

THE ROLE OF MENTORING IN PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION OF NOVICE TEACHERS

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Abstract

Entering teaching profession is considered as the most determining stage in a teacher's professional life. The aim of this research is to explore opinions of novice teachers in Latvia about the role of mentoring in their professional socialization. The following research questions were defined: (1) what difficulties novice teachers faced during their in-service experience? (2) what support novice teachers needed when they started teaching? (3) what the role of mentoring in teachers' professional socialization is? Qualitative research design was developed for the research. Empirical data were obtained during the focus group discussion with ten teachers representing Council of young teachers (in age below 35) of the Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees, nine semi-structured interviews with novice teachers, and interview with a mentor.

Novice teachers face teaching reality which often differs from perceptions about the profession developed during the studies at university. The research shows that teachers from the sample faced following challenges during their first years of in-service: establishing teacher's authority and self-positioning as a teacher, time management, problems with discipline in a classroom, lack of skills to develop curriculum and lesson plans, difficulties in communication with parents. During socialization novice teachers learned their responsibilities and acquired specific knowledge; appropriate support such as mentoring reduced level of stress and uncertainty while novice teachers adapted to school during the period of transition from pre-service period to in-service period. In relation to mentoring, novice teachers expected that a mentor would introduce them to school traditions and internal rules and would advise on discipline in a classroom as well as would help to develop curriculum. Policy makers should focus on teachers' support guidelines at national level, which would allow schools to ensure the most appropriate environment for novice teachers so that they would like to continue their careers in teaching profession.

Key words: *mentoring, novice teachers, professional socialization, teacher retention, teaching profession.*

Introduction

Entering teaching profession is considered as the most determining stage in a teacher's professional life. First years of a teaching can influence the length of career, effectiveness of work and job satisfaction. During initial phase of in-service experience, teachers form their professional identity (Píšová, 2013) therefore it is so important that teachers integrate in school successfully. Previous studies indicate a great number of beginning teachers who leave teaching shortly after the first years of in-service experience (e.g. Buchanan, Prescott, Schuck, Aubusson, Burke, & Louviere, 2013; Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014); therefore countries seek to find approaches and instruments in order to reduce this trend. In socialization of new teachers, different factors such as the state educational policy, local district and school conditions interact with personal and professional backgrounds of teachers (Achinstein, Ogawa, & Speiglmán, 2004). As Píšová states, the evidence from previous studies is particularly important and should be taken into consideration when designing teacher career system encompassing a systemic attention to novice teacher induction (Píšová, 2013, p. 78). Many studies focus on support the teachers' need in the beginning stage when they as new professionals experience transition from studies to work environment.

Theoretical Considerations: Professional Socialization of Novice Teachers

In a number of studies (e.g. Barrett, Jones, Mooney, Thornton, Cady, Guinee, & Olson, 2002; Huberman, 1993; Petty, Good, & Putman, 2016) novice teacher is defined as one with less than three years of teaching experience. The literature review allows concluding that there is plethora of theoretical analysis and empirical studies on professional life of teachers, their occupational (or in many studies called professional) socialization as well as on support teachers need and receive during their in-service experience. This research focuses on the role of mentoring in professional socialization of novice teachers. When entering an organization, new workers often feel confused and stressed as they are not familiar with its internal environment, their own responsibilities and role expectations yet. In order to become competent members of the organization, new hires have to acquire technical requirements which involve skills related to their responsibilities and socially acceptable and anticipated behaviour (Saks & Gruman, 2012). During socialization within the organization, a beginning teacher as a new member of school community acquires knowledge, values, norms and manner of behaviour as well as adapts to the school (Eisenschmidt, Poom-Valickis, & Kärner, 2011). Pišová concludes that professional socialization is much more than acquiring the skills and knowledge that an individual needs to perform as a teacher, for it includes also understanding and internalising of values and norms that are essential to the profession (Pišová, 2013, p. 77). In general, occupational socialization (in other sources – professional socialization) is a complex and complicated process, during which the specialists adopt certain values and behaviour patterns of the occupation (Vaisburg, 2015, p. 344). It comprises several elements formed and developed in different stages of socialization starting with schooling and career choice and ending with professional activities and improvement of competencies (Vaisburg, 2015, p. 348). Vaisburg also points out that there are three levels of occupational socialization according to the extent to which an individual has passed the stages; the highest level requires passing all stages.

Chronological model of teacher socialization developed by Staton and Hunt includes biography, pre-service experience and in-service experience (Staton & Hunt, 1992). According to this model similarly to the process described by Vaisburg, socialization process starts long before teacher's in-service experience and continues during his or her career. The process is complex and is influenced by many factors such as personal values and beliefs, successful adaptation and integration in school environment, knowledge transfer to students, availability of support from colleagues and administration. Templin and Richards refer to the lecture and experience of McCloy (Templin & Richards, 2014) who states that the teacher socialization occurs during the phases of acculturation, professional socialization, and organizational socialization. According to McCloy, during acculturation individuals gain knowledge about the teaching profession from their teachers, trainers and other important people long before their enrolment in the particular study programme. Professional socialization refers to the period when future teachers are enrolled in respective study programme at universities or colleges. Finally, the organizational socialization occurs when an individual practically acquires teaching profession. From the literature review it is clear, that different authors use slightly different concepts to define stages of socialization, especially referring to the period of in-service.

In school, novice teachers need support in three dimensions: professional knowledge and skills dimension, social dimension and personal dimension (Eisenschmidt, 2006). According to Eisenschmidt, professional dimension focuses on acquiring teacher's roles, self-confidence, professional skills and knowledge as well as future professional development during the teaching career. Social dimension emphasizes the aim to help a teacher become a member of a school community. It promotes integration in a school and profession in general because the support that teacher receives develops understanding of the internal norms of a school, its values, structure and norms. Within a framework of personal dimension novice teachers develop their professional identity and teaching approaches. Professional socialization involves a number of socialization agents including family, educational institutions, employees, the

state, and, of course, community of professionals having different impact on individual at different stages of socialization. Investigating the role of legitimating and how it influences the professional socialization of second-year athletic training students, Klossner concludes that even during their studies, pre-professional students seek to gain a sense of affirmation from socializing agents such as professionals of a field (Klossner, 2008). Students are considered as most influential and primary socialization agents for novice teachers. Also, organizational culture of a school plays a significant role in this process (Barrett et al., 2002), as it can both promote and hinder socialization course.

The Role of Mentoring

Novice teacher has a vision and expectations about what kind of teacher he or she wants to be. This vision and his or her approaches to teaching are based on professional and personal experience. However, work with children in a real classroom can change initial conceptions, break taught principles and teacher can lose faith in his or her own philosophy. Some authors refer to the first teaching experience as a shocking experience (Caspersen & Raaen, 2014) or describe it as a 'reality shock' when expectations of the novice teacher confront reality (e.g. Blakley, 2006). Most of the novice teachers face reality shock; therefore, successful induction programmes and support systems are important to overcome the challenges, to strengthen their coping ability, and to refuse doubts about the choice of the teaching profession. If new teachers do not receive expected support and are not fully acquainted with the school they have joined, they feel frustrated and not welcomed. As one of the respondents in Farrell's study described it: "You're just thrown in to survive yourself" (Farrell, 2016, p.15). In different countries beginning teachers are offered different support. For example, Coenders and Verhoef describe and analyse experience in the Netherlands where beginning teachers together with experienced colleagues collaborate in Lesson Study teams in order to increase their professional development and pedagogical content knowledge in particular (Coenders & Verhoef, 2018). Studies testify that induction programmes play significant role in professional socialization (Nasser-Abu Alhija & Fresko, 2010) thus enabling inclusion of new teachers in schools. The major component of induction is mentoring (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015; Parker, 2010), which means that mentor - an experienced teacher – assists a novice teacher, familiarizes him or her with school environment and the teaching profession. Thus, mentors are key figures and play a central role in the induction programmes (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Stingu, 2013). Socialization of a novice teacher in the induction phase takes place on two levels (into the organization and into the profession) and mentor can serve as a bridge between the new teacher and the school (Stokking, Leenders, de Jong, & van Tartwijk, 2003).

Lack of support is often reported as one of the factors influencing teacher's professional future. As Eurydice study shows (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015), in almost two-thirds of the countries in Europe newly qualified teachers have access to structured induction phases of many different organizational patterns, and their length varies between three months (for example, in Spain) to three years (in Germany). In most countries induction is compulsory; exceptions are Estonia, Slovenia, United Kingdom (Scotland). In Hungary, Portugal, Montenegro, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia the induction phase is limited to mentoring; still in many countries including Latvia the induction phase for fully qualified teachers does not exist (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015), however, mentoring in Latvia is available. In Latvia, approximately one thousand mentors were trained from 2010 to 2013 within the project "Innovative and practice-based teacher education and mentors' professional development" supported by European Social Fund (Mentoru datu bāze). Participation in mentoring programmes and/or supporting new teachers in induction programmes is voluntary in less than a half of the OECD countries, including Latvia (OECD, 2017, p. 391). By focusing on teachers' daily work and teaching situations, mentoring is a tool, which helps to eliminate the mutual isolation of teachers and support their professional

development (Dzerviniks, 2017, p. 150). Studies show that novice teachers who had a mentor have more developed organizational skills and they cope with their responsibilities more easily (Fletcher & Mullen, 2012). The more successful socialization process is, the more confident novice teachers are and the greater is the possibility of teacher retention in a school (Freiman-Namser, 2001; Kelley, 2004). Therefore, policy makers should focus on teachers' support guidelines at national level, which would allow schools to ensure the most appropriate environment for novice teachers encouraging them to continue their careers in teaching profession.

Problem of Research

In Latvia, similarly to many European countries there are fewer teachers in the age groups below 40 than in the age groups above (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013, pp. 90-92; OECD, 2016) which in combination with a declining number of applicants for teacher education could lead to teacher shortages (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013). In Latvia, approximately 30% of teachers working in schools are in preretirement age or retired (IZM, 2017). Alongside inevitable trend of teachers' ageing, another alarming problem in Latvia is that young teachers after graduation often do not choose teaching career in educational institutions. Even though the total number of graduates is sufficient to ensure Latvian schools with the teaching staff (according to statistical data (IZM, 2016) around 1000 new teachers graduate yearly), schools in both rural areas and cities do experience the lack of novice teachers. This problem in combination with a challenge of teacher retention in schools due to inadequate remuneration, stressful job and long hours, low level of occupational prestige, frequent policy reforms in education or other reasons (LIZDA, 2016; LIZDA, 2013) have led to situation when schools permanently face shortage of teachers almost in all subjects but especially in science, mathematics, physics, chemistry, and languages. Induction programmes and mentoring do help to solve these problems as novice teachers are supported during their initial professional socialization (e.g. Hansford, Ehrich, & Tennent, 2004).

Research Focus

Every teacher in his or her professional development goes through several stages: initial teacher education, the induction phase (first independent steps as a teacher) and the continuing professional development (European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2010). During the teaching practice novice teachers gain their first experience and develop an opinion about the teaching profession which does not always reflect whole picture. Socialization into profession requires understanding in personal, pedagogical and ethical contexts, which are related to school, teacher's work, classrooms and responsibilities. This process provides a novice teacher with information about professional values (Nasser-Abu Alhija & Fresko, 2010). On the basis of previous studies, Çakmak summarizes major challenges that novice teachers face: "time management; student assessment; negative relationships with teachers, principals; lack of time (to plan, prepare, carry out administrative duties); establishing positive relationships with students; the need to establish authority; difficulties in aligning instructional techniques to the subject content and evaluation" (Çakmak, 2013, p. 56). Evidence from another study can add some more challenges to this list such as different forms of isolation and workload (Buchanan et al., 2013). Some of these challenges involve less support from the colleagues as expected, lack of experience and knowledge, lack of self-confidence, and uncertainty about one's capacity for work (Caspersen & Raaen, 2014). The aim of this research is to investigate opinions of novice teachers in Latvia about the role of mentoring in their professional socialization. The following research questions were defined as:

- 1) What difficulties did novice teachers face during their in-service experience?
- 2) What support did novice teachers need when they started teaching?
- 3) What is the role of mentoring in teachers' professional socialization?

Methodology of Research

General Background

Topicality of the research is justified with the fact that previous studies in Latvia envisage the threatening trend: novice teachers often leave their careers in school after few years of work experience (e.g. LIZDA, 2013). Therefore, activities and induction programmes for novice teachers to ensure support in their occupational socialization are very crucial in the context of Latvian education system. In Latvia, currently there is an ongoing debate among the Ministry of Education and Science, universities, teachers' professional organizations and wider teacher community on governmental attempts to improve system of teachers' education including professional support during in-service career; teacher organizations emphasize lack of sufficient support system for novice teachers in Latvian schools (IZM, 2017), although mentoring is available occasionally.

Qualitative research design was developed for the study, which was carried out in February to April, 2017. Empirical data were obtained in collaboration with the Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees (LIZDA) during one focus group discussion and later during the interviews with nine novice teachers.

Sample

In the research literature, recommended focus group size per session varies from five to ten (Carey & Asbury, 2012, p. 45). In this study, one focus group discussion with ten members of the LIZDA council of young teachers in the age below 35 was conducted. Members of the council are either novice teachers or those with an in-service experience of less than 10 years; therefore they were asked to share their opinions and experience about the support that beginning teachers need. Two male and eight female teachers representing trade unions and educational institutions from all five regions of Latvia were selected for the focus group after the council's regular meeting.

At the second stage of the research nine semi-structured interviews with novice teachers (two male and seven female in the age below 30) were conducted. Teachers from the sample represented rural and urban schools from different regions of Latvia. Methodological principle of saturation is widespread in the qualitative research (Saunders, Sim, Kingstone, Waterfield, Bartlam, Burroughs, & Jinks, 2017) and was also used in this study for selection the research sample. Saturation means that during the research "no additional data are being found whereby" the researcher "can develop properties of the category" (Saunders et al., 2017), therefore there is no need to include more respondents in the sample. In this research the saturation point was reached at nine respondents as no new insights were received from novice teachers. Respondents for an interview were selected according to analysis of previous research papers and demographic situation (most of the teachers in Latvia schools are female). In order to answer research questions and to form diverse research sample, the following sampling criteria were defined: 1) respondents have to have a teaching experience no longer than three years; 2) teachers have to represent both rural and urban schools; 3) novice teachers have to be both with and without mentoring experience at the beginning of their professional career.

One interview with the teacher-mentor (female) from the capital-city Riga having teaching experience of 20 years also was conducted. Few more interviews with mentors were intended; however, responsiveness of the mentors turned out very low.

Instrument and Procedures

The focus group was organized in collaboration with LIZDA on February 25, 2017. The advantage of the focus group method is that group members can share their arguments and experience, discuss and react to the opinions of other participants, and thus together come to conclusions, which would not be derived during individual interviews (Wilkinson, 2004). The aim of the discussion was to identify needs and experience of novice teachers in relation to support they needed and received or did not receive during their first years of in-service experience in school. The following topics were covered in the focus group:

- motives for choosing teaching profession;
- problems, difficulties and available support during novice period;
- and mentoring and its usefulness in professional socialization.

After the session, the discussion was transcribed and analysed. The results of the discussion were used to define the questions for the individual semi-structured interviews with the novice teachers. The focus group discussion was audio-recorded, and the moderator made some accompanying field notes (Wilkinson, 2004). According to the requirements of the research ethics, the participants were asked for a permission to record the discussion, which was received. The length of the discussion was approximately one hour.

During the next stage of the research nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with the novice teachers. To meet the requirements of the research ethics, the participants were asked for permission to record the interview. Six interviews were audio-recorded; other three respondents rejected audio-recording, and it was respected. Average length of the interviews was 30 minutes. Six interviews were conducted in schools where respondents worked, but other three – outside the school environment. Three respondents had some experience with mentoring, while other six did not have any. It was important for the data analysis. Before the interviews, respondents were informed about the research questions, but to the more specific questions they were introduced on the day of the interview. During the interviews beginning teachers were asked about their everyday challenges in school work, what kind of support they needed and how mentoring helped or could help them. The interview with the teacher-mentor was conducted in order to understand the point of view of the mentor. The interview was audio-recorded and later transcribed.

Data Analysis

In the analysis, the results of the focus group discussion and the individual interviews were integrated, and data analysis was organized around the research questions. At the first stage of the research, thematic analysis was used as an analytic approach to analyse the data obtained during the focus group. In a qualitative research, “thematic analysis is widely used to broadly identify, analyse, and describe patterns of themes” (Carey & Asbury, 2012, p. 83). For this reason, particular approach was useful to identify the needs and experience of beginning teachers during their first years of in-service experience in school particularly focusing on problems, support and mentoring during novice period. The identified themes were later explored in the individual interviews with novice teachers, in order to answer the research questions.

At the second stage of the research a qualitative content analysis of the individual interviews was carried out (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000). The units of analysis (categories) were defined and coded to answer the research questions. The respondents were coded and quotations in the analysis are referred to R with a number from 1 to 8 in case of the interviews with novice teachers and to M if the mentor was cited.

Results of Research*Difficulties that Novice Teachers Faced in School*

Respondents were asked what difficulties they faced during their first year of teaching; and they shared different experiences and feelings. The teachers pointed out that during their studies at university they did not practice how to conduct a real lesson or how to prepare learning materials and curriculum:

“First of all, it was not clear how everything happens, because we did not practice real lessons at university.” (R1)

This element was also missing during teaching practice at school; therefore, novice teachers lacked skills of conducting lessons and attracting students’ attention in real classrooms because they as practitioners were provided with previously prepared materials. Respondents stated that in reality teaching profession differed from their perceptions developed at the university:

“It turned out that university taught something, which completely differed from real life. At the beginning you do not understand how to speak, what to teach.” (R6)

As it was already discussed earlier, former experience and perceptions about the profession have impact on professional socialization of novice teachers; therefore, confrontation situations which do not correspond with expectations may lead to doubts about the pertinence for the teaching. The respondents’ experience shows that curriculum of the university study programmes, as well as the form and content of a teaching practice should be revised. During the focus group and individual interviews, the teachers pointed out that the duration of a teaching practice (two month) was too short, because the adaptation process in school normally takes a longer time; also improving professional skills in a real classroom should be longer than a couple of months. The teachers suggested that pedagogical practice should be introduced already during the first year of studies for the students to understand what the school is, how it is to work there, what the work with children means. This also would help to understand whether teaching profession is indeed suitable for a particular student. Several teachers admitted that preparing and developing plans for the lessons which correspond to the text books and curricula for them were problematic:

“It was difficult to understand how to work with the text book, how much and what exactly to use of it.” (R4)

They believed that these skills should be developed during teaching practice under supervision of an experienced tutor or a teacher.

Similarly to previous studies, this research also envisages that novice teachers face difficulties with discipline in the classroom. The respondents admitted that novice teachers need to put more efforts into earning students’ respect. Students try to test the patience and skills of a teacher, which in turn leads towards disrupted learning process. This happens because novice teachers have not found the most effective way of work yet. Novice teachers shared their experience:

“[...] it was difficult to maintain peaceful atmosphere in the classroom because I felt like a young girl who was not taken by the students seriously and therefore they did everything they wanted.” (R5)

„The greatest challenge was positioning myself as a teacher, because when you are young, it is complicated to make students respect you and to make sure they treat you as a teacher all the time.

Keeping discipline is a great challenge, also uncertainty how to teach students meaningfully and with interest so that students would come to your classes without thinking 'oh, again that history'" (R3)

The respondents mentioned that respect needs to be received from the parents as well. Some teachers have experienced that parents often treat novice teachers as less competent, less proficient and less skilful. This makes it a harder task to gain confidence and support from the parents. The situation was described by one of the teachers:

"The school does not mean you work only with students, as there is also the other side – their parents. At the beginning I had to prove myself, since I was only 23 years old. Some parents accepted my rules and demands unwillingly. They believed I was young and inexperienced." (R2)

Lack of ability to communicate and cooperate with parents may serve as one of the reasons for teacher attrition. Some respondents had observed that children are influenced by their parents as significant socialization agents in terms of how they view teachers' authority: if the parents are negative and do not express confidence in school, the children will behave similarly and therefore teachers can lose their power of authority. It should be noted here that traditionally in Latvian culture offhand communication in school between teachers and students is not an acceptable way of conduct. Still, contemporary democratic behavioural trends in society and in the school in particular focusing on more informal and friendly relationships between teachers and students lead towards situation when teachers feel they are losing their influence. This is particularly obvious in case of novice teachers. One of the respondents pointed out:

"[...] children are very impolite, rude, they do not respect you. They do not treat the teacher as an authority, for example, they do not say "Good morning!" politely but simply call out "Hi! How are you?" when entering the classroom. They do not respect you and call you by your name. They also ignore reproaches." (R8)

These are the cases when novice teachers would need advice from older colleagues; they need to know the internal rules of the school and must be confident that they can rely on them. Also, support from parents is crucial as children adapt to school norms together with their parents. Novice teachers need to learn practically how to maintain good relationships with students and not to lose their respect at the same time. Besides, teachers themselves should take care of their occupational prestige, authority, and professionalism.

To conclude, teachers face various problems and challenges in their novice period and they can influence a teacher's decision to continue teaching career or leave it. The respondents admitted that discipline in the classroom, motivating students and preparing learning materials were the greatest challenges. Still, the scope of problems was larger and slightly differed among the novice teachers. Complicated relationships with children and their parents is indeed challenge while novice teachers themselves try to adapt to school environment and its internal rules. Most frequently mentioned challenges are as follows:

- preparation of teaching materials;
- self-positioning as a teacher;
- lack of information;
- time management and planning;
- work with students and their parents.

Almost all beginning teachers faced these problems and needed support.

Support that Novice Teachers Needed when They Started Teaching

Respondents were asked about what kind of support they received during their first years of teaching and what support novice teachers actually needed. Answers proved that the transition period from studies to work in school was complicated and teachers needed support.

During the socialization process this induction phase is very important, within which support is provided by colleagues and other agents. Teachers were asked to tell how they solved their everyday problems. Almost all novice teachers referred to the support of their colleagues; in general, they were characterized as responsive and helpful. However, colleagues were not always available due to them being busy. Teachers also looked for help in their own families. This complies with theoretical considerations that teachers need support in three dimensions: professional, social, and personal.

Teachers who collaborated with a mentor, received most of the support from him/her, but other colleagues were involved as well. It depends on a particular school what kind of support is available for novice teacher. Respondents were positive about establishing mentoring as a support system available in every school in Latvia. However, currently mentors are not available in each school. In some European countries seminars and additional courses for novice teachers are provided within induction programme for everybody to attend. The respondents agreed that seminars for novice teachers would be useful in the induction phase if the knowledge provided by the courses was really useful, which is often missing in available courses. The teachers mostly were very critical of the courses and seminars they have been attending:

“There are opportunities to attend various courses; however, they often are boring and useless, and even out-dated. Topics of the seminars do not always comply with content. Lecturers do not always work with enthusiasm, which makes me think that the issues they cover during the seminars and solutions they provide are not necessary. But in general, seminars and courses are essential as they improve teachers’ knowledge and skills and facilitate everyday work.” (R5)

A quote from the interview with another respondent – sports/PE teacher - describes a problem of the usefulness of seminars:

“Recently I attended a seminar on badminton. I had to attend it because we were expected to participate as we need to raise our qualification all the time. The seminar took a whole day and at the end I understood that I could not use the information and approaches presented at the seminar because particular activity was suitable for a group of 14 children and therefore was not useful for bigger student groups. It turned out that I spent a whole day for nothing, I gained knowledge I was not able to adapt in practice in real classroom. That type of seminars should not be organized at all, because normally all student groups are bigger. The content of the seminars should be changed.” (R8)

Another problem that novice teachers pointed out is that seminars often are theoretical without workshops and practical activities. But that exact type of seminars would be more useful for novice teachers. As one of the respondents described it:

“Definitely, there should be more practical activities. We always discuss theory, all the time. Students in the classroom enjoy practical activities, so the teachers also would like to be involved in practical activities. They want to explore real situations, to ‘play’ case studies.” (R1)

Topical issues that according to novice teachers’ needs and opinion should be covered in seminars are the use of new technologies in teaching, which would make the learning process more interesting, tips on how to improve communication, and issues of discipline in a classroom. One of the respondents said:

“In seminars, I would like to learn more about how to use new technologies and online resources in teaching and learning process, because I believe students like it. They like visual materials and practical tasks. Also, the communication methods that we could use working with students and their parents would be useful. And courses in psychology what could help to better understand students’ behaviour and needs.” (R5)

One of the teachers emphasized that there is a need for seminars about students' and teachers' rights. It was based on the experience that children know their rights, but often forget about their responsibilities and the need to respect a teacher.

"There are lot of public discussions about rights and responsibilities of children and their parents. There should be also courses and seminars on teachers' rights, as teachers must be informed about their rights related to their work with students." (R5)

Familiarizing novice teachers with their rights could be the responsibility of a school during the introduction to its internal rules.

The content and curricula of seminars and courses need to be diverse, but the main requirement is that they must meet the needs and interests of novice teachers and should be practical rather than theoretical. Former experience of the respondents' points to different cases. The respondents listed the following topics of interest for the seminars that would be very important for novice teachers:

- discipline in the classroom;
- technological opportunities during the learning process (smart phones, tablets, apps, etc.);
- communication with teenagers;
- communication with parents;
- psychological seminars on students' behaviour;
- teachers' rights and responsibilities.

Beginning teachers turn for advice to their more experienced colleagues because this cooperation contributes to integration of novice teacher into school environment. This interaction develops both new professional skills and relationships between colleagues. As the interviewed mentor explained, novice teachers in her school assist experienced colleagues during exams, and this approach allows developing skills gradually. The mentor shared her experience of co-working:

"One novice teacher and one experienced teacher are selected for an exam and the youngest acquires everything step by step. When we check students' papers and works, diagnostic works, we also do it together and this is a way how they learn it. And they pick up everything naturally without feeling that they have been taught. In practice, I let them do what they want while everything is fine. When something goes wrong, we start to discuss it." (M)

In most of the European countries novice teachers are assigned a mentor who gives support in different situations. Some focus group members referred to a particular deputy principal who has fulfilled the functions of mentor.

The Role of the Mentoring in Professional Socialization

Not every teacher had an opportunity to receive mentor's support. During the interviews teachers were asked to share their opinion about the necessity of a mentor and mentor's role in the process of integration of novice teachers. Experience of other countries proves that mentoring in general is a very effective approach to facilitate socialization of novice teachers and to ensure their successful induction into profession. Each teacher needs different support according to his or her needs and interests. The mentor, a math teacher, pointed out:

"[...] The ideal would be that every school had a staff unit for a mentor who takes care of novice teachers, especially when there is more than one. Still, the main support should be received from the teacher of the particular subject. For example, what can I do for young sports teacher? Nothing. Or for the teacher of visual art when I can't even draw! Just some geometrical figures." (M)

Her idea was that mentor and novice teacher should be both teachers of the same subject, as this would be the best support for developing specific professional skills. There should be a special staff member to give induction lectures for novice teachers on general rules where specific professional skills related to particular subjects are not needed.

The respondents who had experience with a mentor were asked to assess usefulness of mentoring. Mostly, the respondents were positive and expressed similar opinions. Still there were differences in opinions about mentor's particular functions and support. One of the teachers said:

"I believe mentoring is useful. Sometimes it is like you really need somebody to ask for advice on how to keep students' attention and rouse their interest. Especially at the beginning I missed the support, - I was young, and students treated me as a peer rather than a teacher and therefore did not take me seriously." (R6)

Another teacher agreed that a mentor is needed at least for a couple of months but only if the mentor is actively involved in a learning process instead of observing, because there is a real need for help in conducting lessons. The duties of a mentor should comply with a specificity of the school subject.

"It would be great if a mentor introduced novice teachers to internal rules of the school, to what behaviour is and is not acceptable." (R8)

Another novice teacher pointed out that a mentor should provide advice regarding discipline in the classroom:

"It would be useful if a mentor could suggest how to maintain discipline in the classroom, how to present myself so that children would respect me. Of course, at the beginning someone is needed to introduce a novice with the school and its order." (R6)

Most of the interviewees acknowledged that mentor's presence in a classroom during lessons is crucial, as this is the only way to identify problems and find solutions in cooperation with a beginning teacher. That was proved also by the mentor who agreed that it is impossible to advice on something if a mentor has not observed lessons and has not identified areas to improve.

According to theoretical assumptions, organizational culture influences productivity, organizational behaviour and self-esteem of the employees. Therefore, it is important that mentors introduce novice teacher to school traditions, values, internal rules and order. This contributes in more successful professional socialization of teachers and helps in their retention in school and teaching profession. It is crucial that novice teachers develop the sense of belonging. One of the mentor's responsibilities is introducing teachers to school environment and teacher's everyday activities. One of the respondents said:

"Mentor helped me to plan lessons, introduced me to school environment and everyday activities." (R7)

Similarly, another respondent mentioned this:

"Most of all, my mentor and I discussed issues related to the preparation of lessons, because when I started to work in school I lacked understanding what to teach, as there were a lot of learning materials but limited number of lessons. My mentor was also a teacher of Latvian and that made everything easier, as she gave me her own previously prepared materials." (R5)

Mentoring is important during the induction phase. The respondents recognize that currently many novice teachers in Latvia deal with everyday situations alone, as there is no

person who informs them even on very simple things; it increases their stress significantly. This can lead to a decision to leave profession. Most of the respondents acknowledged the importance of mentoring in their professional socialization; but they also pointed out that mentoring should be controlled to some extent. At least during the process of lesson planning coordination must be in place: if both mentor and mentee have their own lessons with different student groups simultaneously, the mentor will not be able to attend lessons of the novice teacher, and therefore opportunities to recommend any improvements will decrease.

Mentoring should also be analysed from the perspective of a mentor. It is not difficult to appoint a mentor; but it is important to understand how to make sure that he/she provides the desired support. During the focus group it was acknowledged that mentors as well should be supported, and they need to receive some bonuses for their job. As focus group members mentioned, the bonuses could be more free time and/or paid hours for mentoring, so the mentor would not need to work in classroom compulsory, but he/she would be available in school when needed and everybody who needs it could approach him or her. The mentor also emphasized:

“[...] a mentor could help more if his/her own workload were lighter; mentoring also should be viewed as paid activity in that case.” (M)

During the interviews teachers were asked about the factors that motivate them to remain in school and continue their teaching career. One of the respondents emphasized her love for the teaching:

“First of all, it is the love for teaching, the joy of giving knowledge to children, also the appreciation from school, children and their parents, and the satisfaction with what has been done.” (R6)

Some teachers point out emotional reasons such as satisfaction, while others emphasize the stability which teaching profession traditionally provides as one of the occupations of the public sector:

“The fact that teaching profession implies a stable job, and I know what I can count on. You always know that you will receive your monthly salary.” (R8)

It was proposed that the lack of support can promote teachers' attrition; still, very much depends on teacher's own motivation and willingness to be related with teaching. Six of the interviewed teachers considered leaving teaching profession during their first year of in-service experience; however, after having done careful analysis of situation they made positive decision about continuing teacher's career in school. Besides professional support novice teachers would like to receive support and recognition from municipalities, for example, awards or grants. A more fair remuneration system was emphasized as motivating factor for novice teachers to remain in school. They did not support the norm which is currently in power in Latvia, that amount of the salary depends also on length of the service. Respondents viewed this norm as non-motivating for young people to remain in education system.

Discussion

The research shows that novice teachers from the sample faced similar challenges during their first years of in-service as reported in other studies: establishing teacher's authority, time management, problems with discipline in a classroom, lack of skills to develop curriculum and lesson plans, difficulties in communication with parents. Novice teachers face teaching reality which often differs from the perceptions about the profession developed during the studies at university. This indicates the need to revise university study programmes and organization of teaching practice.

Advantage of the mentoring is that all parties involved are actually winners as everybody acquires new experience. Novice teachers are inducted into the profession and mentors help them to become constituent members of the school community. That lessens a sense of isolation and desertion when a novice teacher starts his or her independent teaching career. Some disadvantages also should be mentioned. There are cases when a mentor and a mentee cannot for some reason develop good relationship and fruitful communication. Teaching approaches and views of a mentor may significantly differ from those of a mentee and that may hinder their cooperation. In this research, mostly positive experience about mentoring was gained. Still, some respondents reported on too strong influence between a mentor and a mentee, so that the mentee became dependent on the experienced teacher and did not even attempt to solve problems independently. Other studies show that novice teachers have also expressed dissatisfaction with mentoring and the relationships with their mentors, for example, because of conflicts over language teaching methodology (e.g. Brown, 2001). As Stîngu states in her study (Stîngu, 2013, pp. 155-156), mentors, however, also encounter difficulties such as lack of understanding of a mentor's role, non-integrated mentoring activities in a day-to-day schedule of mentors and beginning teachers, and novice teachers' resistance to change. Hansford, Ehrich and Tennent in their article analyse hundreds of studies focusing on the nature and outcomes of mentoring and conclude that mentoring programs should consider maximizing the experience of mentoring for all stakeholders (Hansford, Ehrich, & Tennent, 2004).

Theories of professional socialization explain how new professionals integrate into the workplace emphasizing the role of support. During socialization teachers learn their responsibilities and acquire specific knowledge; appropriate support such as mentoring reduces level of stress and uncertainty while novice teacher adapts to school during the period of transition from pre-service (university) to in-service (school). Successful professional development within a profession is determined by consecutive stages: initial teacher education, the induction phase and the continuing professional development. When all stages are not passed successfully, novice teacher may fail in fulfilling professional duties, which in turn can lead to the decision about leaving teaching profession. Studies in different countries seek to understand, why some early career teachers choose to remain in the profession and why others choose to leave (e.g. Buchanan et al., 2013). Brown in his study concludes that "conventional conceptions of mentoring may only be a marginal factor in the survival of these teachers in their first year" (Brown, 2001). The research results presented in the article also show that the final decision about retention in school was often made on the basis of personal reasons (love for teaching, recognition, sense of stability) rather than support received from colleagues or mentors in particular. Still, the presence of a mentor and collaboration with him or her smoothed out the process of professional socialization and those teachers who did not have a cooperation with a mentor acknowledged that most likely they would have liked to have it.

Conclusions

Regarding the research question on difficulties that novice teachers face, the respondents reported on the following problems they encountered in the first year of teaching: self-positioning as a teacher, maintenance of discipline in a classroom, planning lessons, preparation of tests and student assessment, motivating students to study, communication with parents, and lack of information about the school where a novice teacher works.

In relation to mentoring, novice teachers expect that a mentor would introduce them to the traditions and internal rules of the school, would give advice on discipline in a classroom, and would help to develop plans for lessons. In the countries of European Union, novice teachers are supported in different ways in their professional socialization: teachers are offered induction programmes within which seminars and courses are provided, meetings with other

novice teachers organized, and mentor's support received. In Latvia, there is a need to improve the support system that would contribute to teacher retention in schools. Currently there is no coherent and structured system of induction programme in all schools offering mentoring to novice teachers. It is a free and independent decision of every school to appoint a mentor or not; beginning teachers also may accept or deny mentor's help.

Many novice teachers consider leaving teaching profession during their first year of in-service experience. Six novice teachers of the nine who were involved in the study referred to their own reflections about leaving profession: difficulties to become a member of the school community and thoughts about leaving the teaching was provoked by the lack of understanding and respect, inability to cooperate with parents, the lack of recognition from students, complicated work with problematic students. They shared the opinion that state support is not adequate in terms of remuneration which is not competitive in comparison with other professions of public and especially private sectors. The workload is high; novice teachers make additional effort to prepare learning materials as they have just started teaching, and that pools more stress and shortage of time. Future studies are needed to understand what the best support system for novice teachers is and what legal regulations should be established to improve the process of professional socialization.

More than thousand mentors have been trained in Latvia; however, there should be developed a system at national level of how to involve these teachers in the support system for novice teachers. One of the solutions would be to include mentoring responsibilities in teacher's workload; thus, mentors would receive remuneration for their contribution. Another problematic issue is that mentors often do not have enough time to spend with their mentees because their own workload in a classroom is enormous; so, they simply cannot get involved in mentoring activities meaningfully. This can be resolved by ensuring that mentoring activities are paid and included in teacher-mentor's workload.

Comparative study focusing on both novice teachers and mentors should be carried out in a future. This research sought to reflect the experience of novice teachers during their first years of in-service including the aspects of professional socialization; however, to capture the whole picture, future research about mentors' experience would be very useful to improve their status and support in providing mentoring.

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Received: March 30, 2018

Accepted: June 03, 2018

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