

The first-year as a mentor in Norwegian teacher education – asking for the authoritative word

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Abstract:

In this article I describe and interpret how a first-year mentor for student teachers, Anna, lacks support in her new role within the context of field practice in Norwegian teacher education. Even though she is employed at what is called a “practice school”, she feels alone in her work with the student teachers. There is no one there to answer her questions on how to perform her new role. I argue that due to the lack of an arena where she can discuss her questions, Anna positions herself as someone who should act upon what others have decided. She subsequently asks for the authoritative word from the University College.

Keywords: mentor, practice school, authoritative discourse, internally persuasive discourse

I artikkelen beskriver og tolker jeg hvordan en første års praksislærer, Anna, savner støtte i sin nye rolle som veileder for lærerstudenter i norsk lærerutdanning. Selv om hun er ansatt på det som blir kalt praksisskole, føler hun seg alene i arbeidet med lærerstudentene. Det er ingen til å besvare hennes spørsmål om hvordan hun skal utføre sin nye rolle. Jeg argumenterer for at mangelen på en arena hvor hun kan diskutere spørsmålene sine, bidrar til at Anna posisjonerer seg som en som skal gjøre det andre har bestemt. Hun spør derfor etter det autoritative ordet fra høyskolen.

Nøkkelord: praksislærer, praksisskole, autoritative diskurs, indre overbevisende diskurs

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Introduction

As a researcher, I followed “Anna” throughout her first year as a mentorⁱ for student teachers in Norwegian teacher education for primary and lower secondary school. Throughout the year, she posed a recurring question: “Who can I talk to?” This was a surprise to me as she was employed at what in Norway is called a practice school. Since 2002, student teachers have had access to whole schools as an arena for their training and learning, where teacher teams have taken on the responsibility to serve as mentors. Their primary occupation is to teach their pupils, whilst they are allocated time to mentor a group of student teachers for about two hours each day to promote a reflective stance on teaching. The headmasters are the ones who reach an agreement with the University College (UC) and who, in cooperation with the UC, decide which members of staff should be in charge of the mentor work.

Official documents state that field practice and theoretical studies are seen as two different but equal arenas for student teachers’ learning, and everyone involved should take responsibility as teacher educators (KD, 2009; 2010). From international studies, we know that the transition from being a teacher of children to becoming a mentor of student teachers and acting as a teacher educator is not something that can or should be taken for granted (Carroll, 2005; Edwards & Collison, 1996; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Orland-Barak, 2001). Additionally, mentors are often left alone and have to find their own way of managing the work (Bullough, 2005; Hall, Draper, Smith & Bullough, 2008; Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2010; Zeichner, 2005). In a quantitative study Munthe and Ohnstad (2008) question if the idea of practice schools in Norway has been properly implemented as they found that mentors are still what they call “lone wolves”. However, the mentors are motivated for their new role, and working with student teachers is a role that inspires their own work as teachers (Nilssen, 2014).

Teacher education programs differ around the world, and we should of course be careful when it comes to transferring the findings from studies in other socio-cultural settings to our own. This is the reason why I decided to observe and gain insight into how first-year mentors employed at practice schools in Norway experience their new role. From the student teachers’ point of view mentors are seen as the most credible source in teacher education (Bergem, 1993) and the key persons for ensuring quality in field practice (Zeichner, 2002). I also agree that as they have such a prominent role in student teachers’ learning to teach, it is worth exploring the mentor role more deeply (Jaspers, Meijer, Prins & Wubbels, 2014). The research question in this article is how Anna, as a first-year mentor, is supported in the performance of her new role. An inductive analysis of the data material revealed that she desperately wants someone to talk to, wants to discuss her situation with her colleagues, and wants to be informed by the UC. In interpreting Anna’s experiences, I have used Bakhtin’s (1981) two opposite concepts, the authoritative and internally persuasive discourse. In the next section, I will present previous research on mentor learning and the overall theoretical framework for the study.

Previous research

According to Feiman-Nemser (2001), the widespread assumption that good teachers automatically make good mentors does not hold. Mentoring is not an intuitive activity that can simply be performed as another layer of their professional function as classroom teachers (Edwards & Collison, 1996). Teachers do not automatically develop mentoring skills or responsibilities (Jaspers et al., 2014; Langdon, 2014). Mentoring is rather a highly conscious and gradual process of reorganizing and reconstructing the beliefs and understanding the novice mentor has as a teacher in order to make sense of the new context of mentoring (Orland-Barak, 2001). Orland-Barak sees learning to mentor as a process of learning to teach at a new conceptual level, or as she says, learning a second language of teaching. Mentors also struggle when it comes to knowing to whom they are accountable; they constantly mediate between their personal understanding and values and the external requirements of the work as elaborated by policy makers and administrators (Orland-Barak, 2002). They tend to be underprepared for their work as mentors (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2014) and have to find their own way of doing

this work (Bullough, 2005; Hall et al., 2008; Kwan & Lopez, 2010). A questionnaire answered by 380 mentors in Norwegian teacher education shows that half of the respondents experienced very good support and involvement from the school leadership. Among the other half, 34 experienced no or very little support while the rest answered some support (Følgjegruppa, 2015).

Studies have shown how mentors understand their role, develop their practice, and strengthen their identity by being members of a learning community (Carroll, 2005; Feiman Nemser, 2001; Nielsen, Clarke, Triggs & Collins, 2010; Orland, 2001; Williams, Prestage & Bedward, 2001). For instance, Carroll's (2005) study shows how interactive talk became a tool for how ideas about mentoring were jointly constructed by mentors at the same school and mediated by an external facilitator. By being involved in "learning conversations" where they are encouraged to reflect on their roles in the company of fellow mentors, mediated by an experienced mentor of mentors, they are allowed to articulate the construction of their new role (Orland, 2001). Bullough (2005) proposes that institutions should open for participation in seminars operating as "affinity groups" to help mentors overcome isolation, to facilitate the development of a shared discourse for mentoring, and to enhance mentors' development of skills.

Bearing these studies in mind, and considering the Norwegian system where the entire school is responsible for the student teachers' practice field, I found Wenger's (1998) work on how identity develops through participation in communities of practice a suitable framework for the overall study. Communities of practice are places where we develop, negotiate, and share our own theories and ways of understanding the world. Participation and engagement in social practice is the fundamental process through which we learn and become who we are, as people, as teachers – and as mentors. By engaging in the social practices of a community, participants learn not only the technical skills and explicit knowledge that are required, but also the tacit knowledge and sense of belonging that are an essential part of a person's identity as a member of this particular community (Wenger, 1998; Williams, 2010).

Methodology

The presented study is part of a project that is following six teachers at two different schools through their first year as mentors of student teachers. The aim of the project is to gain more insight into how these mentors experience their new role. For the purposes of this article, data material from one of the mentors, Anna, has been examined to understand how she is supported in her mentor work at a practice school.

The main datasets are two different types of interviews and logs written by Anna. Before she met the student teachers, I conducted a semi-structured individual interview with her, lasting for one hour. Examples of themes in focus during the interview were: being employed at a practice school, becoming a mentor, and preparations and expectations for the new role. Throughout the year, Anna took part in four group interviews with the other two first-year mentors at her school, two in the autumn and two in the spring, each of them lasting for two hours. Topics provided both by me and the research participants were discussed. The topics I proposed were mostly based on what I had read in the participants' logs. I also revisited their expectations from the first individual interviews. All the interviews were transcribed. The participants in the study wrote logs when they were mentoring the student teachers. The idea behind this was to give me insight into their immediate experiences from their daily work with the student teachers. The reason why I have chosen to analyze Anna's experiences more in depth is that she wrote more elaborate logs. Additionally, she provided many issues to discuss in the group interviews and was quite willing to talk about her experiences.

In the analysis of the data material, I have used an inductive approach with open coding. Inspired by the constant comparative method I have used various procedures and techniques as

analytical tools, for instance tables and comparisons (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To identify patterns, similarities, and contradictions in the data material I placed quotations and utterances from Anna in different types of tables. For longer passages, I used meaning condensation where “long statements are compressed into briefer statements in which the main sense of what is said is rephrased in a few words” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 205). For instance, in one such table I wrote utterances from both kinds of interviews vertically and quotations from the logs that either confirmed or disproved Anna’s utterances horizontally. In one column I wrote down questions that formed the working hypothesis based on Anna’s utterances and quotations. For instance, in the first interview I experienced how she seemed to rely on information from the UC on how to perform her new role. I asked myself if this was a frequent pattern and searched for data to confirm or disprove this. When this was confirmed, I began to examine the situations where she sought information. Another example is connected to her colleagues. Anna had told me that before accepting the role she had made sure that she could ask for support, but throughout the year I became aware of how she felt alone in her work. How did she deal with this, and where were her colleagues when she needed them? By scrutinizing Anna’s log entries and her utterances in the interviews, I understood that while she wanted to be *informed* by the UC, she wanted to *discuss* with her colleague mentors at her school.

Anna asked many questions, both in her logs and in the group interviews. Some of the questions could be rhetorical, showing her reflections and thoughts on her new role. However, some questions were addressed directly to the UC. As a researcher employed at this institution I sometimes found myself in a difficult situation. In my memo, I have written: “Anna asks me, and perhaps I make the mistake of answering?” I could see that I did not take sufficiently into account how my research participants did not only see me as a researcher. I was also seen as a person representing the UC; they knew I was a lecturer in education preoccupied with student teachers’ field practice. Having noted the experience in my memo, I decided that I should answer the concrete questions that could be answered, whilst other questions were given as topics to be discussed in the group interviews. I felt this was an ethical obligation to my research participants. Ethical care and credibility have also been addressed through the processes of informed consent (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings in qualitative studies can be presented as stories (Cresswell, 2007; Gudmundsdottir, 1997). To reveal Anna’s own voice I have constructed a portrait of Anna written as a diary throughout the year (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The diary is a construction where quotations and utterances from interviews and logs have been assembled and arranged according to a time-line that starts in August, when I first interviewed her, and ends in May, when she wrote her last log and all the group interviews had been completed. Quotations, questions, and utterances from Anna have been arranged according to the dates of their occurrence. The constructed diary shows how Anna, throughout the year, constantly asked for someone to talk to, someone who could give her some answers as to how to perform her new role. The analysis revealed that the study was carried out within a community of practice that did not exist, and I had to go beyond my theoretical framework for an analytical interpretation of the findings. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) point out how you should not be afraid to borrow concepts if they fit your data, putting it as follows: “Although most researchers align themselves with a special theoretical framework, it is standard to borrow from diverse frameworks to make sense of data” (p. 148). Bakhtin’s (1981) two opposite concepts, the authoritative and the internally persuasive words or discourses have been used for the analytical interpretation. This means that I approached this in a similar way as Wollcott (2009), who said: “here is what I saw, presented in terms of what I made of it” (p. 29). He also proposes that “whether to weave description and interpretation together or keep them separate (...) it is again a matter of storyteller strategy and personal style” (p. 28). I decided to do this separately. However, before I present the constructed diary I will introduce Bakhtin’s two concepts used in the interpretation.

The authoritative and internally persuasive word

According to Bakhtin (1981), the authoritative discourse, or word, is strongly anchored in the past, and originally connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. Such discourses may embody various types of content: authority as such, or the authority of tradition, of generally acknowledged truths, of the official line, and other similar authorities. As examples of authoritative texts, Bakhtin mentions religious, moral, and political texts, as well as the word of a father, adults, and teachers. The authoritative discourse can only be transmitted, and requires that we acknowledge it and make it our own. Instead of functioning as a generator of meaning or as a thinking device, an authoritative text, spoken or written, demands our unconditional allegiance. This means that the authoritative discourse permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no flexible transitions, and no spontaneously creative stylizing variants of it. The authoritative word is infused with authority and stands and falls together with that authority. It is not a question of choosing it among other possible discourses that are equal to it (Bakhtin, 1981). On the contrary, the authoritative word or discourse is unable to be in contact with other voices. This contrasts with its opposite, what Bakhtin calls the internally persuasive discourse.

The internally persuasive word does not rest on the hierarchical differentiation of authority between interlocutors (Bakhtin, 1981). Contrary to the authoritative word, the internally persuasive word allows for dialogue, and consequently it awakens new and independent words, or new insights. Bakhtin explains this as follows:

Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. (...) we can take it into new contexts, attach it to new material, put it in a new situation in order to wrest new answers from it, new insights into its meaning, and even wrest from it new words of its own (p. 345-346).

We are encouraged to engage in some type of dialogue with others because this kind of discourse is tightly interwoven with “one’s own word”, “the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else’s” (p. 345). As the internally persuasive word allows and encourages dialogue it awakens new and independent words, or new insights, “the internally persuasive word is not *finite*, it is *open*, in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, and this discourse is able to reveal ever newer *ways to means*” (p. 346).

Findings – Anna’s diary

August: I’m ready to mentor student teachers, or?

Today, I was asked if I wanted to be a mentor for student teachers next year. I immediately answered yes. The idea was exciting. All my colleagues who are mentors describe mentoring as a good experience. It’s not at all dangerous, they tell me with a smile. I’m ready for this. I made sure that I would be able to lean on my colleagues’ experiences for support. On my way home I began to feel a bit nervous, and a lot of questions started to spin around in my mind. What does it mean to be a mentor? What are my responsibilities? What do the student teachers want me to do? Can they learn something from me? At any rate, I’m sure that I’ll learn from them. The headmaster said something about some courses and information at the UC. I hope that I’ll get some answers then.

August: Employed at a practice school – or?

Today I met with Vivi for an interview. Interesting. She asked me how I felt about being employed at a practice school. At first, I didn't understand the question. The headmaster had mentioned how mentors should be proud of their important work. But we have never discussed why we have decided to be a practice school or why it is important. I can't remember that we have ever discussed anything beyond practical matters, such as how crowded it will be, and how we'll have to share computers and other technical matters. I began to see that perhaps there was no shared understanding among the staff of what it means to be a practice school. I would have liked to discuss the mentor role, not only practical matters. The teachers who don't act as mentors should attend these meetings, too. Then maybe they won't complain about the school being overcrowded when the student teachers are here.

Unfortunately, I couldn't attend more than half a day of the courses at the UC. I really think I missed something. I feel like I have been "left behind" as I'm the kind of person who is afraid of making mistakes. I really have thousands of questions I want to ask the UC, and I wish I had a person I could talk to. I have tried to talk to the experienced mentors at my school, but they're always in a hurry. They have just informed me about how much time they spent, and which forms the student teachers should use in their planning. They also told me that there is a lot of paper work. We never take the time to sit down and talk. I would have liked to discuss how to ensure good learning processes for the student teachers. Nobody seems to be interested. Should the student teachers follow one group of pupils, or should they follow my timetable? How can we organize this? In my teacher team some of us are mentors, others are not. Are we free to decide what we think will be the best, or are there any restrictions from the UC?

September: The first meeting with the student teachers – who is in charge?

Right now, I am convinced that being a mentor will be a good experience for both the pupils and me. All four second-year student teachers seem to be eager and responsible. I'm looking forward to discussions. I hope that they'll feel free to ask why I do things the way I do. Beforehand, I asked them to write down their expectations for their experiences in the field. This was advice I received from a more experienced mentor. Not surprisingly, these expectations mirror four individual personalities. And I wonder how I can look after each of them? And how will the pupils respond to each of them? The student teachers want to start teaching on their own immediately. I'm a bit surprised at that, and I wonder what the UC thinks about it? What information did they give the student teachers? Isn't it reasonable to use some time to get to know the pupils first? Anyway, they can do as they want to.

I remember from my own teacher education how we were supposed to carry out tasks or projects in the practice field. I asked the student teachers about this, but as far as they could remember, there were no such tasks or projects. Then, one of the girls told me that last year they had written logs. She found doing this useful, but one of the others disagreed. I felt a bit worried about what to do. Could I decide that they should do this, or was it the responsibility of the lecturers at the UC? I wonder if I should call the institution, but who do I ask to speak to? The institution feels very distant to me. Luckily, the other two supported the girl who proposed the idea of log writing. We agreed that they should write once a week in a log and then they would get a response from me. Later I found out that log writing is obligatory in order to encourage, support, and enhance reflection.

March: Mentoring the student teachers – time-consuming and challenging

Today the student teachers are back for their spring period. Am I doing all right? I don't know. In the student teachers' logs, I can read how satisfied they are. I'm not. Both teaching and planning have become a day-to-day activity. There are no perspectives pointing to the future. Asking the right questions to encourage student teachers' reflection is challenging. I need some more time for that. It's the same with theory. It's been a long time since I was a student.

Moreover, the student teachers are too eager to do everything on their own. Teaching is teamwork – I wonder how they prepare the student teachers at the UC?

In the plans concerning field practice I can read some of the requirements for the student teachers – and the consequences for myself. An example – they should be mentored 9-13 hours a week – that's about two hours a day. There is no way that I can manage that, and when I asked the headmaster if I could use some of the joint time we have, he said no. Therefore, when I have finished my other duties for the day we turn to the mentoring. And all these different forms they are supposed to use in the planning process – am I the one who is supposed to show them how to fill them in? I really think this should be the lecturers' responsibility.

May: Almost a year has gone –

Being a mentor means having a lot of responsibility. I can't believe I entered this role without an hour of supervision myself. I used a lot of energy to develop a framework for this. There was nobody to answer my questions. Nonetheless, even if I don't have a clue as to how I managed the role, I have enjoyed being a mentor for the student teachers.

I failed to make it to many of the meetings at the UC. I remember one day the meeting started early. I decided to let the student teachers take the lesson on their own, having some of my colleagues present – I don't know if that's against the rules.

Writing the report – I got this form from the UC to fill in about the student teachers' competence in different areas – and to point out where they could improve. I didn't really understand the form fully. Anyway, I will do my best with it and then they can come and see me.

How can Anna's experiences be understood?

Through Anna's diary we understand that although she enjoys being a mentor, she lacks confidence and feels uncertain in her new role. Even though she is employed at a practice school together with experienced mentors, Anna is not well supported beyond receiving some pieces of practical advice in her new role. Many questions arise through the course of the year. The way Anna addresses these questions can be understood through Bakhtin's (1981) above-mentioned two opposite concepts: the authoritative and the internally persuasive discourses. I will first discuss how Anna seems to position herself as someone who has the role of implementing what "others" have decided, both in terms of content and structure. These "others" are either lecturers or administrators at the UC. In authoring her new role as a mentor, Anna seems to draw upon the language developed through the authoritative discourse in her relationship with the UC.

In this case, Anna asks for an answer or a text from the authorities at the UC. It seems that she is acknowledging that they have the obligation or authority to tell her how to carry out her work. Examples can be found in her diary, for instance when she writes about being asked to be a mentor in August, and other entries throughout the academic year. Many questions arise, and she often expects the right answers to be provided by employees at the UC. In August she wonders about her responsibilities. She does not know what it means to be a mentor, but seems to acknowledge that she will obtain some answers by attending courses at the UC, where she expects that information will be provided. As she did not attend all the courses, she is afraid of making mistakes; she feels like she is being "left behind".

In her new role, Anna seems to be prepared to do what she is told. She embraces the requirements of the job and is prepared to do what has to be done. She seems to accept that there are rules even if she does not know exactly what they are. An example of this is how she acknowledges that there may be restrictions from the UC on how they can organize the student teachers' field practice. Another example is from September where she wonders about the way

the UC informed the student teachers when it came to how they should start their work in the field. She also seems to hand over the responsibility for tools like log writing and planning documents to the lecturers at the UC.

Before entering her new role, Anna ensured that she had someone to talk to at her school. Through the diary we understand that she was given some advice on how to carry out different tasks, for instance to ask the student teachers to write down their expectations. However, she seems to be stressed because they never had any discussions beyond practical matters and concrete advice. While Anna seems to be asking for the authoritative word with respect to her relationship with the UC, it seems reasonable to claim that she is asking for what Bakhtin (1981) calls the internally persuasive word when it comes to her colleagues at school. This is the type of dialogue Anna is longing for when it dawns on her that there may be no shared understanding among the staff of what it means to be a practice school.

Through Anna's diary we encounter her own voice, her emerging perceptions about what it means to be a mentor, and her growing awareness of her need to discuss different aspects of her own role and what would be the best way of learning for the student teachers. An example is from September when Anna is quite taken aback by the idea that the students should start teaching immediately. She would have preferred that they had observed and become familiar with the pupils first. Anna thinks in what Bakhtin (1981) calls an independent way. He argues that when thought begins to work in an independent way there is a separation between the authoritative word and the internally persuasive word. The tension and dialogue between these two categories forms or determines the individual consciousness. He further claims that consciousness awakens the individual to independent life precisely in the world of alien discourses that surround him or her. The internally persuasive discourse is therefore highly important in the evolution of an individual consciousness.

Discussion

The research question for this article focused on how Anna as a first-year mentor was supported in her new role within the context of a practice school. I have found that because she is not engaged in what Bakhtin (1981) calls an internally persuasive discourse with her colleague mentors, she asks for the authoritative word from the UC. It is, however, paradoxical that Anna only has limited access to the authoritative discourse she asks for as she is unable to attend several meetings and courses. As Anna is given great autonomy in her work it is reasonable to argue that it is not the intention of the UC to force an authoritative discourse on the practice schools and the mentors. But no one seems to take the responsibility for or understand the significance of Anna's need for support in developing a new kind of competence and relatedness in another profession, as has also been shown in international studies (see for instance, Nielsen et al., 2010; Orland, 2001; Williams et al., 2001). This study supports Clarke et al.'s (2014) findings that mentors tend to be unprepared for their work. As with teaching, mentoring is acknowledged as a complex, demanding, and emotionally challenging task (Hall et al., 2008). Rippon and Martin (2006) have pointed out the importance of having self-confident mentors with faith in their ability to positively affect the growth and development of student teachers. Furthermore, Hall et al. (2008) have concluded that self-efficacy is an important attribute of a successful mentor. They argue that it is difficult for mentors to have a sense of self-efficacy if they do not have a clear sense of their role and responsibilities. Confusion over role and responsibility undermines efficacy; and as has been found, Anna does not have a clear sense of her role and responsibility. It is therefore reasonable to assume that it will be difficult for her to develop a sense of self-efficacy.

From a different socio-cultural setting, my study also supports Bullough's (2005) assertion that simply declaring teachers to be teacher educators or mentors, as is often the case, and then occasionally meeting them on campus is not enough. Bullough argues that mentors should be

given the opportunity to expand and enrich themselves as teacher educators. The education ministry in Norway has acknowledged the need for competence-raising among mentors. It is now obligatory to attend a three-month course (15 ECTS) in mentoring. However, while Korthagen (2004) argues that programs, courses, or studies are important in learning a new role or identity, he also points out that there is a relational side, which is about belonging.

As mentioned above, studies from around the world have shown that mentors learn and develop their practice as mentors in the context of a learning community (Carroll, 2005; Feiman Nemser, 2001; Nielsen et al., 2010; Williams et al., 2001). In her new profession as a mentor, Anna has never been given the possibility to become a member of a community of teacher educators. She never gained access to the shared repertoire and the negotiated shared meanings that are essential for professional learning and identity (Wenger, 1998; Williams, 2010). The idea of shifting from individual employment of mentors to engagement of practice schools was mainly a question of the student teachers' need to belong to a "community of practice" (KD, 2009). It would appear that the mentors' need for such a belonging, not as teachers but as mentors, has been underestimated in the Norwegian reform. I have found that the importance of belonging to such a community can also be understood through Bakhtin's (1981) two above-mentioned concepts, the authoritative and the internally persuasive discourses. He points to differences between the neophyte, who is subordinate to a voice of authority, and the person of greater experience, who begins to rearrange, reword, rephrase, and re-orchestrate different voices. Being a member of a "community of mentors" will most probably not only give Anna the possibility to interact and discuss with other voices, but also the opportunity to raise her own voice. Thus it is reasonable to assume that Anna's "own discourse will sooner or later begin to liberate (itself) from the authority of the other's discourse", as Bakhtin (p. 348) contends.

Implications of the study

I have argued that as a first-year mentor Anna is looking for the authoritative word from the UC. We should listen carefully to Anna's concerns to understand why she sees herself as someone who should do what others have decided and why she seems to rely on an authoritative discourse. This is partly because there is nobody else to answer her questions; no time is offered and no forum is provided in which she can discuss what her given role as a teacher educator means. What Anna and other mentors primarily need is a forum where they can share their thoughts and intuitive understandings, and develop their role and identity as a teacher educator in the setting where they work. Not only the individual mentors but also the practice school as an organization need to discuss what it means to be teacher educators – as Anna called for. Teachers eventually discuss pupils' learning and wellbeing, and they need to discuss the issue of student teachers' learning and wellbeing in the same way. In their role as a practice school their professional culture should be characterized not only by critical discussions about teaching, but also about learning to teach. The main implication of the study is not to secure Anna's access to what she asks for. If Anna and other school-based teacher educators are to be seen as equal partners responsible for teacher education and student teachers' learning as stipulated in official documents (KD, 2009; 2010), they have to be engaged in an internally persuasive discourse with employees at the UC.

In this article I have raised the voice of one mentor, Anna. She is not the only one who lacks support in her new role as reported from "Følgjegruppa" (2015). However, 160 of 380 mentors report that they receive very good or some support. We need to listen to several mentors' voices so we can understand more about what is experienced as good support and what kind of support they are receiving.

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ⁱ Within a Nordic context the word mentor is connected to newly qualified teachers. Internationally the word also applies to what we in Norway call “Praksislærer”, and so does most of the literature I cite.