

Chapter 8

Collegial Mentoring for Professional Development

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Abstract Various forms of mentoring and ‘collegial learning’ are often used to enhance teachers’ continued professional development. Teachers’ collegial learning is emphasised in the research literature as a keystone to achieving educational change. When teachers come together to scrutinise their own questions raised from practice, sustainable changes in teaching and classroom situations increase. However, there has been little examination of what kind of professional learning and educational change is possible in practices of teachers’ continuing professional development (CPD) based on collegial learning. To understand what happens in the practice of CPD, and to examine what professional learning is possible in the specific practice, it is crucial to examine the arrangements that hold the practice in place. In this chapter, a practice of teachers’ peer group mentoring (PGM) is examined through the lens of practice architectures. Foucault’s notion of power is also used as a theoretical frame. This analytical approach brings new insight to what enables and constrains professional learning in mentoring practices.

There is a strong discourse in Sweden, as in many other western countries, concerning the (presumed) need for teachers’ continuing professional development. In the wake of global educational comparisons like Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA), teachers’ continuing professional development (CPD) is emphasised as one of the keystones for enhanced results, both in the media and in political rhetoric. Kennedy (2014) refers to this as a “global hyper-narrative” (p. 691), which is based on an idea that improved teacher quality will improve pupil outcomes and, in turn, increase the economic competitiveness of national-states. Kennedy argues, however, that the literature about teachers’ CPD is under-theorised and fragmented. She calls for more sophisticated research that will shed light on the complexity of CPD and help to develop a deeper understanding, especially as there is a tendency towards policies with an instrumental and simplistic view on the relationship between teachers’ learning and student outcomes.

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This chapter provides further input into the current discussion about teachers' continuing professional development in general, and more specifically, it is an attempt to contribute, by using the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis and Grootenboer 2008; Kemmis et al. 2014), to a deeper understanding of the complexity of CPD when practised as 'collegial learning' through peer group mentoring (PGM). Foucault's notions of power have also been adopted as a theoretical lens. According to Foucault (2002), power is always relational and it is exercised and productive rather than possessed and regressive. Power is fluid and there is power in all relations and it affects all actions. These theoretical and analytical approaches expose the arrangements that constitute and hold the practice of peer group mentoring in place. Furthermore, they shed light on what professional learning and development is constrained, enabled, and enhanced in peer group mentoring practice.

The chapter's focus is on teachers' CPD, based on a case study conducted in a Swedish secondary school over 2 years, and involving a teacher team encouraged by the Principal to participate in a practice of peer group mentoring to enhance professional learning and development. The teachers used a well-structured nine-step model of peer mentoring that will be outlined in this chapter. The purpose of the CPD project was to share teaching experiences so as to enhance pedagogical knowledge development. The teachers wanted to improve the teaching of what they described as a "new multicultural student-group from the suburbs" who had recently attended the school.

The following questions are examined in this chapter: *What kind of professional development was enhanced through the practice of peer group mentoring? Why was this particular development realised in this practice?* and *What did the practice architectures of the peer group mentoring practice look like?* The last two issues are illuminated first, and the chapter concludes by highlighting the professional development that became possible in this practice. Although a practice and its practice architectures, its participants, and the site in which the practice takes place are intimately entangled in a mutual and generative enmeshment (Mahon et al. 2017, Chapter 1 in this book), they have here been analytically separated to show how the theory and its key terms can help us to explore and illuminate a practice of professional learning and its outcomes.

Background and the Site

The practice of peer group mentoring discussed in this chapter occurred within a particular teacher team in a public inner-city secondary school in Sweden. In Sweden, teachers have been organised in teacher teams since the 1980s, with their organisation being stressed by a 1994 Bill (curricula Lpo 94; Lgr 80). The composition of teachers in these teams may differ, but frequently the teacher teams are structured around a student group. In this particular case, the teachers had been organised by the school management into teams of teachers who were teaching the same students but in different subjects.

Students attending this school were mostly from a well-educated, white, middle-class neighbourhood. The composition of the student body had, however, recently changed with the arrival of a new student group. The teachers and the Principal described this new group of students as a “multicultural student group from the suburbs that needed another kind of pedagogical tool”. Since all students by law have a tax-funded ‘voucher’ based on the neoliberal principle of user choice implemented in Swedish schools and society at the beginning of the 1990s allowing students to choose to attend any school (public or independent) in their municipality, many suburban students choose to attend the inner-city schools. This decision to leave the suburban schools often leads to disappointment rather than an experience of something better. Historically, the inner-city schools have teachers who are not well prepared to teach multicultural student groups. They do not have knowledge in second language teaching and learning, for example (Bunar and Kallstenius 2006; Langelotz and Jämsvi 2008; Langelotz and Rönnerman 2014). Some of the teachers in the teacher team discussed in this chapter had been trained 20 or 30 years earlier for a ‘monocultural’ school system very different from that of today.

The formation and activity of teacher teams at the school, from the perspective of the theory of practice architectures, was directly linked to material-economic arrangements such as school budgets and funding from the government. Teachers had to leave teams, for instance, when the school budget was restricted. The possibility of having time for collaboration in the teacher teams was also tied to funding arrangements. The changed circumstances in the inner-city school in a neoliberal market-oriented and multicultural society thus constituted *the site* of the peer mentoring practice.

The teachers expressed their need to enhance their pedagogical knowledge in order to meet the new circumstances at school (and in society). As a response to the teachers’ frustration, the Principal offered them continuing professional development (CPD) in the form of peer group mentoring (PGM), in their teacher teams. In line with the theory of practice architectures, the CPD can be understood as the *project* of the practice. This is discussed in the next section.

The Project(s) and Some Enmeshed Arrangements

The aim of the CPD, or in other words, *the project* of the peer group mentoring practice in this study, was broad: to improve pedagogical knowledge and to enhance student learning (in particular, in relation to the “new student group”). This is in line with how teachers’ continuing professional development is defined in the Swedish municipal main agreement: “*efforts aimed at developing teachers’ ability to create good conditions for students’ learning*” (HÖK 12: M). Furthermore, it is noted that all teachers have the right to participate in CPD, and the point of reference is 104 h per full-time employee per year according to the agreement. This is another of the material-economic arrangements enmeshed in the project and the practice.

As mentioned earlier, the teachers used a well-structured nine-step model for the group mentoring in this project to achieve their aim. This nine-step model was a strong part of the practice architectures both in its physical (material-economic arrangement) and in its cultural-discursive form. The model ‘stirred the participant into the practice’ (see Mahon et al. 2017, Chapter 1, this book) through its explicit rules for how to speak and how to manage the mentoring practice.

Before the nine-step model and the practice of PGM are elaborated further, there is reason to mention something about the research project that became deeply connected and partly entangled with the project of the practice of peer group mentoring. The research project (a doctoral thesis project) was aimed at examining professional learning and answering the question of what ‘makes’ a ‘good’ teacher? The question can be understood in at least two different ways. Firstly, what does a ‘good’ teacher do? And, secondly: What kind of practices and external arrangements make (constitute) a ‘good’ teacher? (Langelotz 2014). Hence, both an epistemological and an ontological approach to practice have been applied. The approach used in the research project was based on a Nordic tradition of action research methodology, which shaped the actions undertaken in the conduct of the research practice. The researcher within this tradition is seen as an organic part of the project that is investigated, and equal to the other participants. Hence, cooperation and discussions among the participants (teachers and researcher) are seen as fundamental for knowledge production (Salo and Rönnerman 2014).

Accordingly, two parallel projects – teachers’ continuing professional development and the research project studying the PGM – were here deeply related to the practice of peer group mentoring and the teachers’ professional learning (cf. Langelotz 2014). Figure 8.1 below shows both these projects.

The research project and the teachers’ CPD-project sometimes merged into a mutual practice where both the projects involved were nurtured and a communicative space evolved. A communicative space is, according to Kemmis and McTaggart (2007) elaborating on Habermas’ concept, when people get together with the intent of reaching a mutual understanding and an unforced consensus about how to move on. Or as Habermas (1996) put it:

Unlike success-oriented actors who mutually observe each other as one observes something in the objective world, persons acting communicatively encounter each other in a situation they at the same time constitute with their cooperatively negotiated interpretations. The intersubjectively shared space of a speech situation is disclosed when the participants enter interpersonal relationships by taking positions on mutual speech-act offers and assuming illocutionary obligations. Every encounter in which actors do not just observe each other but take a second-person attitude, reciprocally attributing communicative freedom to each other, unfolds in a linguistically constituted public space. This space stands open, in principle, for dialogue partners who are present as bystanders or who could come on the scene and join those present. (pp. 360–361)

The field notes from the study which this chapter draws upon read: “*I cannot not share what I see or what I think I see?!?*” (Researcher’s field notes, September 2008). In these notes a frustration of how to conduct traditional research (where the research project often is alienated from the ones that are involved) is obvious. Hence, the first



Fig. 8.1 Related and parallel projects of the practice of peer group mentoring

descriptive analyses from the research project were discussed with the teachers and the researcher role and approach were negotiated. Consequently, both the teachers and the researcher became involved in and affected by each other's projects (cf. Langelotz 2014). The involvement of the researcher (the research project) nurtured the professional development through deliberative discussions in the communicative space.

In other words, the research project and associated practices became social-political arrangements that enabled and sometimes constrained the mentoring practice and the associated professional learning, which is further elaborated in the next part of the chapter. Both projects were entangled in a cultural-discursive arrangement that included the concept of 'life-long learning' and an epistemological idea(1) according to which knowledge is seen as able to be shared and created among participants in a (learning) practice. These ideas can, with Foucault's (2002) notion of power, be interpreted as normative, disciplining, and sometimes constraining. Individual teachers may be stigmatised as poor if they do not share the epistemological approach (see Langelotz 2013b). Furthermore, the differences in the practice architectures entangled in the projects (CPD and research project) sometimes became obvious. When the teachers were asked to inform themselves and read the first analyses they laughed and said, "If we get paid". The teachers had no time whatsoever to go through the written material, although they were indeed engaged in the research and its (preliminary) outcomes. As a researcher I had the (paid) time

to review the discussions and questions raised during the peer-group mentoring sessions. These material-economic differences partly constrained the possibilities of developing the communicative space. The researcher role was negotiated to become that of 'a story teller' and I handed out written summaries at the end of each semester (Langelotz 2014). These summaries, which were also presented orally, enabled the teachers to develop a different understanding of the practice of PGM, which supported the professional development and the progress in the practice of peer-group mentoring. Both the increasing relations between the researcher and the teachers, as well as the impact of the peer group mentoring, is expressed in the following example:

When you come, it cheers us up! And the PGM makes us see things in a new way (Two teachers (A-S & I) after PGM-session 4, January 2009).

The mutual communicative space entangled in the two projects became one of the arrangements that enabled professional learning. The research project and the project of peer group mentoring formed 'an ecology of practices' (Kemmis et al. 2014). In the following, further arrangements that enabled and constrained the practice of peer group mentoring are illuminated and examined. First, a few comments are made about mentoring.

The Practice of Peer Mentoring and Enmeshed Arrangements

Mentoring related to professional development is not a well-defined concept, and it is used in many contexts with different purposes and based on various epistemological and ontological perspectives. In an educational context, mentoring is used for beginning and experienced teachers' professional learning and can be performed as a group process, or with just two people involved. In group mentoring processes, an external facilitator is often used (Handal 2007; Lindén 2005). Teachers also facilitate each other's learning, however, in more or less organised forms. There are different models to support organised professional group mentoring processes. To enhance pedagogical knowledge and professional learning, the Principal, in this study, suggested the following nine-step model to the teachers for their mentoring practice:

1. each participant has the opportunity to present a case or a problem;
2. the participants choose one case to focus on;
3. a moderator and a secretary are appointed;
4. the case owner carefully describes the case/problem without any interrupting;
5. each participant raises one question each about the case until there are no more questions left;
6. each participant formulates his/her perspective on the case;
7. good advice is presented by each participant, one at a time;
8. the case owner describes how he/she is going to handle the problem, everyone reflects;
9. summing up: meta reflection – what do we need to consider to ensure a more fruitful next session? (Langelotz 2013a, pp. 379–380)

The model is a simplified version of the approach developed by Lauvås et al. (1997). It was outlined on a piece of paper that was referred to by the teachers each time to set up the mentoring practice. As an external artefact (and one of the material-economic arrangements), it stirred the teachers into the practice. The mentoring model also embodies cultural-discursive ideas such as ‘the reflective practitioner’ and the Nordic idea(l) of adult education, where the participants’ knowledge and experiences are valued and provide a point of departure for further knowledge development (Langelotz and Rönnerman 2014). According to Lauvås et al. (1997), this model inspires teachers to construct common professional knowledge, professional ethics and professional practice based on teachers’ experiences and knowledge gained in their own everyday practice. The authors use the expression ‘the care of the Self’ (Lauvås et al. 1997, p. 21), which is an expression that can be traced to Foucault (2002). In the book, *The history of sexuality: The cultivation of the Self* (2002), Foucault shows how this discourse is a self-regulated power technology with an individualistic discourse embedded.

Lauvås et al. (1997) emphasise the teaching profession’s obligations to continue professional development and the commitment to care for the Self and the students. They point out that a reflective practice combined with peer mentoring can counteract fatigue among teachers. In other words, a discourse of collegial learning is here combined with an individualistic discourse similar to ‘the cultivation of the Self’ (Foucault, 2002). When ‘the care of the Self’ is combined with consultation (like mentoring) in existing relations, it contributes to an intensification of social relations according to Foucault (2002). This interaction is traced in the teachers’ sayings. For example, the teachers in the study expressed the idea that they became a “better teacher team” when they were able to “collaborate and discuss pedagogical issues”. The relatings in the teacher team emerged and combined with the cultural-discursive arrangements entangled in the practice, shaping the professional development (Langelotz 2014, pp. 83–84).

Apart from the PGM-model that stirred the teachers into the practice, other material-economic arrangements such as time and the Principal’s management were enabling factors. The Principal rearranged the teachers’ meeting time to enable the peer mentoring practice. Previous research emphasises the importance of principals to CPD-projects (Åberg 2009; Timperley 2011). The time aspect is also highlighted as one of the main resources to fulfil the aim of CPD in other studies (Opfer and Pedder 2011; Tyrén 2013). However, the management practice here included more than obvious conditions to enable professional learning. The Principal also took time to follow up the project in discussions with the teachers and in meetings with the researcher. In other words, the Principal emphasised – both in his sayings and doings – the importance of the peer mentoring practice and that he valued the outcomes. The outcomes were not, however, preconceived beforehand, which is emphasised as a crucial aspect for professional development by, for example, Timperley (2011). Neither were the outcomes measured in a traditional way. The Principal let the teachers themselves express, lead, and measure their learning processes. The approach was enmeshed both in the cultural-discursive and the social-political arrangements that enabled the project(s) and the practice to take place.

Social-political arrangements that also seemed crucial because they enabled and constrained the peer group mentoring practice included the teacher team, and the research-project that became enmeshed with the practice of peer group mentoring. In the teacher team there were prejudices and preconceptions about individuals as, for example, ‘good’ or ‘poor’ teachers, which sometimes constrained learning as a result of mentoring. The practice of peer group mentoring occasionally took the shape of a disciplining, corrective, and normative practice rather than a collegial and empowering one. One of the teachers sometimes became positioned as the poor teacher, and the practice (sayings) became normative rather than explorative (Langelotz 2013b). With the notions of disciplining and pastoral power (Foucault 2000, 2002) as analytical tools, the sayings, doings, and relatings show how the teachers sought the researcher’s (and each other’s) approval in their ‘confessions’ during the peer group mentoring. A disciplining scientific discourse, in which knowledge is seen as power, was manifested through the researcher engaged in the practice. Pastoral power technique is salvation-oriented and “linked with a production of truth – the truth of the individual himself” (Foucault 2000, p. 333). In the mentoring process this truth- and salvation-orientation is inbuilt in the model used by the teachers (cf. Langelotz 2013b, 2014).

The increased relatings among the participants (the teachers and the researcher) enabled, as mentioned earlier, the practice to evolve into a communicative space, where the aims of both parallel projects were discussed. A shared aim of the communicative space– to support and investigate professional learning – evolved and became a mutual interest. The teachers and the researcher discussed the first descriptive analyses, and through this an understanding of the teachers’ practice and professional learning increased. Furthermore, changes in the everyday practice were negotiated in the communicative space. The research project was transformed into a catalytic storytelling project enmeshed in the teachers’ CPD-project, which supported professional learning (Langelotz 2014).

When analysing the sayings, doings, and relatings that hang together within, and constitute, the practice, one main finding was that professional and personal development may be encouraged through peer mentoring. Democratic processes increased and seemed to have an impact on classroom practice and the practice of parent-teacher meetings (Langelotz 2014). These processes can be described as *disciplining*, *democratising*, and *developmental* for both the individual and the teacher collective (Langelotz 2013a).

Conclusions – Democratic Practices Evolved

The results from this study show that teachers’ professional learning and development through collegial learning in the form of peer group mentoring are far removed from something easily measurable and transferable. Rather, this learning is part of a complex web of intersecting practices and practice architectures. The practice architectures that hold the practice in place have an impact on what kind of learning

is possible and desirable to develop in the specific site where the CPD-practice takes place.

This study found that the teachers in this site developed communicative talents through the practice of peer group mentoring. These talents were described as an advanced ability to listen to each other in a “better way” and that “all voices became important”, as the teachers expressed it. The ability to listen carefully without immediate judgement was, according to the teachers, one of the most important learning outcomes in the project of professional development. Furthermore, the teachers formed a collegial approach and aptitudes for cooperating and acting with a collegial responsibility, which can be understood as an important aspect of teacher talents in this site. They literally illustrated with their hands, while they expressed their thoughts orally, how the mentoring practice enabled them to “put the problems on the table” and (most of the time) they strived towards looking at the problems presented during the peer-group mentoring as collective issues rather than individual ones (Langelotz 2013a, 2014). The practice of PGM encouraged the teachers to ‘de-privatise’ (Kemmis et al. 2014, p. 140) their classroom practices.

Overall, the increased communicative capacity and the de-privatisation of the teaching practice seemed to enhance the teachers’ democratic abilities, perhaps changing the power relationships that previously existed, and possibly challenging the kind of “care of the Self” (Foucault 2002) that was anticipated when the PGM project was imposed on the teachers. They involved each other, the students, and the parents of the students in decisions concerning classroom practice (Langelotz 2013a). Biesta (2003) points out that an education that provides students with the opportunity to truly act helps the students to become subjects. When the teachers discussed the students during the peer mentoring practice, they sometimes managed to go beyond stereotypes like ‘a troublesome boy’ or ‘a silent girl’ and the students became subjects rather than objects in the teachers’ perceptions. The teachers sometimes managed to look upon each other in new ways and go beyond their presumptions – the colleagues could become (and construct themselves) as subjects, vis-à-vis each other. Biesta (2003) emphasises that the opportunities of becoming a subject engender democratic situations (Langelotz 2014). Professional learning that stimulates democracy and educational actors’ possibilities for acting is of course extremely important in a world where democracy has to be re-constituted every day. In the Swedish curricula, teachers’ ability to *teach democratically* and not only teach about democracy is strongly stressed.

By employing the theory of practice architectures, various models of teachers’ continued professional development could be analysed in relation to sites and the specific architectures to be found in them. The theory may help us to better understand how the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements with which mentoring practices in a particular site are enmeshed impact on teacher professional learning in that site. Peer group mentoring in another site, however, might well lead to other and partly different professional learning for the teachers involved.

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