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Induction and the teacher's professional development: an Estonian project

Eve Eisenschmidt

Tallinn University

Memories of the first year of teaching:
The second day of the school week - it was horrible. I felt I couldn't go back. It was so awful that I would never like to experience anything like that in my life again...

Luckily I got help from my mentor. But the problem is, I don't ask for help a lot. When it's a big thing, when I feel that now I have to ask...

In many countries supportive activities have been implemented to help a teacher during his/her first working year(s). In Estonia preparations for the induction year – the support programme for novice teachers – started in 2002. On the national level the programme is implemented since 2004 for all first year teachers.

There are many reasons for supporting teachers' professional development during the first year of teaching:

- (1) Studying to become a teacher is not popular among young people. The number of university entrants into teacher training is decreasing and at the same time the teaching staff is ageing.
- (2) During the first five working years many teachers leave school, trying to find jobs in other fields, thus the educational system loses the resources spent on their preparation.
- (3) The views and beliefs about becoming a teacher have changed. Teachers' professional development is a continuous process, including initial training, induction year (incl. socialization, entering the profession) and in-service training. Teacher training and the first working years have to be connected and the transition from one role (learner) to another (teacher) should be smooth. By regarding the first working years as a professional learning period, we approach teacher training in a complex way.
- (4) Supporting novice teachers during their first working year(s) has an essential place in educational reform. Different measures have been implemented: mentoring at schools and in the region, university

support programmes, continuing educational programmes, etc. The role of an organization is considered essential and the formation of teachers' communities of practice is seen as a way of professional learning. The implementation of the induction year requires the cooperation of several parties: school – university, novice teacher – mentor, mentor – school leader, mentor – university teacher.

Which theoretical model to choose depends on the national educational context and the needs of development. This article gives an overview of the theoretical background of the Estonian induction year and the first results of the implementation.

Theoretical background

Arising from the theoretical standpoints and taking into consideration the trends in Estonian teacher education, we should see teacher development divided into three dimensions: professional knowledge and skills dimension, social dimension and a personal dimension (Figure 1). According to this division the processes supporting the development occur simultaneously in three areas: (1) developing teaching competences, (2) socialization in organization and in profession and (3) developing professional identity. Development in the mentioned dimensions and the corresponding processes take place in the school context and are influenced by the processes within an organization.



Figure 1. The theoretical foundations of the induction year (Eisenschmidt, 2006).

Thus, the theoretical foundations of the induction year in Estonia are as follows:

(1) Schools are seen as learning organizations, with existing teachers' learning communities; organisational learning of teachers and supporting each other's professional growth takes place within an organization (Senge 1990; Fullan 1991, 2006; Imants 2003; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2003; Harris & Muijs 2005; Nikkanen & Lyytinen 2005). An important role is played by a school leader as the development of the school in becoming a learning organization depends on the leader's competences (Fullan 2006). The mentor, as an experienced colleague, is a supporter of the novice teacher's professional development in the school context. The mentor provides help to adjust to the school as an organization and to the teacher's profession as well as offers assistance in solving everyday work-related problems.

(2) Evolving into a teacher includes a socialization process, through which the novice teacher becomes a member of the teaching community, accepting the knowledge, skills, qualities, norms and manners valued in the society and in the given school. It is a social process, where the opinions and attitudes of experienced teachers play a big role. Two socialization processes take place simultaneously – socialization within an organization and professional socialization. Professional socialization is more successful if a person adapts to an organization quickly, therefore the focus of the induction year is on adjustment to schools as organizations, on getting to know school culture, the aims of a school and one's colleagues (Lortie 1975; Lacey 1987; Lauriala 1997; Hess 2000).

(3) The prerequisite for the continuous development of a teacher is the readiness to develop oneself, to analyse one's work. In order to ensure the continuity of the professional development of teachers, it is essential to connect the three stages: initial training, induction year and continuous professional development (Feiman-Nemser 2001: 1050). During the first working years the basic competences are developed (among them a suitable teaching style is adopted and a learning environment is created) and the basis for professional self-concept is formed. The ability and possibilities to self-reflect are some of the most important basic skills for professional growth (Schön 1983, Calderhead 1988, Korthagen 1999). David Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning is the basis for the self-reflection process of a novice teacher. During the induction year it is the mentor who supports a novice teacher in the process of reflection and planning of one's development.

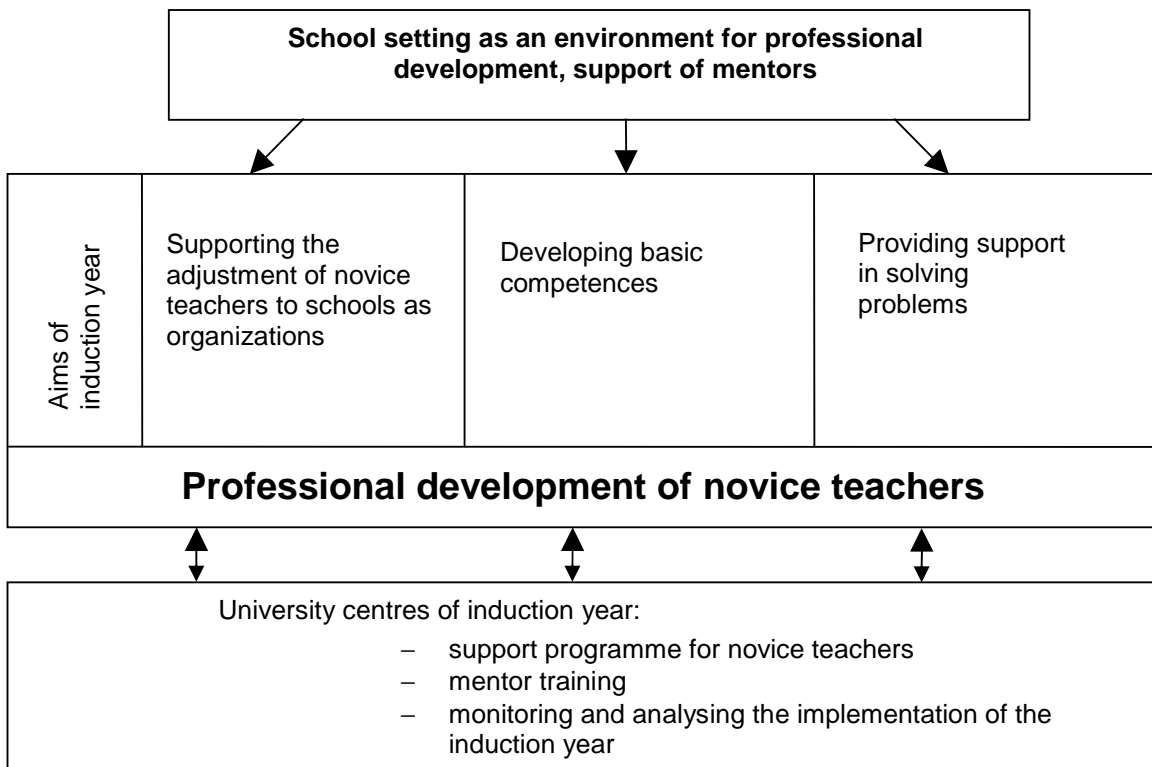
According to the theoretical concept the mentor has three important tasks in the Estonian school system: (1) to support the professional development of a novice teacher, (2) to support the adjustment of a novice teacher to the school as an organization and (3) to participate in the school's development.

At the same time the induction year is an opportunity to implement reforms in the educational system, and to support the implementation of the ideology of professional development of teachers and

workplace learning. Supporting the development of a novice teacher also influences the development of schools as organizations; the possibility of teacher cooperation increases; and an atmosphere of a learning community is formed (Fullan 2006; Hargreaves 2003). In order to evaluate the chosen theoretical foundations, an appropriate implementation model has to be designed, which determines the activities of all the parties involved in the process as well as the principles of implementation.

The implementation model of the induction year

The focus of the model (Figure 2) is on the professional development of novice teachers and is supported by the school setting on one side and the support programme organized by the university induction centres on the other side. The aims of the induction year were determined as follows: (1) to support the adjustment of novice teachers to schools as organizations, (2) to further develop the competences acquired in initial training and (3) to provide support in solving problems caused by a lack of experience.



In the model two approaches are combined: learning and development in the school setting and the meetings of novice teachers in university centres. The principles supporting workplace learning and professional growth of novice teachers inside the school have been researched and have evidence based theoretical foundations. Less attention has been turned to the reasons why it is essential to organize the meetings of novice teachers at universities.

The following circumstances have caused the implementation of university support programmes:

- 1) international research shows that the teacher's eagerness to self-reflect is insufficient (Harrison et al 2005) and mentors are more oriented toward supporting adjustment to school culture (Wang & Odell 2002);
- 2) meeting with other novice teachers helps to understand the universality of the problems encountered by beginning teachers, which relaxes tension and supports novice teachers in their professional development;
- 3) while adjusting to the school setting, problems might arise, which novice teachers do not want to discuss with their mentor, or conflicts might emerge, which can be discussed during the support programme in university centres;
- 4) this provides a link between teachers' initial education and continuing professional development.

In the implementation of the induction year model there are four parties. In the school setting (1) a school leader, who is the creator of the environment that supports learning and professional development, and who appoints a mentor for a novice teacher; (2) a mentor, who is the closest partner for novice teachers and who supports their socialization and professional growth; (3) a novice teacher, who is responsible for his/her own professional development, (4) a university centre providing mentor training, seminars of the support programme for novice teachers and constant monitoring and development of the process (Figure 3).

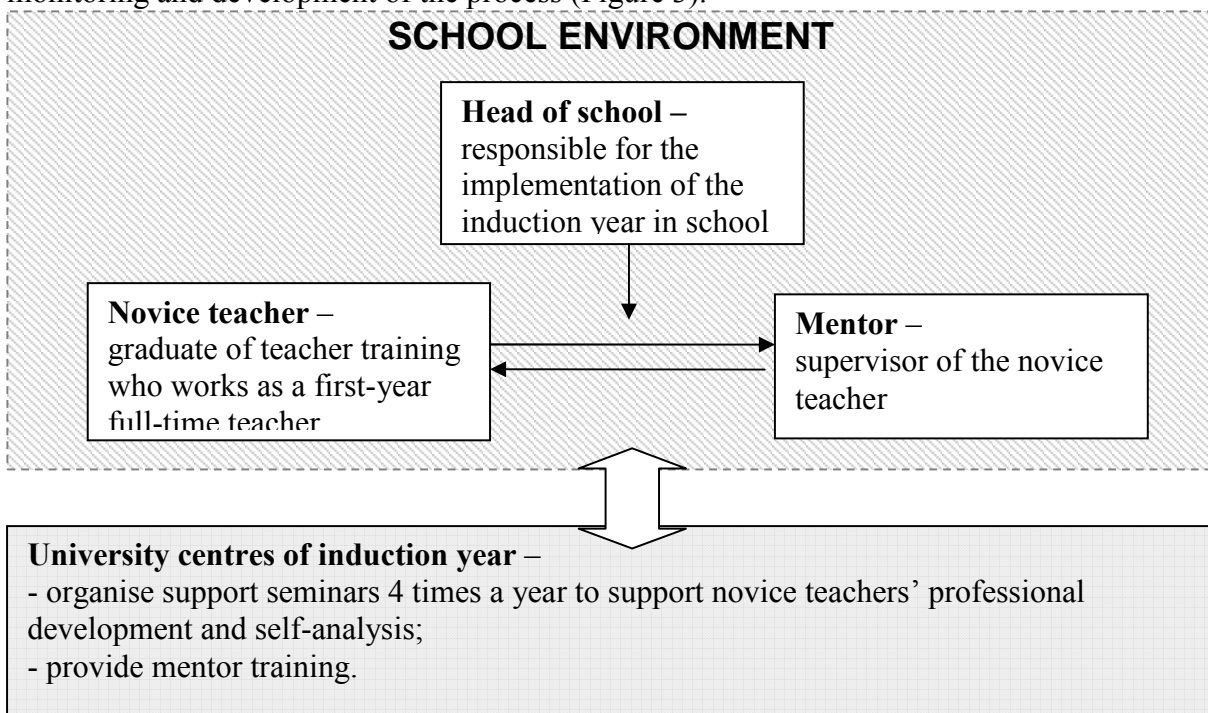


Figure 3. Parties of the induction year.

First results of implementation

It could be said that the first working year for the novice teacher is a period of adaptation to the organization, however, it could be doubted whether the organizational learning actually takes place. It became clear that school environment affects judgements on the professional skills concerning collaboration, self-analysis and professional growth.

Help in solving the risen problems was provided by a mentor. The novice teachers consider the mentor to be the “local guide“. The mentor is successful in the role of supporting the novices in their adaptation to school, however, help in planning the teacher's professional development is meagre.

The school leaders of an organization with higher co-operative culture value induction year as the learning period of the novice teacher.

The novice teachers' assessments of the importance of the induction year were very divergent, which indicates that the value placed on the induction year varied greatly, probably depending on the amount of the assistance received from the mentor, the meaningfulness of the university support programme and the novice's own readiness to analyse his/her professional growth.

The eligibility of the implementation model

When assessing the eligibility of the implementation model, it can be noted that the created model is well-suited for the Estonian educational context, although it requires further development. The partnership of universities and schools in supporting the novice teacher's professional growth can be viewed as an advantage of the implementation model, since this approach creates a tense connection between initial training and the following continuous development. Co-operation with schools provides feedback on the quality of initial teacher training and creates opportunities for interconnecting theory and practice.

The drawbacks of the implementation model are the limited possibilities to directly affect school culture and the development of organizational learning. The teachers' own readiness to analyse their practice and develop professionalism should be more highlighted. University's support programmes should be more oriented towards the process of reflection both while working with novice teachers as well as in mentor training.

Training school leaders has a great impact on school development. Since the process is primarily organized by universities, one major theme of the training should be connected to fostering teachers' professional growth and organizational learning.

Assessing the concept of Estonian induction year in international context, its complexity should be once more highlighted. The partnership of university and school in supporting teachers' continuous development is rather uncommon. By now the network of Nordic universities fostering novice teacher's professional growth and planning the respective research has been created (Newly Qualified Teachers in Northern Europe- NQTNE).

The first experiences of the implementation have created the following suggestions:

- Initial teacher training should lay more emphasis on and create preconditions for the development of the future teacher's professional identity (including professional self-concept). Self-analysis and professional lifelong learning are principles, which should be followed by every professional in the contemporary world. The essential tasks in initial education are to develop readiness for continuous learning and constant professional improvement.
- In mentor training more attention should be paid to the mentors' skills and readiness to support the professional growth of the novice teacher through the process of feedback and reflection in organizational context.
- More and more significance lies in organizational learning and learning community as a setting for fostering a teacher's professional development. The discussed topic should be more reflected in the context of school development and school leaders' prior training. The new forms of the continuing professional education are based on co-operation, more knowledge is acquired in networks and from each other. Therefore, school environment should become more supportive of teacher's learning and development and the teachers as well as the school leaders should master the skill of fostering organizational learning.

The question of changes in implementation of the induction programme is more complex. The changes on the level of understanding are more easily achieved in schools which have the characteristics of a learning organization, because these schools are oriented towards the idea of teachers' professional learning. The key person of the educational system – the teacher – becomes a guide of her/his own professional development. Support programmes reduce work-related stress and should bring the young teacher to school.

Memories of a second year teacher:

These first years have taught me to know my weak sides as a teacher. I have to develop my skills. I noticed my weak points thanks to the self-analysis. But sometimes I think that I analyze myself too much... The tasks that life throws in front of us should not be this difficult, because at one point the question arises – how big a price should I pay for becoming a good teacher? However, I like my job and I have always been proud of saying that I'm a teacher.

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