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# Understanding mentoring of new teachers: Communicative and strategic practices in Australia and Finland

## 1. Introduction

Transition from initial teacher education to the classroom is the one of the most critical phases of a teaching career (Jokikokko, Uitto, Deketelaere & Estola, 2017; Zuljan & Požarnik, 2014) with entrance into the profession described as “reality” or “practice shock” (Kane & Francis, 2013; Stokking, Leenders, De Jong, & Van Tartwijk, 2003; Veenman, 1984). A comprehensive literature review of empirical studies (Authors et al., 2011) notes that new teachers in many countries face similar challenges including: feelings of inadequacy in terms of their skills and knowledge leading to decreased self-efficacy and increased stress; uncertainty regarding their role and position as newcomers in the education community; and threats of job loss due to precarious employment conditions.

Problems in the early years of teaching often result in exhaustion and high teacher dropout rates with early attrition being an international issue (Harfitt 2015; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). One response to these concerns has been the introduction of various mentoring programs to support teachers in their early career phase (Authors et al., 2012b; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Nasser-Abu Alhija & Fresko, 2010; Zuljan & Požarnik, 2014). However, mentoring is a contested concept, employed differently in a variety of settings and for different purposes (Authors et al., 2014b; Sundli, 2007). The activities and actions, concepts, meanings and concomitant social relations associated with mentoring also vary between national contexts so that what is described as mentoring practices in one setting may look quite different from another setting. These differences have serious consequences for how mentoring of new teachers is defined, conceptualised and theorised. Mentoring has also been described as “a practice, which is ill-defined, poorly conceptualized and weakly theorized” (Colley, 2003, p. 13; see also Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). To promote a more integrative view on research of mentoring, a remarkable body of recent literature (39 articles), published in *Teaching and Teacher Education*, has been reviewed by Lily Orland-Barak (2014). As a result of this review, three distinctive categories were identified: 1) Mentors' performance and behaviors; 2) Mentors' reasoning, beliefs and identity formation and 3) The place of culture, context and discourse in mentoring.

This article, however, does not fall entirely to any of these three categories. It builds on a body of research theorising mentoring for new and continuing teachers as a *set of social practices* unfolding in different sites of educational practice (c.f., Authors et al., 2012c; 2014a; 2014c; 2016; 2017b). Our practice theory approach has something in common with the aforementioned categories. Especially category 3 is close to our view given that the practice standpoint pays a lot of attention to discourses and cultural contexts. Still, social practices may be viewed from the point of view of human behaviour represented in the studies of category 1; practises can be seen as individuals' behaviour, activities and actions. Moreover, we may find also some connections with the category 2 studies in terms of agency as an essential element of social practices.

All in all, this research approach offers a specific perspective of its own to mentoring, addressing practices of mentoring through a practice theory lens, more precisely the *theory of practice architectures* (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008; Authors et al., 2014b). This approach to mentoring has previously been applied in a number of studies. In the first phase of this series of studies, (Authors et al., 2012c; 2014a), the practices of mentoring were investigated separately in Finland and Australia. In these studies we described the site-specific (cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political) arrangements (Authors et al., 2014c) that prefigured Finnish practices of peer-group mentoring; and Australian practices, which took a more traditional, dyadic form.

In the second phase of this series of studies, a comparative design was applied to study mentoring practices in Finland, Sweden and Australia. As a result, three archetypes of mentoring were illustrated: (1) mentoring as *supervision* in order to assist new teachers to pass through probation; (2) mentoring as a form of professional and emotional *support* provided within a more traditional dyadic model; and (3) mentoring as *collaborative self-development*, i.e., social construction of professional skills and competence (Authors et al., 2014b).

The third phase of the series of studies, rooted in the same theoretical basis and continuing international comparisons between Australia and Finland, provided access to the (cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political) arrangements that prefigured ‘good mentoring’ in these different geo-political sites (Authors et al., 2016; 2017b). It also offered an understanding of ‘good mentoring’ in Aristotelian terms, i.e., as virtuous practice located in the middle of two extremes referred as ‘vices’ (Authors et al., 2017c).

This article, however, is not a synopsis of previous work. Instead, the aforementioned studies inspired us to reflect more closely on how mentoring was constituted as a *social practice* and what prefigured differing understandings and practices in the two settings of Finland and Australia. In particular, we wished to understand why the practices of mentoring of new teachers looked so different in the two sites. Hence, the focus of this article is twofold: (1) *how do mentors in the different sites of Finland and New South Wales, Australia understand mentoring as a social practice?* (2) *how are the practices of mentoring prefigured in these two different sites?*

We turned to German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas’ theory of communicative and strategic action (1984) as a lens through which to understand these questions: not only in terms of *how* differing practices were emerging in the sites but also *why*. The combination of the theory of practice architectures (Authors et al., 2014c) and Habermas’ theory of communicative and strategic action provided a useful stereoscopic lens through which to examine these research questions. In the remainder of this article, we map the theoretical frameworks of practice architectures and communicative and strategic action (Habermas, 1984). We then sketch the context of the two study sites, the methodological approaches employed and outline the findings. We conclude by discussing the implications for the theory and practice of mentoring for new teachers,

particularly in terms of the *lifeworld* into which new teachers are inducted in these two settings.

## 2. Theoretical frameworks

### 2.1 Theory of practice architectures

Both the Finnish and Australian systems have been impacted by a range of international education trends, including increasing accountability demands placed upon educational leaders such as principals and teachers. However, *how* such movements are taken up in systems and school sites is not uniform and depends greatly on the existing conditions for educational practice in differing educational sites, their educational histories and traditions and the differing meanings ascribed to them (Authors et al., in press). Moreover, mentoring practices are made meaningful by the arrangements or *practice architectures* (Authors et al., 2014c; Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) which prefigure – but do not determine – how a practice such as mentoring takes root, is interpreted and understood within varying educational sites.

The theory of practice architectures is part of a broader umbrella of practice theories which foreground the practices of social sites, rather than the individuals or practitioners within a practice (Authors et al., 2014c). It takes its inspiration from a site-ontological practice perspective (c.f., Schatzki, 2002), which posits that organisations such as schools are inherently social phenomena composed of practices which unfold in all their “happeningness” (Schatzki, 2005). As an inherently social and relational practice then, mentoring cannot be fully understood without attention to how it unfolds and takes shape as a practice in particular sites at particular times (Authors et al., 2014a; Authors et al., 2014c). As such, a practice architecture lens shifts the researchers’ gaze from the work of individual or groups of practitioners to the mentoring practices in a given site in which mentors and mentees are always located. In addition, it forces us to examine the sets of supporting arrangements which collectively support particular practices in specific sites and together constitute the preconditions for these practices to emerge.

As Figure 1 below illustrates, social practices are composed of *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings* that “hang together” (Schatzki, 2002) in the *project* of a practice such as mentoring of new teachers (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). The project of the practice is its substance and purpose. People name the project of a practice when they give a sincere answer to the question, “What are you doing and for what purpose?” Practices such as mentoring of new teachers are brought into being by the collective actions of practitioners, with “individual will ... understanding and action ... orchestrated in collective social-relational projects” (Authors et al., 2014c). Yet practices do not occur in a vacuum. Rather, they are held in place by arrangements in the medium of language, in the dimension of semantic space (*cultural-discursive arrangements*); in the medium of activity or work, in the dimension of physical space-time (*material-economic arrangements*); and in the medium of solidarity and power, in the dimension of social space (*social-political arrangements*) (Authors et al., 2014c).

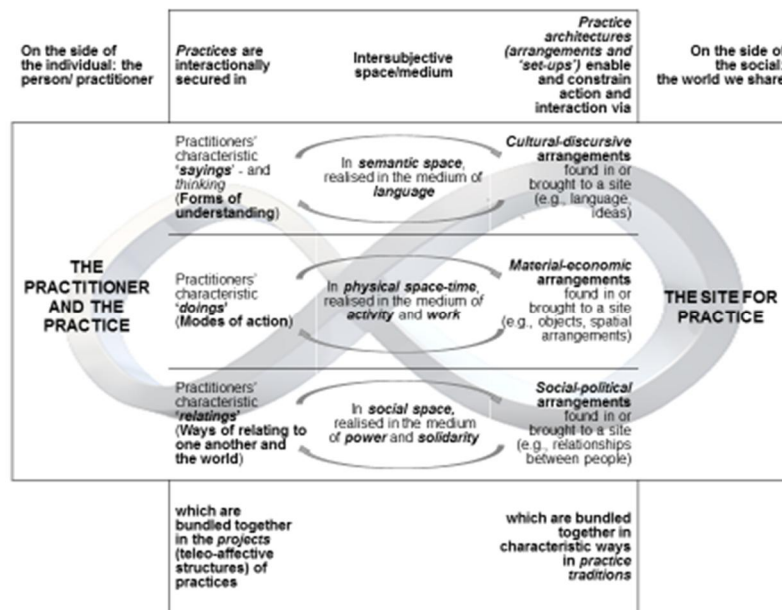


Figure 1. The theory of practice architectures (modified from Authors et al., 2014c)

These practice architectures enable and constrain the *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings* characteristic of a mentoring practice. For instance, in Authors et al. (2014a) examination of mentoring in a rural Australian secondary school, the project of mentoring included offering new teachers professional and emotional support. Thus, there was an associated set of *sayings* focused on caring and counselling, held partly in place by gendered discourses of the female mentor as a maternal caring figure (cultural-discursive arrangements). Practices are also held in place in the medium of activity or work, in the dimension of physical space-time (*material-economic arrangements*) (Authors et al., 2014c). For instance, an examination of peer-group mentoring in a Finnish site found that mentors' *doings* clustered under a set of organising activities to ensure the smooth operation of peer-group mentoring. The material-economic arrangements that made this possible included the provision of funding by local municipalities for ongoing training of teacher mentors (Authors et al., 2012c). Finally, practices are also held in place in the medium of solidarity and power, in the dimension of social space (*social-political arrangements*) (Authors et al., 2014c). For instance, in Authors et al. (2014a) Australian study, a set of *relatings* had formed, shaped by the more traditional power-relations of a dyadic form of mentoring between novice and more experienced educator. Although for analytical purposes we separate out sayings, doings and relatings and their associated arrangements, in reality, they “hang together” (Schatzki, 2002) in the project of a practice, such as mentoring.

## 2.2 Mentoring as communicative and strategic action

In this study, what was of interest to us was *how* and *why* mentoring practices in the two sites looked very different. The concept of the *project* of the practice, which provides differing answers to the question, “What are you doing?” (Authors et al., 2014c) provides a glimpse as to why such variation in mentoring practices for beginning teachers may emerge in diverse sites. Habermas’ theory of communicative and strategic action (1984) provides a further insight into why the differing projects or *teleo-affective structures* of practices (Schatzki, 2002) of educational sites may support the emergence of different kinds of mentoring practices. In the Australian site, the project of mentoring practices appeared to serve more instrumentalist purposes, for it was underpinned by a means-end rationality, i.e., to support new teachers to become fully accredited (Authors et al., 2014a). In contrast, in the Finnish site, the project of mentoring practices appeared to be more open-ended and broadly educative, i.e., to enable the well-being and professional development of both new and experienced teachers (Uitto, Kaunisto, Kelchtermans, & Estola, 2016.) Due to the differing projects of mentoring practices in both sites, mentees were variously positioned along a spectrum as *objects* of social action, and sometimes as more like *subjects* of communication. This finding sensitises us to study mentoring more closely in terms of the theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984). According to this theory, social action among people can be understood both in terms of genuinely *communicative action*, i.e., open and free communication; and *strategic action*, i.e., communication which is oriented to achieving the speaker’s objectives (Habermas 1984, pp. 273-337).

The theory of communicative action offers conceptual instruments which enable us to better apprehend the concealed features of mentoring practice. Habermas (1984) suggests that strategic action can be implemented in two ways: as *open strategic action* where the predetermined goals of the speaker are openly expressed, and *concealed strategic action* where the objectives or ambitions are not expressed. Moreover, we may distinguish two forms of concealed strategic action. *Conscious deception* is manipulation of the other party where the speaker is aware of the aims of discussion but tries to mask them. *Unconscious deception* is communication where the speaker is unconsciously guided by an ideological belief system of some kind, such as a political worldview. Habermas (1984, pp. 332-333) conceptualises this kind of concealed strategic action as *systematically distorted communication*. The conceptual body of Habermas’ theory is illustrated in its entirety in Figure 2 below.

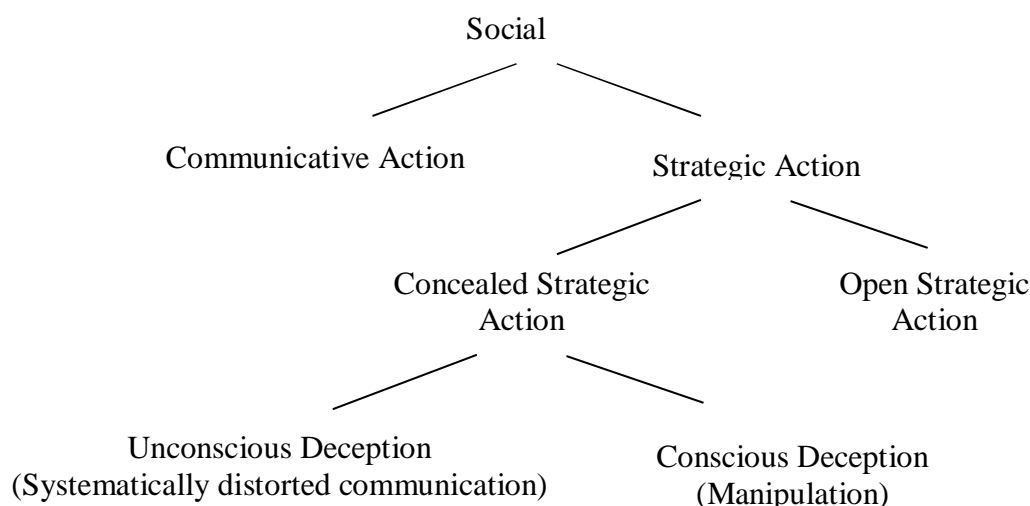


Figure 2. Communicative and strategic action. (Typology of social action; Habermas, 1984, p. 333.)

### 3. The Study: Mentoring in Finland and New South Wales, Australia

#### 3.1 The Finland Case

Finland is well-known for the high learning achievements of its students, addressed in a number of international student achievement tests such as PISA. One of the strengths of the Finnish education system is its research-based initial teacher education, which aims to educate students to become autonomous and reflective teachers (Authors et al., 2012a; 2012d; Sahlberg, 2011). During the last decade however, concerns about new teacher attrition have grown in Finland. As a result, a model of professional development, known as Peer Group Mentoring [PGM] was introduced in order to support teachers in their early career (Authors et al., 2015). This model has been disseminated and further developed in a national program for teacher development known as ‘Osaava Verme’ (2010-17).

In PGM, communication in mentoring is recognised as being more dynamic, collaborative and reciprocal than in traditional models. Sometimes these approaches have been referred to as ‘co-mentoring’ (e.g., Kochan & Trimble, 2000; Mullen, 2000) and ‘peer mentoring’ (e.g., Le Cornu, 2005). PGM differs from traditional mentoring in its theoretical foundations. Whereas traditional approaches are based on a *metaphor of knowledge transmission*, the PGM approach emphasizes a *metaphor of knowledge construction* (Authors et al., 2012b). More precisely, this approach can be described as a *critical constructivist* approach (Wang & Odell, 2007), rooted in two theoretical traditions. One is *critical theory*, aiming at learning to question existing knowledge, in which new teachers are encouraged to pose questions, challenge existing practices and alter their way of acting as teachers. The other is *constructivism*, according to which new knowledge is constructed by drawing upon an individual’s prior knowledge,

conceptions and beliefs. In PGM, the element of *social constructivism* is especially emphasised; knowledge is constructed through social interaction.

This theoretical basis has direct consequences for how mentoring is practically organized in PGM groups, which consist of novice and more experienced teachers. The aim of the groups is to promote mutual professional development and the well-being of teachers. The PGM model draws the concept of mentoring closer to that of a professional learning community [PLC]. It can be regarded as an application of PLC, that is, a place where “participants become genuinely involved in one another’s learning as well as their own, and are positioned as co-learners as they engage in professional dialogue with one other” (Le Cornu, 2005, p. 358).

PGM was originally applied as a specific method for promoting the professional development of new and experienced teachers. Recently, however, the PGM method has been applied to combined groups of pre-service student and experienced teachers under the brand of ‘Paedeia Café’ peer group mentoring. The name comes from the European PAEDEIA project undertaken from 2012-2015 (Authors et al., 2015b) which aimed to develop practices to support student teachers in their transition phase from initial teacher education. The empirical material for this study was collected from the mentors of these Paedeia Cafés. We now turn to the Australian case to examine a more traditional, dyadic form of mentoring practice for new teachers.

### **3.2 The Australian Case**

Responsibility for funding and administering Australian schools rests largely in its six state and two territory governments. The federal government provides only a small amount of funding for schooling. Hence, there are key differences between systems across Australia, with the two largest states of New South Wales [NSW] and Victoria having contrasting approaches to governance and administration. The state of Victoria was the earliest adopter amongst the OECD of neoliberal discourses of a market approach to public, fully government funded schooling. Its schools and principals have far greater levels of autonomy in terms of budgets and hiring of staff. In contrast, until very recently New South Wales had retained a highly centralised, hierarchical approach to management of its public schools, with responsibility for budgets and employment of staff vested in central administration. In neither state do principals or schools enjoy relative autonomy over curriculum. Despite the various levels of autonomy experienced by the two states, however, both systems have similar results in terms of PISA outcomes (Jensen, 2013).

A shared trend between Australian state education systems is a high new teacher attrition rate. Data in regard to overall attrition rates is hard to find as each state and territory keeps its own statistics and may be reluctant to make this information public (Buchanan, Prescott, Schuck, Aubusson, Burke, & Louviere, 2013). An older OECD study found attrition rates of up to 30% of Australian teachers in the first five years of their career (OECD, 2005). Mason, & Poyatos Matas (2015, p. 45) note however, that more recent “estimates of early career attrition rates range from 8% to 50%”, raising



“concerns regarding the trustworthiness of the data collected and the validity of the claims”. A survey of over 600 Victorian primary and secondary teachers suggested that 29 per cent of new teachers were suffering from emotional exhaustion and were close to burn out due to lack of support from leadership, “onerous compliance measures” and challenging emotional conditions (Marshall, 2013).

In order to combat these factors, a Federal Government parliamentary inquiry into teacher education (*Top of the class*, 2007) recommended a range of measures. These included the adoption of a consistent set of teaching standards for new teachers across all education systems, which would require them to “move from provisional to full registration in the early years of their career” (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2016). In so doing, beginning teachers would be engaged in a “process to demonstrate their ongoing growth and competence as a professional practitioner” (AITSL, 2016). To support full registration, the enquiry also recommended that new teachers be provided with “a suitable induction program ... structured over a year, offer[ing] reduced teaching load, provid[ing] a mentor and ... access to a structured and tailored program of professional development” (*Top of the class*, 2007). As a result of this report, teaching standards across Australia were endorsed in 2013 (AITSL, 2016), with states and territories taking up the recommendations for new teacher induction in varying degrees. The shifts towards greater consistency of teaching standards, along with the provision of greater formalised support for new teachers in order to avoid higher attrition rates, frames the context of the Australian study, which examined the mentoring practices of/for novice teachers in a small government rural secondary school in New South Wales.

### 3.3 Methodology

Our parallel case studies of the Finnish and Australian sites of mentoring practice were conducted within a qualitative research approach, inspired by the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition (Van Manen, 2007; 2014). Accordingly, researchers were seen not as objective observers but active interpreters of a given reality. As researchers, we are ‘*always already in the world*’ (Husserl, 1970), and all our knowledge is based on our pre-understanding. Hence, our ideas about mentoring emerged not only through this study but also through our previous research studies of mentoring discussed in our introductory section.

In the Australian study, the data was collected as part of a larger, 18 month action research project conducted in New South Wales [NSW], which examined the leading and mentoring practices of a new principal and staff working in a small rural secondary school with large numbers of disadvantaged and disengaged students. The appointment of the principal had led to a process of school-wide curriculum and pedagogical renewal and staff capacity building. Part of this process included using Federal Government funding to provide time release for a small number of experienced teachers to mentor new teachers through the process of accreditation and simultaneously, to enhance the quality of their teaching. In this article, we draw on interviews and focus group discussions conducted in the Australian study with three mentor teachers and one new

teacher mentee. For the purposes of the data for this article, all participants were female. Individual interviews were conducted with the three mentors. In some cases where we ran out of time, follow up interviews were conducted with individual mentors. One interview was done with a mentoring pair (mentor and mentee). Interviews were normally between 45- 90 minutes long. A focus group was conducted with the three mentors. The focus group interview was between 45- 90 minutes long. All the data were collected during school hours, at the school, in the faculty conference room. This was done with the permission of the principal; the appropriate arrangements were made to ensure that all classes were covered. For the purposes of this article, the following questions were most relevant: (A1) *what do you understand mentoring to mean in this school?* and (A2) *how do you understand your role as a mentor in this school?* Interviews were audio recorded and material transcribed verbatim (N=6 transcripts).

In Finland, six mentors who were working as facilitators of 'Paedeia Café' peer-mentoring groups were interviewed using a semi-structured interview approach. The questions were adapted to the Finnish context from the Australian study, i.e., (F1) *what do you understand mentoring to mean?* and (F2) *how do you understand your role as a mentor?* All the mentors were female, and they were interviewed one by one in privacy by a female research assistant at university campus in a comfortable and silent coffee room. The interviews lasted from 27 to 53 minutes, and there was 4 hours 12 minutes of audio material in all. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English.

In the first phase of analysis, the two national datasets were analysed separately through thematic content analysis, using *inductive reasoning*. In this first phase, we focused on the first research question, i.e., how mentoring was understood as a social practice. The Finnish data was analysed and categorised employing QSR NVivo 10 software. The inductive phase of analysis was started with the Finnish data by the Finnish researchers, and parallel analysis was made separately with the Australian data by the Australian researchers. At this phase, we did not apply any concepts derived from any theory. At a result of inductive reasoning, the subcategories described in figure 3. emerged first. Gradually, we began to see connections between the subcategories and to sketch clusters that eventually formed main categories.

In the second phase, the inductive analysis was continued with an intensive communication between the Australian and the Finnish researchers. The initial results of analysis of the two separate datasets were analysed in relation to each other and to Habermas' theory of communicative action (1984). During this collaborative process of interpretation, all researchers negotiated about the meanings of the categories and their relationship to one another. At this phase, the verbal formulation of the subcategories and main categories required *inductive and deductive reasoning*. At the end of this phase, through a profound reflection and communication, we ended up with applying same main categories for both datasets. The emerging categories were located in the dimensions of strategic and communicative action. Gradually, after having sketched a number of versions, our analysis ended up in the form of a mind map illustrated in figure 3 (see below).

In the third phase, we focused on the second research question about the prefiguring of mentoring practices which allowed us to grasp the practice architectures which held together particular mentoring practices in each site. At this phase, *abductive reasoning* was applied. Abduction can actually be described as a “good guess” that provides the best explanation for the phenomenon (Peirce, 1994). The main phases of the methodology are illustrated in table 1.

Table 1. Phases of analysis

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Research question addressed	RQ 1 Practices of mentoring	RQ1 Practices of mentoring	RQ2 Practice architectures of mentoring
Main form of inference (logical reasoning)	Induction	induction and deduction	Abduction
Australian data	Interview questions: <i>A1</i> and <i>A2</i>	Interview questions: <i>A1</i> , <i>A2</i> , <i>F1</i> and <i>F2</i>	Interview questions: <i>A1</i> , <i>A2</i> , <i>F1</i> and <i>F2</i>
Finnish data	Interview questions: <i>F1</i> and <i>F2</i>		in addition to the results of previous studies and experience

One of the limitations of the empirical material used in this case study is that it represents a small dataset. However taking into account the series of studies referred to in the introduction to which this current research refers, the overall corpus of material is sufficient for making generalisations.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Practices of mentoring

#### 4.1.1 Peer-group mentoring as a practice in Finland

In response to the first research question, *how do mentors in the different sites of Finland and New South Wales, Australia understand mentoring as a social practice?* the subcategories which emerged out of the interview data were combined into four main categories of mentoring as a social practice: *Opening up*, *Facilitating*, *Guiding* and *Leading*<sup>1</sup>. Subsequently, these categories were located on Habermas’ continuum of

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<sup>1</sup> We have deliberately used verbs to describe the mentoring practices which emerged from both data sets in order to capture the “happeningness” of the practices (Schatzki, 2005), as opposed to using nouns, which suggest mentoring as an entity or completed state.

strategic and communicative action. The results are presented below with illustrative quotes from the interviews with the mentors. An overview of the results is presented in Figure 3.

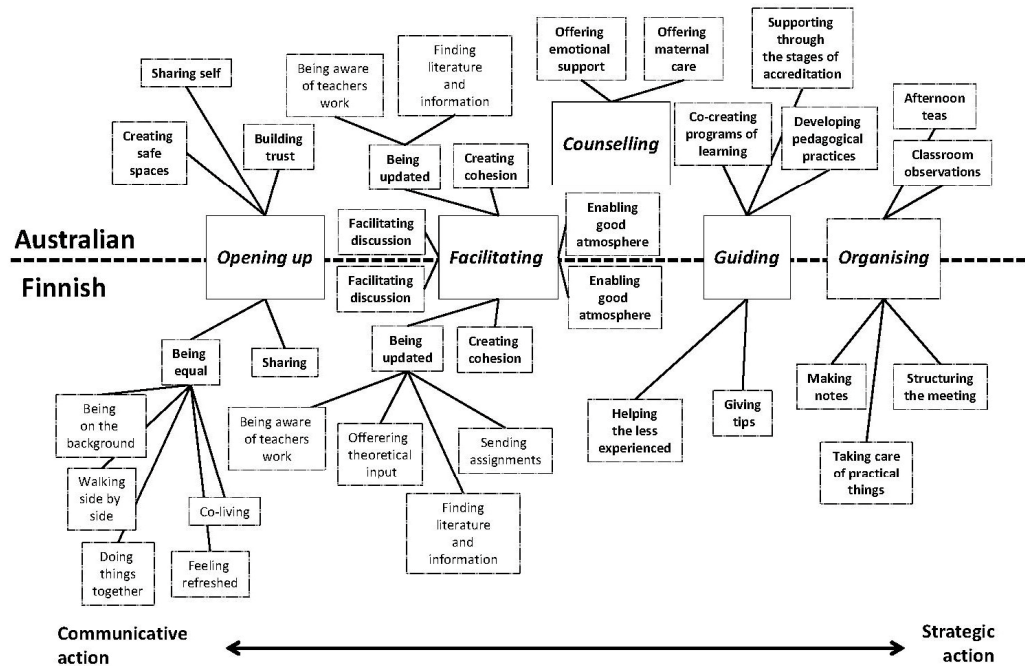


Figure 3. The practices of mentoring in the Finnish and Australian sites

## Opening up

This main category incorporates the subcategories of mentoring practice that emerged as closest to Habermas' forms of communicative action. It encapsulates expressions which portray opening up of a communicative space for discussion. Although communicative action in its purest sense is an ideal, rather than a realistic goal, nonetheless the Finnish mentors' *sayings* suggested their aim was for PGM to function as a communicative space for discussion for both mentors and mentees. Given that our data in both the Finnish and Australian sites draws upon the discursive positions of mentors, their claims about the success or otherwise about their mentoring practices need to be treated with caution. Nonetheless, it is interesting to see that the stress of the Finnish mentors' sayings was on mentoring as a reciprocal activity in which open and free communication was a goal to be striven for. The emphasis in these sayings was on the importance of all participants *being equal* in the group. Equality was described through metaphors such as "co-living", "doing things together" or "walking side by side". The quotation below is illustrative of this sentiment:

*I think it means walk beside one another and also sharing from your own. Both who are talking in mentoring group are giving and receiving. The other is not in higher position than the other, or doesn't know more, but everyone is sharing everyday things that happen in their work as equals (Eeva)<sup>2</sup>.*

Mentors often underlined the aspects of *sharing* in mentoring, from which both parties could potentially benefit. Mentors reported that they intentionally endeavoured to adopt a background role where they set the conditions and enabled space for the participants to interact and share everyday work experiences and ideas. Some mentors even claimed that the participants did not necessarily need them. The mentors observed they often felt “refreshed” after the meetings.

### **Facilitating**

Setting the conditions for PGM and enabling a space for all participants to equally participate required a range of *doings*, or activities associated with mentoring as a process of facilitating. For instance, in order for more equal sharing of experiences, the mentors needed to engage in a range of activities such as *facilitating discussions*. These *doings* included making sure the discussion stayed on topic, was within time limits and that everyone had space in the conversation. The mentor also intervened in the discussions by commenting or asking questions. These *doings* were described as follows:

*I am kind of the chairperson. You have to have antennae and listen to who says what, and then sum up, and make sure that fairness maintains in the group. And make sure you don't talk too much yourself, yet you are still willing to lead the conversation (Ritva).*

Clearly, the mentor needs interactional skills, in terms of how to lead a conversation and how to relate to others in the group. At the same time, however, the mentors stressed the importance of *enabling a good atmosphere* where it was safe to express one's thoughts, and *creating cohesion* in the group. However, mentors often felt that they needed to *be updated* on topical issues such as the new Finnish curriculum. Sometimes the mentors also sought out literature for background reading and even sent assignments to the participants.

### **Guiding**

To some extent, the Finnish mentors also understood their task and role in terms of a more traditional meaning of mentoring, i.e., *helping the less experienced*. This understanding suggested a particular set of *relatings* between mentors and mentees, that is, the mentor as a guide who helps the newcomers in the profession. The following

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<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms are employed for participants in both the Finnish and NSW, Australian studies.

quote highlights these ways of relating between the two participants in the PGM communicative space:

*Generally, I understand mentoring more in a way that it's someone who has more experience and is helping someone who is less experienced. So that's how I understand mentoring in its traditional meaning (Erja).*

One mentor understood these forms of *relatings* as resembling more traditional student-teacher *relatings*. Furthermore, this form of mentoring practice included *giving tips*, which the mentor had found worked well. Importantly, however, the category *Guiding* contained only a small number of expressions, reflecting the fact that in terms of *relatings* between mentor and mentees, peer-group mentoring was not predominantly regarded as a novice-expert relationship.

## **Leading**

Leading practices in the Finnish case centred mostly on *organizing* and *structuring* the meetings. These doings included making an overall plan for the whole year as well as planning the structure of each meeting. The mentor sometimes acted as a secretary, *making notes* during the meetings. In the beginning, the principles and rules of the group were discussed and agreed upon as noted below:

*My role is to create the overall structure as we did with the principles and with the themes that we collected and that would be my responsibility... And then the structure of each meeting; that I start and I finish, and we have maybe something like an activity first and then we have another time for conversation. So I am sort of like the organiser (Ursula).*

The mentors also *took care of practical matters*; they prepared the meetings by providing necessary things like biscuits and coffee, booking rooms and guiding the participants to find their way to the right place. One of the indications that show leadership in the Finnish data was the finding that the mentor was actually expected to make everyone feel welcome.

### **4.1.2 Mentoring as a practice in NSW, Australia**

Within the Australian case mentoring was articulated through different kinds of activities and practices. We identified five categories, four in common with the Finnish study: *Opening Up*, *Facilitating*, *Guiding* and *Leading*; and one additional category, *Counselling*. In this section, we draw mainly from the discursive positions of 'Hazel' and 'Sharon', two mentors who had primary responsibility for organising the mentoring experience for new teachers.

## Opening Up

As in the Finnish case, mentoring activities focussed on creating safe spaces for the mentees to open up and share their thoughts freely. However, the content of the discussions was quite different. Rather than a stress on the reciprocity of mentoring practice through the use of metaphors such as “walking side-by-side”, many sayings focussed on less equal *relatings* between new scheme and experienced teachers, prefigured by system-wide institutional requirements of accreditation. These requirements shifted the *relatings* between mentors and mentees from an assumption of equality to a more traditional dyad of novice/experienced teacher. Opening up was also about reflecting on the assumptions both mentees and mentors had about teaching practices; exposing these assumptions through recounting stories from the classroom and suggesting interventions. To open up in this manner required relationships of trust be built between the mentees and the mentors and this included mentors exposing their own vulnerabilities in relation to teaching practices. As Sharon comments:

*...And I might say, “I’m a bit stuck about what I should do with this particular student,” or “struggled in this lesson today.” So if they see the senior teachers having a bit of an issue, they’ll go, “Oh well I did this, this, and this”. And so the teaching ideas start to pour out and another teacher will go, “Oh yeah, but I had problems with this, this, and this” and then they start... So that gives me an opportunity, an informal one where they’re a bit more relaxed to divulge a bit more.*

## Facilitating

Opening up spaces for critical conversation entailed a range of activities or *doings* focussing on facilitating opportunities for building collegiality. However, unlike in the Finnish case, where facilitating activities focussed on setting the conditions for PGM and enabling a communicative space for participants to equally participate, the NSW, Australian activities stressed more direct teaching-related activities such as facilitating reciprocal sharing of teaching materials in order to create cohesion between mentees/mentees and mentors, and providing opportunities for networking with senior teachers. The latter activity served to break down the walls of isolation that so often surround early career teachers as Sharon, one of the mentors observes:

*And that’s what I always push for, but then, if you haven’t got the confidence to do it like some of our teachers are, because they go, “Oh but I’ll be networking with experienced teachers.” And I go, “That’s the point...they’re there to give you critical feedback,” which sometimes is just, is very difficult for new scheme teachers to cope with. They’re there to give you teaching ideas; they’re there to share resources... ideas and strategies.*

## Counselling

In contrast to the Finnish case, this emerged as a main category in the NSW data. As in many areas of teaching and learning, mentoring as a form of professional development is also emotional, in the sense that it can be a demonstration of caring. Caring for less experienced teachers can be a means of reducing teacher attrition (a concern for the state) and reducing new teacher anxiety (a concern for school administration). Counselling in mentoring may create a human connection between mentees and the mentors, promoting collegiality and attending to the nurturing of the whole professional. However, it does imply an unequal set of *relatings* that potentially can perpetuate a dependency between helper and helped, particularly when such *sayings* are couched in gendered discourses of maternal care. Hazel attempted to navigate the line between mentoring and counselling practices as she shifted from an all-too-human desire to ‘fix’ the mentee to a dawning recognition that some things were beyond her ability and scope to ‘fix’. In the following quotation, she articulates these competing dilemmas for her as a mentor:

*I think initially it was caring and concern and consideration for another and knowing that I would be interested about that person – wanting to help them and assist them... I thought initially it was all about the nurturing and fixing the other things. But then I realised... It was more about the caring, kindness, motherly role but then that had to be established with a trust to them [to] work on the [problem with a professional counsellor] – it’s not a quick fix.*

## Guiding

As the mentors became more practised at mentoring, there was a shift in their *sayings* from a focus on ‘fixing’ the mentee to guiding. This shift was reflected in a range of *doings* or activities such as working with mentees to co-create learning programmes, supporting them through the stages of accreditation and developing a repertoire of pedagogical strategies. As Hazel remarked:

*...It’s about role modelling and about showing... guiding and helping and it’s just so complex... I think now I’m seeing this role to facilitate the role of the teacher.*

As in the Finnish case, the emphasis in *Guiding* was on a more traditional set of *relatings* in terms of a novice-expert relationship. Unlike the Finnish case, however, there were far more guiding practices identified. This was hardly a surprising finding given the more instrumentalist focus of mentoring practices in the NSW site.

## Leading



As in the Finnish case, the *doings* of leading practices focussed on organising Activities included: providing regular afternoon teas where mentors and mentees together could talk in a more informal manner; giving explicit directions to mentees with regard to the accreditation process (such as how to complete necessary paperwork); and creating opportunities for classroom observations (leading pedagogical development). At times the roles were flipped and the mentor shifted from observer to observed. This led to a shift from more traditional *relatings* between mentors and mentees to a more collegial set of practices, manifested in activities such as the mentee observing and providing feedback on the mentor's lesson. Such a shift was very different from the directive activities Hazel notes below:

*[W]e will bring them all in at the end of term and go through all of that process, but our new scheme teachers... need all their accreditation and so that has to be finalised and dated,...my role for one is to make sure that they know how to learn how to provide things when called for and tick off and register, and some of that finer accountability that's where they're getting mentored in – in being accountable and presentable... so that's a very professional accountability and mentoring in that role.*

Although for analytical purposes, the mentoring practices described in the preceding Finnish and Australian cases have been separated into *sayings, doings and relatings*, in reality these dimensions of practices are interconnected. Also the arrangements (practice architectures) that prefigure the actual practices are interconnected in the specific sites of the practice; in other words, the practices are held in place in particular sites by specific arrangements that incorporate cultural-discursive, material-economical and social political preconditions of practice. In other words, the practices described above are prefigured (but not predetermined) and enabled and constrained by the particular practice architectures which form the preconditions for mentoring practices in particular sites. We now turn to the second part of our findings to examine how this prefiguring occurs.

## **4.2 Practice Architectures**

### **4.2.1 Practice architectures of mentoring in Finland**

The second research question which guides the findings in this section was: *How are the practices of mentoring prefigured in the two different sites?* Figure 4 below diagrammatically captures the Finnish case.

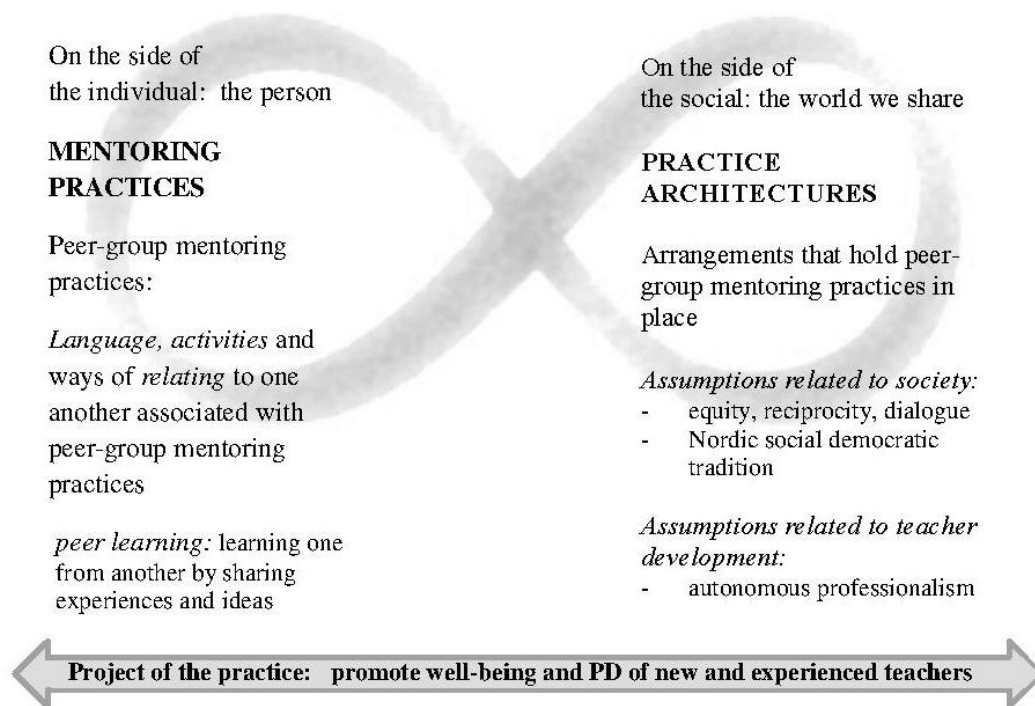


Figure 4: Practice architectures of peer group mentoring in Finland

We encapsulate the dimensions of the practice architectures that prefigure mentoring practices in Finland under the concept of *autonomous professionalism* rooted in the high trust on teachers and schools. In Finland, teachers are regarded as highly capable and well-educated professionals who hold exceptionally high status and respect in the society. Since 1970s, all Finnish primary and secondary teachers have received a five-year university teacher education at Masters Level. Teacher education is highly respected in society, not only within the educational field but also other professional fields. The profession is one of the most popular ones among the youth; for example, less than 10 % of applicants pass the entrance exam into primary teacher education. Given that new teachers are regarded as highly educated and capable professionals, no elements of assessment, registration or control are required in mentoring. Participating in mentoring is voluntary and more experienced colleagues are regarded as equal in the peer-mentoring groups. A critical-constructivist view on learning is thus emphasised; knowledge is being constructed through communication and critical reflection. This came forward strongly in the first category, *Opening up*. This category described *sayings* in the form of reciprocal dialogue between equals. The latter is very close to the very definition of *communicative action* (Figure 2). In the data, we discovered symmetrical relationships at the existential level between the mentors and the mentees;

it is, as human beings the interlocutors acknowledge each other as unique and dignified persons. In juridical terms, on the other hand, the relationships were asymmetrical regarding responsibilities; the mentor was regarded as responsible for *leading* the group which, as a category, is closest to the *strategic action* end of the continuum illustrated in Figure 2.

To sum up, the *practice architectures* of autonomous professionalism became apparent in the *cultural-discursive arrangements* that held in place particular kinds of communication about teachers and mentoring ('sayings' of mentoring). These included an emphasis on a respectful and appreciative manner of speaking, as well as a vocabulary which emphasised the high trust placed in new teachers and their capacities for reflective learning. This, in turn, demonstrated the culture of trust in teachers in Finland. In terms of *material-economic* arrangements, i.e., the physical, material and spatial prerequisites to support PGM mentoring practices (*doings* of mentoring), teacher development meetings held around a coffee table opened up insights without the need for record keeping, formal accreditation, evaluation, control or inspection. Regarding the *social-political* arrangements which enable and constrain particular types of social relationships between persons and social groups and which held in place the 'relatings' between mentors and mentees, we found assumptions related to society which can be conceptualized as originating from Nordic social democratic traditions with their emphasis on equity, reciprocity and dialogue.

#### **4.2.2. Practice architectures of mentoring in NSW, Australia**

In contrast to the PGM model in Finland, the *project* of mentoring practices in NSW, Australia was oriented towards developing and supporting new scheme teachers for accreditation, thus creating a *standards-driven professional* (see Figure 5 below). Thus, the primary focus of the mentors was largely instrumentalist, that is, oriented towards a form of strategic action with a predetermined end result.

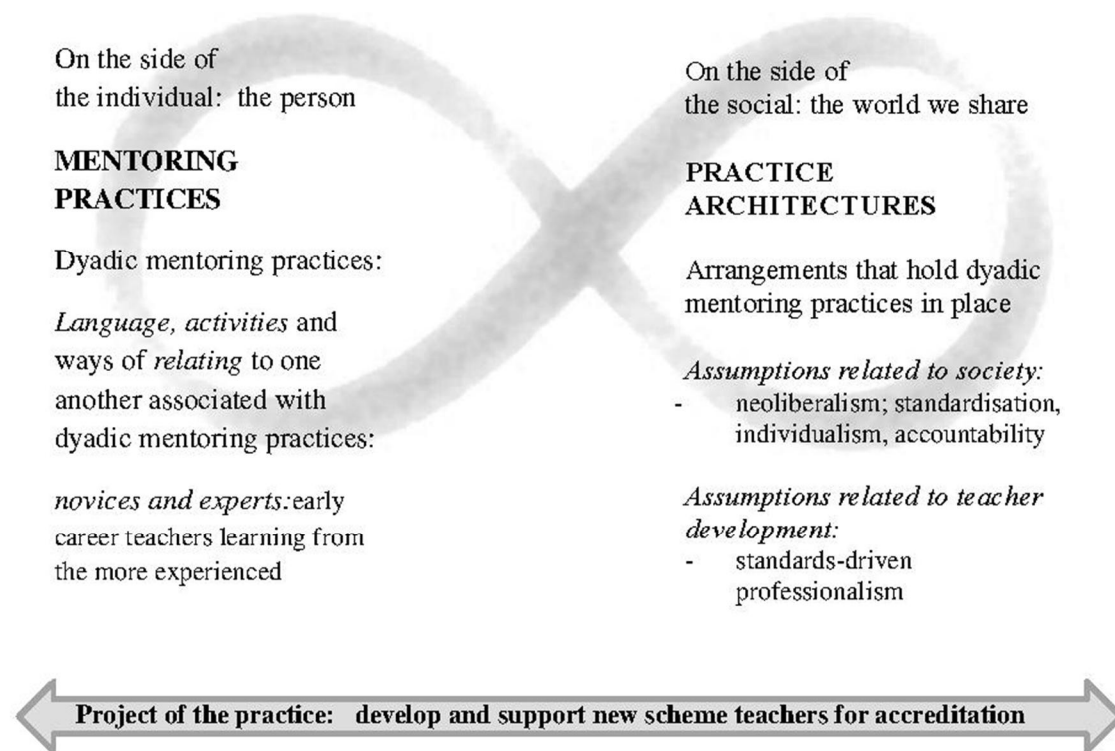


Figure 5. Practice architectures of dyadic mentoring in NSW, Australia

With regard to the project of mentoring practice as aimed towards *creating a standards driven professional*, the language and ideas about mentoring practices were prefigured by a mix of contesting discourses including accreditation, maternal caring and notions of teacher professionalism rooted in collegiality. Mentors' sayings may have been oriented towards providing the mentees with a sense of their position within the profession but the competing discourses suggested that it was unclear exactly what this position was. Mentors' sayings focussed on articulating new teachers' place not only in terms of a specific location (rural) but in terms of stage (early career) and relationships (networking and not isolation). These practices created the opportunity for the mentee to articulate the challenges they were experiencing when it came to state and national requirements.

In terms of material-economic arrangements, the principal utilised federal government equity funding to support regular release of mentors to work with mentees. This release time included varying forms of communicative action oriented towards building a sense of safety for the mentees, in which mentees were positioned as subjects rather than objects of social action (e.g., mentors creating a communicative space in the form of afternoon teas where mentors and mentees felt free to talk in a more informal manner). It included varying forms of strategic action in which there were some attempts to position the mentee as equal subjects of communication. Examples included the principal providing time release for: mentees to observe the mentors while teaching thus enabling critical reflection on mentors' teaching practices; mentors facilitating

connections with other professionals within the school and external to the school via networking opportunities; and mentors and mentees co-designing academic programmes and units of work (collaborating). The time release also provided opportunities for mentors to give step by step guidance to mentees around the accountability measures of accreditation. In this instance, the mentees were clearly positioned as the objects of social action.

Adjustments to the material-economic arrangements facilitated a concurrent change in the social-political arrangements (*relatings*) related to *creating a standards driven professional*.

## 5 Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this article was threefold: 1. to understand how mentors who facilitate peer group mentoring in Finland and mentors in NSW, Australia understood mentoring as a *social practice*; and 2. to understand how practices of mentoring were prefigured, leading to major differences between mentoring practices in the two sites. A third and final purpose was to deepen scholarly understandings, conceptualisations and theorisations of mentoring as a practice. In sum, we have contended that employing a practice theory approach such as practice architectures to our respective sites of Finland and NSW, Australia afforded opportunities to apprehend:

1. The *what* and *how* of mentoring as a social practice for new teachers, i.e., how participants in the practice of mentoring of new teachers in Finland and NSW, Australia related to one another via diverse projects and arrangements which prefigured (but did not predetermine) their mentoring practices;
2. The various mentoring practices and arrangements that created the site-specific conditions through which new teachers in our two case study sites came to practise their profession and learn how to *go on* (or not as the case may be) in their chosen profession. These practices and arrangements, we suggest, may be variously experienced as educational or indeed, anti-educational for these new teachers; and
3. The broader possibilities for *transformations* to mentoring practices, i.e., understanding the site-specific composition of a practice such as mentoring (its sayings, doings and relatings) – and the arrangements that hold it in place – can enable new, more educational understandings, activities and ways of relating to one another to emerge, as the Finnish PGM model illustrated.

In terms of the implications of this examination of our two cases, our employment of Habermasian notions of communicative and strategic action in concert with a practice theory lens has firstly drawn attention to the critical need for education systems and educators to find a *balance* between communicative and strategic action in educational practices such as mentoring of new teachers. As our two case study findings suggest, all forms of communication such as mentoring have both strategic and communicative purposes. The utilisation of Habermas' theory of social action highlights this twofold

purpose and rationale for mentoring practices of new teachers. In the international literature, this dynamic balance in the mentor's role has sometimes been described as a tension between *supporting* versus *judging*, or being a *mentor* versus being an *evaluator* (Le Maistre, Boudreau & Paré, 2006). The challenge for the mentor is that the balance between strategic and communicative action can only be achieved in a space riven with dilemmas: educational practices are to some extent essentially about influencing another person, i. e., *strategic action*, such as evaluating or giving instructions or advice. However, the ideal would be that these people would be able to work as equal colleagues and thus apply *communicative action*, i.e., free and reciprocal professional dialogue between the partners. It is not logically possible, however, to achieve dialogue between equal subjects through a communication where the other has been treated as an object of action. Should mentees be regarded as autonomous individuals from the very beginning, or if not, where is the magic point at which the novices turn from heteronomous objects into autonomous subjects? Thus, we meet with a traditional problem in education, known as the *educational paradox*.

In general terms, the pedagogical paradox arises in mentoring when a mentor declares that mentoring should foster communicative action and dialogue, but on the authority of the mentor. The essence of this educational paradox was formulated by Immanuel Kant in his lectures on pedagogy (1803/1964, p. 718): "How do I cultivate freedom through coercion?" (Biesta 2015, 80; Authors et al 2012c.)

Secondly, the employment of a Habermasian lens of social action suggests that educators, educational leaders, and educational systems more broadly need to be mindful of and explicit about the strategic purposes of mentoring as a social action. Whenever mentoring practices are drawing predominantly upon strategic forms of action, there is a need for openness in terms of one's aims, goals and values. In other words, there needs to be open strategic action. This applies equally to mentoring or other forms of educational practice. A lack of openness about these aims, goals and values may lead to concealed strategic action which leads to unconscious or conscious deception (see Figure 2). In the Australian case, mentoring practices were presaged on a mix of open strategic action, i.e., the purported project of the practice was to support new teachers to become accredited – a project which the mentors willingly embraced. However, there was also a more concealed strategic action arising from system demands, i.e., if struggling new teachers did not improve professionally, they would not meet accreditation standards and could be dismissed. It is not surprising then that the mentors in the Australian case struggled at times to establish more trusting relations with mentees given the concealed strategic action that formed part of the practice architectures prefiguring their practices as mentors.

Finally, both cases raise larger questions about the project of the practice of *education* and the *lifeworld* into which new teachers are being inducted. If we conceive of education as having a double purpose, i.e., "to prepare people to live well in a world worth living in" (Authors et al., 2014c) then the "world worth living in" is not being created 'out there' but in the moment-by-moment "happeningness" (Schatzki, 2005) of educational practices (and the arrangements that hold such practices in place). A critical

aspect of the creation of this world lies in how new teachers are initiated into the profession through mentoring and other social practices. Given research which suggests that the educational world into which new teachers are being inducted is increasingly precarious and stressful, it behoves us to pay greater attention to the *conditions of practice* which are being created by mentoring and related practices. The utility of a practice architectures lens combined with Habermas' view of social action is that it draws our attention to the practices (and the arrangements that hold them in place) that create the conditions of possibility (enablement and constraint) for new teachers to practise their profession. It suggests possibilities for transformations of these practices and that the broader project of education to create a world worth living in lies not in the future but in how we behave towards one another in the present. In other words, the "good life" for new teachers and the teaching profession is being continually created and recreated in the here and now through the ways that we practise our profession and treat/mistreat one another. As such, how and why educational practices like mentoring unfold in their moment-by-moment "happeningness" in varied educational sites serves as a continual reminder of their location as "sites of the social" (Schatzki, 2002).

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