school development, according to the principal. Her hope was that mentors should be used as support for their colleagues' professional learning activities also in future. What she saw as the greatest challenge, however, was her perceived lack of autonomy as a school-leader. Compared to other countries like for example Scotland she claimed that due to demands from political authorities Norwegian school-leaders have less freedom to decide what their staff should spend time on.

Summing up, teachers and principal agree to the fact that mentors can act as a support for their professional development. The main reasons were selection of activities, strict leadership from the mentors and protected time. Through classroom-observations and peer-group mentoring they got to know their colleagues better, to go deeper into the problems they daily had to cope with, to get feedback and be stimulated to collective reflection. The main challenges they saw, were that participation was voluntary and that there were so many other important tasks that should have been discussed and solved.

What possibilities and challenges did the mentors encounter?

The mentors claimed that mentor education had contributed to personal confidence and consciousness concerning mentoring (7). An important reason for the safety they experienced as mentors was the theoretical knowledge base they had acquired through education combined with practical exercises in mentoring. Based on theoretical perspectives they could argue for the significance of peer-mentoring as support for professional development. By the end of their studies they were able to see their school in a meta-perspective and to figure out what activities they would suggest to promote professional learning for their colleagues (6). They judged the project to be successful according to the aims and their expectations concerning support for professional learning. It is unusual for teachers to be leaders of other teachers in Norway. All the mentors answered that they believed their colleagues had learned from and appreciated the mentor project (11). Two mentors claimed that their colleagues were taken by surprise by this fact.

So what had the mentors experienced as leaders and participators? The mentors who answered were uniformly positive and asserted that they had learned a lot (11). Some mentioned that their confidence as a mentor had increased (3). Still others reported that they were anxious to be leaders for their colleagues, but experienced that they were respected:

> *"Because I was the leader of the groups it was a support for my self-esteem as a mentor. I got a new understanding of teachers' challenges, how they reflect and how they are able to support each other with new solutions."*

According to one of the respondents, the project made them see the connection between theory and practice:

"Through this project, I have reached a goal I never have reached before: To be able to explain practical challenges supported by theory. I have also gained new strategies for mentoring and refined the ones I already had."

The mentors' main concern, however, was time. Mentoring activities are easily exchanged for other activities that may seem more important at the moment. Appointments are easy to cut. During the project period the four hours on Wednesday were sometimes reduced to two due to other important matters that had to be discussed. Finally, the mentors were asked about their perceptions of the future role of mentors in Norwegian schools. Those who answered this question were afraid that lack of time and resources would strangle the position of mentors (11).

To sum up, all the mentors agree to the fact that it was a great possibility to be given the responsibility for the project. Through mentor-education they had gained a new insight and new competence. Through the project they were given the possibility to link theory and practice through experience. To act as leaders for their colleagues was scaring, but they experienced to be respected for their new role.

Discussion

In the next paragraph mentors' possibilities and challenges in supporting their colleagues' professional development understood as sustained, long-term and self-going is discussed. Mentor-education offers education beyond qualification for teachers. What kind of competence should students develop through this study in order to be able to support teacher professional development for newly qualified as well as experienced colleagues? In 2015 formal mentor-education was offered at 16 different teacher education institutions in Norway. Organization and content differs from one institution to another. However, the Department of Education has suggested a common aim for the study stating that "—mentors are supposed to be a support for newly qualified teachers' identity in a challenging and complex profession" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2015, p. 59). While the Whitepaper from the Department focuses on mentors' individual support of newly qualified teachers, findings from the current study show that teachers across years of experience including the whole staff claim to learn from peer-mentoring experiences. Findings in this study show that mentors are able to organize and lead a process promoting professional learning activities for all their colleagues. The answer to the question of competence is that through mentor-education students should learn how to challenge and change the teaching profession in learning communities in line with Hargreaves and Fullan's suggestions (2000, p. 55). Professional development for mentors should be to act as leaders for their colleagues' professional development. In the peer-mentoring project described in this study, mentors were given the opportunity to use their professional knowledge and lead the process of supporting their colleagues' professional learning activities. Findings show that the activities the mentors selected were judged from the participants to be a support for professional development.

The principal had an important position in promoting and supporting mentors' possibilities. She was enthusiastic to the idea from the beginning and crucial for accomplishment of the project. Although she knew there were lots of other activities to spend time on, she was willing to support the peer-mentoring project. Findings in this study show that the principal had a crucial position as a door-opener and a supporter for the project. A huge body of research shows the importance of principals' support for teachers' professional learning and development (Schleicher, 2014; Alexandrou & Swaffield, 2014). The reason why the mentors were given these possibilities was also

depending on the fact that I as a facilitator from outside took the initiative to start the project. According to the definition of a community of learners, guidance from outside the institution is important (Helleve, 2010). In this project the mentors also acted as facilitators who asked questions and stimulated to reflection.

Still another finding deals with the dilemma of non-participation. A challenge that mentors and principal had to answer was whether the peer-mentoring project should be voluntary or not. In this case, they chose to give the decision to the teachers themselves. According to Hargreaves and Goodson (2006, p. 35) practice changes before beliefs and the most effective strategies are top-down and bottom-up which means that all the teachers should have participated. On the other hand, what would mentor dialogues be like if teachers were forced to participate?

The study shows that educated mentors can be a support for colleagues' professional learning in designing learning activities where teachers can learn from and with their peers (Opfer and Pedder, 2011). Through theoretical perspectives and practical experiences mentor education had made them conscious of why peer-mentoring was an important tool for professional development in schools and how they wanted to organize and lead the project (Lauvås & Handal, 2000). The principal, the mentors and most of the teachers were positive to the project and wanted the professional learning process to continue. What seems to be the main challenge, however, is the finding that shows that many external demands disturb the inner activities of this school's organization. According to the principal, she cannot decide that they are going to drop other activities and give priority to mentoring, even though she knows that it would be the best thing to do. The school leader and the mentors seem to lack the professional autonomy and power to decide that the mentoring activities should continue. One reason may be that Norwegian school leaders, teachers, and accordingly also mentors, have less autonomy than educators in many other countries within the OECD-region (Schleicher, 2012).

Conclusions

Norwegian policy documents claim that teachers should develop an identity as teachers through professional development. However, the OECD reports TALIS (2008; 2013) reveals that Norwegian teachers lack opportunities for participation in professional learning activities promoting professional development in learning communities compared to teachers in many other countries. Simultaneously, Norwegian teachers are offered formal education as mentors. Educated mentors gain a new competence that makes it possible to say that a new profession is emerging in schools (Smith & Hansen, 2012). This study shows that educated mentors if they are given the possibilities can act as professional leaders of their colleagues' professional development processes where the aim is to challenge and change the teaching profession (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2000). The question is if there is a willingness to use the possibility?

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Appendix:

Questionnaire for teachers
(translated from Norwegian)

Age_____years

Gender: Male/Female

Experience as teacher _____years

What activities did you participate in?

How can you describe your experiences?

How can you describe your learning-outcome?

Do you think the peer-mentoring project will continue?

Why?

Why not?

Questionnaire for mentors
(translated from Norwegian)

Age_____years

Gender: Male/Female

Experience as teacher _____years

Why did you participate in mentor-education?

How can you describe your learning-outcome?

What has been your role in the peer-mentoring projects in school?

What do you think your colleagues have learned? (professional learning)

How do you evaluate your own role/influence in the project?

Do you think the peer-mentoring project will continue