UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Supporting beginning teachers in urban environments

Gaikhorst, L.

Publication date
2014
Document Version
Final published version

Citation for published version (APA):
Gaikhorst, L. (2014). *Supporting beginning teachers in urban environments*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

CHAPTER 5

Induction of beginning teachers in urban environments: An exploration of the support structure and culture for beginning teachers at primary schools needed to improve retention of primary school teachers[1].

Abstract

This study aimed to gain insight into ways to enhance teacher retention. Principals and beginning teachers from 11 Dutch urban primary schools were interviewed about their schools' support structure and culture. Schools where teachers judged about the support they received positively and schools where teachers evaluated this support negatively were contrasted. The study revealed that all schools undertook support activities, such as offering beginning teachers a buddy or coach. However, at schools where teachers judged the support positively, these activities were performed more consistently and conscientiously than at the other schools. Furthermore, cultural rather than structural characteristics distinguished the schools.

Keywords: beginning teachers, teacher induction, teacher retention, urban teaching

Introduction

For a variety of reasons, including a high workload and inadequate guidance and support, a great number of beginning teachers leave the teaching profession after only a few years of teaching (Buchanan, 2010; De Jonge & De Muijnck, 2002). The high turnover of novice teachers has resulted in a shortage of good qualified teachers in several countries (Ingersoll, 2003; Moon, 2007). Especially in urban areas, the outflow of beginners is relatively high (Ingersoll, 2003; Berndsen, Gemmeke, Hello & De Weerd, 2008). Teaching in an urban environment appeared to be challenging for teachers because they are confronted with complex issues such as cultural diversity and violence (Groulx, 2001; Haberman, 1995; Smith & Smith, 2006). This situation can lead to an outflow of teachers from these schools or from education in general. Research has shown that guidance in the workplace itself ('induction') may contribute to the retention of beginning teachers (Gilles, Davis & MacGlamery, 2009). Both the support structure and the support culture of a school contribute to effective induction practices and thus to the retention of beginning teachers (Assunção Flores, 2004; Davis & Higdon, 2008; Devos, Dupriez & Paquay, 2012; Howe, 2006; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Wang & Odell, 2002; Weiss, 1999). Support structure refers to the support activities that schools undertake to assist their beginning teachers, such as guidance from a coach, opportunities to gradually grow into the teaching profession and the provision of an introductory handbook. Support culture refers to the extent to which the culture of a school is supportive of beginning teachers, such as whether novices can easily approach colleagues for advice.

Research indicates that it is important for support practices to focus on the problems that teachers experience in the specific context in which they operate (Siwatu, 2011; Tamir, 2010). Therefore, it can be expected that urban schools provide specific forms of support. However, little is known about how support practices for novice teachers are actually organised at urban schools and whether this organisation matches the specific problems of beginning urban teachers (Jurasaite-Harbison & Rex, 2010; Wang, Odell & Schwille, 2008). Therefore, this study investigated the support structure and support culture of 11 urban primary schools. By contrasting schools where teachers judged the support they received positively and schools where teachers evaluated this support negatively, we aimed to identify valuable elements in the support structure and culture of urban schools.

Teaching in urban environments

The challenges for beginning urban teachers

Research has shown that newly qualified teachers are more likely to leave urban schools compared with non-urban schools (Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Ingersoll, 2003). A major cause of the early outflow of novice teachers from urban schools is that teaching in an urban context is challenging for teachers. Novice teachers in urban contexts must address issues that apply to all beginners, such as classroom discipline and a high workload (Abbott, Moran & Clarke, 2009; Veenman, 1984). In addition, beginning urban teachers must address the typical challenges of an urban context.

An important challenge is that urban teachers must address *cultural diversity* (Groulx 2001; Erskine-Cullen & Sinclari, 1996). Urban teachers are confronted with children and parents from different cultures, backgrounds, and values and who speak languages other than the teacher's native language (Diffily & Perkins, 2002; Zeichner, 2003). According to Zeichner (2003), this increasing gap between the backgrounds of the students and the teachers makes it challenging to teach at urban schools.

Dealing with the school environment appears to be a major challenge for urban teachers. Urban teachers experience difficulties with highly educated parents or parents with non-native backgrounds (Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Roosenboom, & Volman, 2014). Additionally, teachers in urban schools may feel anxiety about the students' use of violence at school and fear of the neighbourhoods in which they work (Smith & Smith, 2006).

Furthermore, urban teachers must manage relatively large *differences* between children in terms of character, behaviour, norms and values, and attitudes together with differences in students' cognitive and language development (Kooy, 2006; Swanson Gehrke, 2005). A major challenge appears to be second-language learners, which(is believed to be more common in urban schools because a higher percentage of families from ethnic minorities live in cities (Kooy, 2006).

The urban educational context in the Netherlands

The largest cities of the Netherlands can be considered as global cities (as many large cities in other countries), in which three types of urban schools can be found: schools

that primarily educate children with a high socio-economic status and a native background, schools that primarily educate children from a lower socio economic status and sometimes also from culturally diverse backgrounds, and schools where the student population is a mix of these pupils (Hooge, 2008). Beginning teachers in global cities are thus confronted with different types of student populations. We found that teachers in schools in global cities experience different types of challenges depending on the student population of their school (Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Roosenboom, & Volman, 2014). A major challenge of the teachers from schools with children from high SES was dealing with highly educated parents, whereas teachers from schools with children from low SES and culturally diverse backgrounds primarily perceived challenges related to their diverse student population (Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Roosenboom, & Volman, 2014).

Support needs of beginning urban teachers

Research among newly qualified urban teachers has shown that it is important for novices to receive guidance from an experienced 'buddy'. Furthermore, it appears to be important for the content of support programmes to focus on daily practice. Research by Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Zijlstra and Volman (2014) has found that the opportunity to exchange experiences and expertise in a network of teachers contributes to the competence and self-efficacy of starting urban teachers. Good support practices are important for every teacher, but because of the specific challenges faced by beginning teachers in urban environments and the pressure on urban teachers, it is important for these teachers to receive good guidance and support.

Support structure

The support structure of schools refers to all activities that schools undertake to support their beginning teachers. One support activity that is mentioned in various studies on induction is guidance by an experienced teacher who acts as a coach (also referred to as a mentor, tutor or teacher tutor) (Davis & Higdon, 2008; Howe, 2006; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Wang & Odell, 2002). There are significant differences between schools in the purpose, length, structure, intensity, and expectations of guidance and in the selection and training of the coach (Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005). To be effective, the guidance of a coach or mentor should meet several requirements, such as a relationship of trust

between the mentor and teacher, sufficient time for coaching, training/education of the coach, and addressing the individual needs of beginning teachers (Gardiner, 2012; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005).

Another support activity that is described in the literature as a promising way to promote teachers' professional development and job motivation is the opportunity to share experiences and expertise in a network of teachers (Hofman & Dijkstra, 2010; Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Zijlstra, & Volman, 2014). Furthermore, opportunities to gradually grow into the teaching practice and to reflect with colleagues on experiences are effective activities that schools can organise to support their novices (Howe, 2006).

Support culture

A good support structure is not enough; a support culture is necessary for the professional development and job motivation of teachers. Devos, Dupriez, and Paquay (2012) investigated the influence of support culture on teachers' self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as "the teacher's belief in her or his ability to organise and execute the course of actions required to successfully accomplish a specific task in a particular context" (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, p. 233). Research indicates that the role of self-efficacy is not clear: some authors think that teachers with low self-efficacy are less motivated to experiment with pedagogical challenges, whereas other researchers found potential benefits of teacher efficacy doubts for educational reform (Wheatley, 2002). Evers, Brouwers, and Tomic (2002) found that teachers with lower self-efficacy are more likely to experience burnout than are teachers with high self-efficacy. Consequently, teachers with lower self-efficacy are more likely to leave the teaching profession because of burnout. According to Devos et al. (2012), self-efficacy is strongly influenced by the support culture of schools. A support culture in which teachers' intrinsic motivation, which relates to personal growth and a desire to work with children (Moran, Kilpatrick, Abbott, Dallat & McClune, 2001), is stimulated and in which colleagues show confidence in the beginning teacher has a positive effect on the self-efficacy of beginning teachers, in contrast to a culture in which teachers are not allowed to show their weaknesses and in which competition and comparison are predominant. Teachers' intrinsic motivation can be stimulated by a culture focused on a vision and mission and in which the individual development of teachers is encouraged (Minarik, Thornton & Perreault, 2003).

Johnson and Kardos (2004) distinguish three types of professional cultures that beginning teachers might experience at their school: veteran-oriented, novice- oriented, and integrated professional culture. In a *veteran-oriented* culture, the workplace norms are set by veteran teachers who protect individual autonomy. In such a culture, there is little professional interaction between beginning teachers and more experienced teachers, so beginning teachers cannot benefit from the knowledge and skills of more experienced colleagues. A *novice-oriented* culture is characterised by a relatively large number of beginning teachers who often have high ambitions and work long days. In such a culture, there is intensive contact among the beginning teachers, but due to the absence of more experienced teachers, beginning teachers must learn everything independently. Although the novice-oriented culture differs significantly from the veteran-oriented culture, the consequences for beginning teachers are the same: beginning teachers cannot benefit from the experience of teachers who have worked longer in the teaching profession because there are few opportunities for these novices to interact with experienced teachers. In an *integrated professional* culture, there is ongoing professional exchange among all teachers. Both new teachers and more experienced teachers can benefit from this culture. Beginning teachers can be included in the team and supported by more experienced colleagues, and more experienced colleagues can benefit from new insights and knowledge from the beginning teachers.

In an integrated professional culture, teachers feel jointly responsible for the provision of good education. Teachers are autonomous, but they do not work only independently. There is a strong belief that a school can best teach its students if teachers work together at different levels and support each other in achieving educational goals (Johnson & Kardos, 2004). Promoting cooperation between teachers and involving teachers in decisions contributes to teachers' feelings of being supported and their intention to remain in the teaching profession (Weiss, 1999). This situation is in line with the results of Assunção Flores (2004), who indicates that, in the opposite situation, teachers feel isolated and unsatisfied when there is little collaboration and support among teachers, which can lead to an outflow of teachers. When there is collaboration among teachers, teachers are more satisfied with their careers and are more likely to remain in the teaching profession (Fulton & Britton, 2011).

Williams, Prestage, and Bedward (2001) perceive the extent of collaboration between teachers as a continuum running from completely individual work through structured collaboration to spontaneous collaboration. Structured collaboration stems from organisational procedures and is related to agreements that the school makes about a certain way of working. According to Williams et al. (2001), school cultures in which teachers work together through structured or spontaneous collaboration are more likely to provide for the needs of beginning teachers than school cultures in which teachers work individually. The teachers who participated in the study of Williams et al. (2001) preferred spontaneous collaboration. Beginning teachers in such a culture can develop well and experience the greatest satisfaction. According to McCormack, Gore, and Thomas (2006), beginning teachers not only benefit from support activities, such as supervision or coaching, but also have a great need for informal, unplanned contact with colleagues.

Johnson and Kardos (2004) argue that support activities for beginning teachers (such as guidance from a coach and practical, day-to-day help) must be embedded in a good support culture. In schools where this embedding is realised, teachers feel better supported and more successful in their work, and they have higher job motivation than teachers in schools where this is not the case.

Present study: purpose and research questions

As described, beginning teachers in urban environments teach in a complex environment where they encounter complex urban challenges, such as the need to address diversity and language differences (Groulx, 2001; Haberman, 1995; Smith & Smith, 2006). However, it is unknown how teachers can best be supported and retained in urban environments. Despite several initiatives intended to professionalise and retain teachers in urban schools, teacher shortages in urban areas remain, and beginning teachers are more likely to leave urban schools compared with non-urban schools (Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Ingersoll, 2003). The aim of this study was to gain insight into ways to improve the retention of beginning urban teachers. This study investigated the support structure and support culture of 11 urban primary schools. We contrasted schools where beginning teachers positively judged the support they received with schools where teachers negatively judged the support they received. Although we are aware that a teacher's

judgement may reflect the match between the teacher's needs and the schools' support practices rather than the actual situation in the schools, we believe that our approach can yield insight into valuable elements of the support structure and culture in urban schools. The research question was formulated as follows:

What are the characteristics of the support structure and support culture at schools where teachers positively or negatively judge the support they receive?

To answer the main research question, the following sub-questions were formulated:

1. What are the characteristics of the support structure at primary schools where beginning teachers positively or negatively judge the support they receive?
2. What are the characteristics of the support culture in primary schools where beginning teachers positively or negatively judge the support they receive?
3. To what extent are the support structure and culture in primary schools where beginning teachers positively or negatively judge the support they receive specifically focused on urban challenges?

Method

Design

A qualitative, descriptive study was conducted using 19 in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight beginning teachers and 11 principals from 11 urban primary schools in the Netherlands. A qualitative research method was chosen because we were interested in the participants' experiences of the support structure and culture of their school. By using a qualitative method, the participants were able to describe their experiences in detail.

Participants

In total, eight beginning teachers and 11 principals from 11 primary schools participated in the study (see Table 1).. The teachers and principals participated in interviews that lasted about one hour and were held - on a one-to-one-basis - in the schools of the participants.

All participants joined voluntarily in the study. The teachers who were selected for participation in the study were in the early stages of their teaching career. A teacher was considered 'beginning' when he or she had less than six years of teaching experience (Eliophotou Menon, 2012).

We attempted to obtain variation in our research group by selecting schools where teachers judged the support they received positively or negatively. Therefore, schools were selected from a database of 176 teachers who completed a questionnaire as part of the evaluation of a professional development course for beginning teachers and for whom information was available about their satisfaction with the support practices at their school. From this questionnaire, the following questions were used to select the schools: 'What mark would you give the guidance and support that you received as a beginning teacher at your school (on a ten-point scale that ranged from 1 'extremely poor support' to 10 'excellent support')?' and 'As a beginning teacher, did you receive guidance and support that was focused on teaching in an urban context (with categories 'no' or 'yes')?' On the basis of the information in the questionnaire, the schools were assigned to one of the following three categories:

1. Schools where teachers judged the support they received positively and where, according to the teachers, the support was focused on urban challenges.
2. Schools where teachers judged the support they received positively, but, according to the teachers, the support was not focused on urban challenges.
3. Schools where teachers judged about the support they received negatively and where, according to the teachers, the support was not focused on urban challenges.

Schools from category 1 and 2 received a score of 7 or higher for their support practices, whereas schools from category 3 received a score of 4 or lower. Schools were randomly selected from these categories and if a school did not want to participate, we selected another school. We attempted to have four or five schools in each category, but this was not always possible. In total, four schools in category 1, two schools in category 2, and five schools in category 3 participated in the study. The relationship with the urban context was included in the categories because the literature indicated that it is important for the support for beginning teachers to be connected to the specific challenges that they experience in the particular context in which they work—in this case, the urban context.

Only two teachers who completed the questionnaire also participated in this study. Therefore, the researchers asked the teachers who participated in this study for their evaluation of the support in their school. In some cases, a discrepancy occurred between the evaluation of the teachers who completed the questionnaires and the teachers who participated in this study. When there was a discrepancy, the researchers reclassified the schools based on the evaluation of the teachers who participated in the study.

Table 1

Characteristics of schools and interviewees

	School size	Student population	Interviewees	Sex Principal/Teacher	Years working as a teacher	Class of the beginning teacher (ranges from 1-8)	Evaluation of support based on questionnaire (category 1, 2, or 3)	Evaluation of support based on present study (category 1, 2, or 3)
School A	133 students	Disadvantaged[a]	Principal	Male			1	1
School B	225 students	Originally black, goes towards mixed	Principal + teacher	Female/Female	3	Middle grades	3	1
School C	375 students	Disadvantaged	Principal + teacher	Male/Female	6	Lower grades	1	1
School D	443 students	Mixed, with predominantly highly educated parents	Principal	Female			3	1
School E	487 students	Mixed	Principal + teacher	Female/Male	1	Middle grades	3	1
School F	135 students	Disadvantaged	Principal + teacher	Female/Female	4	Middle grades	1	2
School G	309 students	Mixed	Principal	Female			2	1
School H	191 students	Disadvantaged	Principal + teacher	Female/Female	5	Middle grades	1	3
School I	314 students	Mixed[b]	Principal + teacher	Female/Female	3	Lower grades	2	3
School J	304 students	Advantaged[c]	Principal + teacher	Male/Female	1	Middle grades	3	3
School K	402 students	Mixed	Principal + teacher	Female/Female	2	Lower and middle grades	3	3

[a] Schools with children primarily of low socioeconomic status and sometimes culturally diverse backgrounds

[b] Schools where the student population is a mix of both disadvantaged and advantaged pupils

[c] Schools that primarily serve children of high socioeconomic status and native background

Variables and instruments

Where possible, the study began with a document analysis of the school, investigating all documents related to the support of beginning teachers. Interviews were subsequently conducted with the beginning teachers and/or principals of the schools. The interviews focused on the central concepts of the research questions, namely, the support structure, support culture, and urban educational context. The interviews began with some introductory questions about, for instance teachers' experiences and support needs. Thereafter, questions were asked about the school's support structure and culture. The concept of 'support structure' was operationalised through questions such as, 'Which structural activities does the school perform to support beginning teachers?'

The concept of 'support culture' was measured by questions such as, 'How would you describe your school's support culture?' Special attention was paid to characteristics that are typical of the integrated professional culture, the novice-oriented culture, and the veteran-oriented culture.

The beginning teachers were also asked for their experiences with their schools' support structure and culture, with questions such as, 'Through which support activities do you feel properly supported?' and 'Are you satisfied with your school's support culture?'

Finally, the participants were asked about the relatedness of the support practices with the urban context, such as, 'How does an ideal support practice for teachers in an urban environment look, according to you?' and 'Do you think that teaching in an urban environment requires specific guidance and support?'

Analysis

A content analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The documents on the support practices of the schools were analysed on the basis of the concepts 'support structure', 'support culture', and 'urban context'.

Data reduction of the interviews was performed by selecting segments that were relevant for answering the research questions. These segments were placed into main categories (which were based on the central concepts of the study: support structure, support culture, and urban context) and subcategories (for instance, 'integrated

professional culture'). Subsequently, codes were created for the different elements of the support structure and culture (for instance, 'spontaneous collaboration').

The outcomes of the analysis of the documents and interviews were summarised in a data matrix for each school and, eventually, in a data matrix for all schools together. In this way, we determined whether the information in the documents was in line with the information from the interviews. It appeared that the information in the documents was less extensive than the information from the interviews. The data matrices included information from both the documents and interviews, and the information in the documents was supplemented with the information from the interviews.

After creating the data matrices, patterns and answers to the sub-questions of the study were identified.

Validity and reliability

The interviews were recorded using a voice-recorder and were transcribed verbatim to prevent interpretation bias. After the researcher transcribed an interview, it was sent to the participant for a member check. The participants were asked whether they wanted to add or correct something; a total of 11 participants responded to this email and they did not ask for changes. The analyses were also evaluated by a second researcher, who determined whether the data from the interviews were interpreted appropriately by the first researcher. Subsequently, the first and second researchers independently assigned codes regarding the extent to which the support practice of the school was judged positively by the teachers who participated in this study. The inter-rater reliability was calculated, and the agreement appeared to be 91%. Finally, the researchers independently evaluated whether the professional culture of the schools could be interpreted in terms of a novice-oriented, veteran-oriented, or integrated professional culture. The inter-rater reliability for the evaluation of the professional culture was also 91%. The outcomes of the evaluations were discussed until agreement was reached, and coding was adjusted to match the outcome of this discussion.

Findings

The findings are discussed first for the schools where teachers judged the support positively and then for the schools where teachers judged the support negatively.

The support structure of schools where teachers judged the support practices positively

At schools where teachers judged the support positively, various activities were undertaken to support beginning teachers. Beginning teachers at these schools had the opportunity to *gradually grow into the teaching profession*. The principals mentioned that they thought carefully about the group of students that they assigned to their beginning teachers; usually, this was not a very difficult group. Furthermore, beginning teachers had fewer extra tasks (such as the organisation of the school's Christmas party) in addition to their regular teaching tasks in comparison with their more experienced colleagues. The principal of school G stated this as follows:

> *"They [novices] have one year exemption from additional tasks. Then it is just the classroom and the children and of course parental meetings and all those things, but no additional tasks as joining the participation council or party committees."*

However, at two schools, the respondents indicated that beginning teachers had the same tasks as their more experienced colleagues. The beginning teacher of school B did not have difficulties managing the extra tasks; she appreciated being approached as a 'full' teacher. The school management of school B monitored whether the extra tasks put too much pressure on beginning teachers.

Furthermore, at almost all schools, there was a '*buddy*' or a *coach* who was an experienced colleague. A buddy was usually an experienced colleague from a parallel group who was assigned to the novice teacher and to whom the novice could always go with (practical) questions. Beginning teachers appreciated the guidance of their buddy because they always had someone to go to with their questions. The conversations between the buddies and the beginning teachers were not always structurally planned, but the beginning teachers could always contact their buddies when they felt the need to do so. In addition to the support of a buddy, it was possible for beginning teachers to receive guidance from an individual coach. At schools E and G, the coaches were internal coaches, whereas at the other schools, external coaching was available. All coaches were specifically trained to support the teachers. The guidance of a coach was perceived as very valuable by the teachers because a coach could focus specifically on the support needs of the teachers. Usually, the support of the coach consisted of classroom visits and/or

reflective conversations. Additionally, video interaction guidance was provided by the coach or by the school's internal supervisor.

Classroom visits were held at all schools by the school management and/or the internal supervisor. Often, there were also classroom visits from other people, such as the language coordinator. At all schools, classroom visits were followed by a reflective conversation. In almost all schools, *collegial consultation* was possible. Teachers could make observations in other classrooms and learn from each other. The principals considered observations in other classrooms to be important and created opportunities for their teachers to conduct these observations. This was stated as follows by the principal of school A:

> *"We started with collegial consultations … I [the principal] take care of the classroom and you [teacher] can observe another teacher. How does your colleague manage the things of which you think, hmm, I do not know if I am doing that well?"*

Guidance from outside the school could be arranged in all schools when beginning teachers indicated that they needed additional guidance. For instance, school C had an external contact with a language specialist who supported everyone in the school, including the beginning teachers. This language specialist provided guidance in the areas of language, but she could also provide support on other aspects. The principal of school C explained:

> *"Teachers receive guidance for language education from the language coordinator. She conducts observations in the classroom (…) and reflective conversations… She also provides guidance on other aspects, such as classroom management."*

At several schools, an *external induction trajectory* was offered to the beginning teachers. These trajectories consisted of meetings with beginning teachers from other schools (in which experiences and expertise could be shared), individual guidance from a coach, and/or video interaction guidance. The teacher of school B appreciated the meetings with other novices:

> *"I like to talk to others [beginners from other schools] sometimes. You come quite close to each other when you show your weaknesses."*

Other forms of guidance that were offered by the schools were an *introductory handbook* that described the rules and agreements about working at the school, *informal conversations* (with other teachers and/or the principal), and *intervision/peer review meetings* (in which teachers could exchange experiences and expertise with beginners from other schools).

Furthermore, the schools focused on the specific problems of their beginning teachers. Each principal believed that the support activities of the school were tailored to the specific problems and support needs of the beginning teachers. The principal of school C argued that it was important for beginning teachers to not be treated equally because not every teacher is the same, and different people have different needs. In conversations with beginning teachers, the principal regularly asked what the teachers needed.

At all schools where teachers judged the support positively, beginning teachers had the opportunity to indicate what type of support they preferred. Classroom visits, video interaction guidance, and the guidance of a buddy and coach were considered the most valuable support activities by the respondents.

The support structure of the schools where teachers judged the support practices negatively

Schools where teachers made judgements about the support practice negatively also undertook various support activities to support their beginning teachers. However, compared to the schools where teachers judged the support positively, the support activities were performed in a different way.

The analysis of the schools' documents about their support practices revealed that at schools where teachers judged the support practices negatively, *the way that beginning teachers were guided in the school was less extensively formulated and documented* than at schools where teachers judged the support practices positively. For instance, in the documents of the schools where teachers provided negative judgements, only principals performed classroom observations, whereas the documents of the other schools described how many observations the principal performed each year and the focus of these observations.

The interviews showed differences between the schools. For instance, principals of schools where the teachers negatively judged the support indicated that, in principle,

they would not present a beginning teacher with a difficult group, but in practice, this was not always feasible. For instance, the beginning teacher of school K was placed with a difficult group, which she experienced as quite challenging:

> *"I had a very difficult group... In retrospect, I think if I had known, I do not know if I would have started. …There have been times when I thought, what am I doing here? I am not able to do this at all."*

These schools seemed to be less clear about what they expected from their novices. They provided their beginning teachers with *fewer or no extra tasks*; however, when the beginning teachers wanted to perform extra tasks, they were allowed to do so. The teacher of school J indicated that there was no monitoring from the school management to determine whether a beginning teacher could handle the situation. Rules and agreements about ways of working were not always formalised, although the teachers had a need for clarity. The principal of school I stated:

> *"There should be a document in which all the agreements about how it works are documented, but yeah, that is not there yet."*

At almost every school, there was guidance from a *buddy* or a *coach*. Compared to the schools where teachers judged the guidance positively, the contact between the buddy and the beginning teacher was less intensive. The meetings usually took place when the teachers felt the need to talk with their buddy. According to the principals, the conversations had to be planned on a weekly basis to be effective. Due to time constraints, however, this was not feasible as, for instance, the teacher of school I declared:

> *".. at the beginning of the year, we had agreed that we would sit together every*
> *Friday, to plan the week, discuss what went well and wrong. But in the end, it took too much time."*

At many schools, there were no conversations between the buddy and the beginning teacher at all. Additionally, beginning teachers said that most of the time, they had to take the initiative to have a conversation with their buddy. The teachers indicated that their buddies often had little time to support them. However, two beginning teachers received guidance from an *individual coach*. This guidance was perceived as valuable because the support was focused on the specific problems of the teachers.

Classroom visits were performed by the school management, internal supervisor[2], and sometimes other people who were involved with the school. The internal supervisor provided guidance specifically for children who needed extra care. The principal of school J admitted that the reflective conversations after the classroom visits did not always occur because of time constraints. Two principals indicated that they regularly walked into classrooms and had *informal conversations* with the teachers, but there were no official classroom visits.

Collegial consultation was possible at two schools; in practice, however, this rarely occurred because there was not enough time or it was not possible to arrange a substitute teacher for the group: . The teacher of school D stated this as follows:

> *"Yes, there are [collegial consultations], however, only a few … (..) there is not much opportunity, because there are not many people who can replace the classroom..."*

External support could also be hired. The difference at schools where teachers judged the guidance positively was that guidance was only used when a problem arose. Thus, the schools solved problems only retrospectively. Teachers felt that they had to produce good arguments when they needed external support.

At two schools, an *external induction programme* was offered to the novice teachers. These programmes consisted of meetings with other teachers (in which novices from different schools could exchange experiences and expertise) and workshops (for instance, about communication techniques). The experiences with the external induction trajectories were mixed; one teacher explained that the induction programme was not connected to her specific needs and she did not see its value, whereas another teacher appreciated sharing experiences and expertise with other novices.

In Table 2, the support activities of the schools are presented.

---

[2] Internal supervisors in primary schools in the Netherlands are responsible for the care system of the school and the development of the educational vision and pedagogical and didactic approach of the school (Groeneweg, 2004).

Table 2

The support structure of urban primary schools

Support activities	School A (cat. 1)	School B (cat. 1)	School C (cat. 1)	School D (cat. 1)	School E (cat.1)	School F (cat. 2)	School G (cat. 2)	School H (cat. 3)	School I (cat. 3)	School J (cat. 3)	School K (cat. 3)
Protocol beginning teachers	x			x	x					x	
Classroom visits principal	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Classroom visits internal supervisor	x	x	x	x	x	X	x	x			x
Classroom visits others		x			x	X	x				x
External classroom visits	x				x		x	x			
Guidance from a buddy	x	/	x	x	x	X		x	x	x	
Collegial consultation	x		x		x		x	x		x	
Guidance from individual coach (internal or external)	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Fewer additional tasks	x			x				x	x	x	
No additional tasks					x	x	x				x
External induction trajectory		x		x		x	x	x	x	x	
Intervision/peer review meetings		x		x		x		x		x	
Video interaction guidance		x	x	x	x	x		x		x	x
Informal conversations		x			x	x	x			x	x
Reflective conversations	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Guidance for children who need extra care	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	?	?	x	x
Introductory handbook	x	x	x		x	x	?	?		x	
Parental contact support	x		x	x	x						
Language differences support	x	x	x								
Cultural diversity support								x			
Individual differences support		x			x						

'x': support activity was performed by the school, '/': support activity was partly performed by the school, '?': not explicitly mentioned during the interviews whether the support activity was performed by the school

The support culture of schools where teachers judged the support practices positively

The respondents who judged the support they received positively described the support culture as '*open*'. Everyone wanted to help each other, and beginning teachers could always go to colleagues with their problems and questions. The teacher of school C described this as follows:

> "*.. it [the culture] is open. (…) and they ask how you are doing and whether they can help you or when you run into difficulties, you can always go to someone with your questions.*"

Teachers felt they were not judged for making mistakes, but they had the opportunity to *learn from their mistakes*. Furthermore, teachers indicated that they were allowed to find their own way of teaching. Teachers appreciated the opportunity to learn from others and to make mistakes. At school C, the principal and teacher indicated that colleagues *collaborate to achieve educational goals*. The beginning teacher felt that she was not alone but that she performed her teaching job together with her colleagues. The teachers were dependent on each other to achieve the educational goals. The principal indicated that teachers were allowed to take initiative as long as a continuous line in the school could be realised. The principal had *full confidence in her teachers* and said that she would support them. These characteristics are typical of an *integrated professional culture*.

In all of these schools, there was (structured or spontaneous) *collaboration* between colleagues. The teacher of school C stated that cooperation arose spontaneously at her school. Teachers realised that when they collaborated, it saved significant time and effort. Collaboration between new and experienced teachers was promoted by linking an experienced colleague ('buddy') to a beginning teacher, giving the beginning teacher a strategic place in the building (so that the teacher could easily make contact with other teachers), and placing beginning and more experienced teachers together in work groups.

Furthermore, teachers could indicate that they *needed additional training*. At four of the five schools, teachers were explicitly encouraged by their principal to pursue additional training.

Beginning teachers in these schools were also invited to *think about important school decisions*. Beginning teachers were taken seriously, and no distinction was made between

beginning and experienced teachers. According to the principal of school C, novices were valuable for the school because they brought new knowledge and insights. Only the principal of school D thought that beginning teachers should focus on their own classroom in their first year. According to this principal, thinking about important decisions required teachers to think beyond their own classroom which was was difficult for beginners.

At schools where teachers judged the support they received positively, colleagues *showed interest in each other*. Beginning teachers could share their experiences and were *involved in the team*. Colleagues asked how the beginning teachers were doing and offered their support. Novice and more experienced teachers shared information with each other and learned from each other. The experienced teachers assisted the beginners when necessary, and the principals offered their support. Beginning teachers did not feel alone, which was very important for them.

The support culture of schools where teachers judged the support practices negatively

The support culture at schools where teachers judged the support they received negatively differed from schools where teachers provided positive judgements. The culture seemed to be experienced as less open by both the teachers and the principals. At three schools, the culture was described as 'familial'. Two teachers, for example, stated that there was considerable gossip at their school:

> *"It seems quite open, everyone is very spontaneous (...), but I did notice that there is gossip. (…) so, saying to your closest colleague that someone else is doing it wrong or that you do not like something, but not [saying it] to the person himself…".*

Furthermore, *collaboration* between teachers was primarily structured and not spontaneous. If spontaneous collaboration occurred, it was mainly because people were friends with each other, not because of professional reasons. Two teachers stated that not all of their colleagues were willing to collaborate. These teachers stated that their colleagues said that they would offer support, but in practice, they never had time. Experienced teachers did not share their expertise with new teachers. These aspects were characteristic of a *veteran-oriented culture.*

It is striking that in three of the four schools, beginning teachers said they were reluctant to express their ideas because they felt that they were not taken seriously:

"I remember in the beginning, when my principal asked me to give a presentation, that they [the older colleagues] really looked at me as, yeah, you know ... They did not take it seriously."

Another striking point is that beginners felt that they *could not develop themselves freely.* The teacher of school J had the impression that beginning teachers were not taken seriously. This was also recognised by the principal of school H, who believed that the teachers criticised each others' ideas. The teacher of school H also explained that when starting teachers took initiative, colleagues were suspicious.

Furthermore, beginning teachers experienced difficulties in obtaining adequate support from colleagues. They said they had to ask many times before they received support.

"(…) so that [group] was quite large, and there were many 'difficult' children. At one point, I had the feeling, 'I cannot handle this anymore'. It was a tough class, and I quite often indicated [that I needed extra guidance], but I received no support at all. At one point, (…) I told them that I would become ill if I did not receive support within a month. And then, finally, someone came, but I really had to… yes, that was annoying."

The *initiative for guidance came primarily from the beginning teacher.* There was no structural support, although the interviewed teachers indicated that they had a need for this. The teacher of school J thought that the support was not adequate for beginning teachers who did not ask questions. All respondents who judged about the support they received negatively recognised that they had to request guidance. The principals indicated that they had too little time to give optimal support to their beginning teachers.

A similarity among the schools where teachers positively judged the support was that it was accepted that *teachers may learn from their mistakes.*

In Table 3, the different culture elements for each school are presented.

Table 3

The support culture of urban primary schools

Elements of the support culture	School A (cat. 1)	School B (cat. 1)	School C (cat. 1)	School D (cat. 1)	School E (cat.1)	School F (cat. 2)	School G (cat. 2)	School H (cat. 3)	School I (cat. 3)	School J (cat. 3)	School K (cat. 3)
The ability to easily approach colleagues	x	x	x	x	x	/	?	x	x	x	x
Interest and support from colleagues	x	x	x	x	x	/	/	/	x	/	x
Opportunities to develop as a teacher	0	x	x	0	x	x	0		x	/	x
Encouragement to develop as a teacher	x	x	x	x	/		x		/	x	
Permission to make mistakes	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	/	x	x	x
Collaboration with colleagues	x	x	x	x	x	/	x	x	x	/	/
Collaboration between beginning and experienced teachers	?	x	x	x	x	/	x	x	x	/	/
Spontaneous collaboration	x	x	x	x	x		?	/	x	x	/
Unspontaneous/structured collaboration	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Encouragement to make investments	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	/	x	x
Working together on educational goals	x	x	x	x	x	/	x	/	x	x	x
Teachers need each other to achieve educational goals	x	x	x	x	/	x	x	/	x	x	x
Involvement in important decisions	x	x	x	/	x	x	x	x	/	x	x
Involved in the team	0	x	x	0	x	x	0.0	x	/	x	x
Taken seriously by the team	0	x	x	0	x		0		/	x	x
Valuation of culture	IPC	IPC	IPC	IPC	IPC	NOC/ VOC	IPC	VOC	VOC	VOC	IPC

'x' indicates that the culture element was present in the school

'/' indicates that the culture element was partly present in the school

'?' indicates that it was not explicitly mentioned during the interviews that the culture element was present in the school

'0' no teacher was interviewed, so an evaluation was not possible

'IPC' refers to an integrated professional culture, 'NOC' refers to a novice-oriented culture, 'VOC' refers to a veteran-oriented culture

The relation of the support practice to the urban context

Almost all respondents from the schools where teachers judged the support practices positively and half of the respondents at schools where teachers judged the support they received negatively believed that teaching in a large city was different from teaching elsewhere. One teacher explained this as follows:

> *"It is quite different. (...) What matters are the different cultures. (...) The kids come in here every day with many stories; these are very diverse. Plus that they all start with very different stories. You have to create all those connections. That is an extra dimension than that you come to school just to teach. There is also a great demand in the social field."*

All of the beginning teachers experienced difficulties with parental contact. At schools that primarily included children with parents from culturally diverse backgrounds, this problem consisted of communication problems (due to language barriers) and low parental involvement. One teacher explained this as follows:

> *"I was used to high parental involvement, which is not the case here. At one point, I had a conversation, and then it turned out that this is not common for parents in this school because they rely on the expertise of the teacher and that if they [as parents] start getting involved, it is disrespectful."*

School J is a school at which most children have highly educated parents. According to the teacher, these parents are very demanding:

> *"The parents are very demanding. (…) They keep an eye on everything that happens in the classroom, whether enough mathematics or language education is offered in the way that they think is good. They are themselves highly educated. So they also have a kind of understanding, or they think so anyway."*

Furthermore, addressing language differences was experienced as difficult by several teachers because there were many non-native children. Two teachers stated that it was more difficult to create a safe atmosphere in the classroom in a large city because so many children with different backgrounds and stories are placed together.

The challenge of managing cultural differences was mentioned by only one teacher. This is remarkable because ten respondents indicated that it would be a good

idea to provide beginning teachers with more knowledge about the diverse cultures of their students. Most of the teachers were confronted with cultural diversity, but they did not perceive this challenge as a real problem.

Other problems that were noted by the teachers in the urban context were dealing with complicated family situations, assertive children, and the large number of care agencies. Managing different individual levels was sometimes perceived as a problem, but the respondents did not specifically relate this issue to teaching in a large city.

Schools where teachers judged the support they received positively focused on at least one of the problems related to the urban educational context. Several teachers explained that they were confronted with urban challenges, such as dealing with cultural diversity, but that they perceived these as challenges rather than real problems because they received adequate support regarding these issues. For example, the teacher of school C explained that there were many low(er) SES children at her school. These children have many problems at home that they bring to school, which makes it difficult for the teacher to create a safe atmosphere in her classroom. The teacher indicated that she received adequate guidance regarding this challenge from an individual coach and her principal. She could approach them with her questions, and they would immediately help her.

Support for challenges with 'parental contact' consisted of jointly preparing for parental conversations and offering support during the conversation itself. The principal of school C indicated that teachers were confronted with many different cultures and characters at her school. Sometimes parents reacted in a way that was difficult for the teacher to handle, such as threatening the teacher. It was important for colleagues to help each other. Methods that worked for a certain colleague were passed on to other colleagues. Furthermore, beginning teachers had the opportunity to jointly prepare and conduct conversations with a colleague.

Support for the challenge of 'dealing with individual differences between children' consisted of guidance from (internal) experts on these themes. Beginning teachers were often supported by the internal supervisor of the school regarding the challenge of 'dealing with language deficiencies'. At three schools, there was contact with an (internal) language coordinator/specialist. The schools that offered guidance on 'language deficiencies' were all schools with many children whose parents came from diverse cultural backgrounds.

No specific support was offered regarding the other urban problems that were addressed by the teachers. However, teachers mentioned that they could always go to their principals to receive support.

The principal of school B argued that schools in an urban environment must create a good support culture for beginning teachers. According to this principal, teaching in a large city was so complex that beginning teachers must have the opportunity to approach colleagues for support and to collaborate with their colleagues. The principal of school H also believed that teaching in an urban environment was very complex and difficult; therefore, there must be sufficient support for beginning teachers.

Schools where teachers judged the guidance they received negatively offered almost no support regarding problems related to teaching in an urban context. For instance, schools with relatively large numbers of children from immigrant parents did not offer specific support regarding language deficiencies.

Conclusion

Support structure

The comparisons between the schools at which teachers judged the support they received positively or negatively showed, superficially, no remarkable differences between the support structure and culture of the schools. All of the schools undertook various support activities for their beginning teachers. However, *the extent to which these activities were performed* consistently and conscientiously was different. For example, the guidance of a 'buddy' was a support activity in every school, but this guidance was often not realised because of time constraints in the schools where teachers judged the support negatively. In schools where teachers judged the support positively, the 'buddy' took more initiative. This finding is in line with the results of the research of Norman and Feiman-Nemser (2005), who indicated that when the guidance of a buddy is taken seriously and enough time is invested, the guidance of a buddy can be valuable for novice teachers. This is especially the case at schools where the buddy is a specially trained coach or internal supervisor. All coaches at the schools where teachers judged the support positively received special training to learn how to support novices and had enough time for coaching. Gardner (2012) argues that it is important for teachers and their buddies to bond with each other, and this can only happen when enough time is available.

Furthermore, at the schools where teachers judged the support positively, the *rules and agreements about the way of working at the school were well documented*, so teachers knew what they could expect. In these documents, topics such as school rules, passwords for computers, and the method for ordering learning materials were described. Additionally, guidance for newly qualified teachers was extensively described in the schools' documents. Furthermore, *external support* could be hired if the teachers needed it. This approach showed that the principals of the schools were willing to invest in the professional development of the teachers. At schools where teachers judged the support negatively, the rules and agreements were not clearly formulated and documented, and external guidance was only possible when teachers already had issues, so problems were not prevented. Another remarkable difference was that the teachers who judged the support negatively indicated that there was no structural support at their school and little initiative for support from the school management or from colleagues, whereas at schools where teachers judged support positively, the *support was more systematically arranged* and *colleagues offered help more often*.

Support culture

Although there were differences in the support structure of the schools, the main difference between the schools appeared to be their support culture. There were large differences between the support cultures of schools where teachers judged the support they received positively or negatively. At schools where teachers judged the support positively, we found characteristics of an integrated professional culture. Teachers experienced an open culture in which they could easily approach their colleagues. The support culture at these schools consisted of collaboration between novice and more experienced teachers, encouragement of beginning teachers' development, and involved colleagues who took the novices seriously and who were open to discussing their experiences with beginning teachers. These elements are characteristic of an integrated professional culture (Johnson & Kardos, 2004).

At schools where teachers judged about the support they received negatively, the culture was less open than at the other schools. Novice teachers experienced difficulties in approaching their colleagues and felt that they were not taken seriously by their more experienced colleagues. This could lead to a feeling of isolation, which has a negative

influence on teachers' job motivation (Assunção Flores, 2004). Another characteristic of the schools where teachers judged the guidance negatively is that teachers reported that when they wanted to develop themselves, they felt criticised by colleagues. This situation contrasts with the schools where teachers judged support positively; at these schools, beginning teachers felt encouraged in their development and appreciated this encouragement. This finding is in line with previous research by Minarik et al. (2003), who stated that the encouragement of individual development/growth has a positive influence on the intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy of teachers. The culture of the schools where teachers judged the support they received negatively could be characterised as a veteran-oriented or novice-oriented culture (Johnson & Kardos, 2004).

Relation of the support structure and culture with the urban educational context

Schools where teachers judged the support practice positively focused on at least one of the urban problems that are present in the literature. These schools provided support for language deficiencies, parental contact, or creating a safe atmosphere in the classroom. According to the respondents, teaching in an urban environment is challenging and complex, and it is very important that there is an open culture in schools and that colleagues help each other.

Discussion

This study aimed to gain insight into the support structure and culture for beginning teachers at urban primary schools. We focused on characteristics of the support structure and support culture at schools where beginning teachers judged the support they received positively or negatively.

This study showed that in schools where teachers judged the support practice positively, support was focused on the specific urban challenges that the teachers experienced more than it was in the schools where teachers judged support negatively. The findings of the study are consistent with results from previous research that the support practice should focus on the specific problems that teachers experience within the context of their work—in this case, the urban educational context.

The respondents considered classroom visits, the guidance of a 'buddy' or a coach, and video interaction guidance were considered to be the most valuable support activities. In these activities, interaction and reflection take place between a supervisor and a beginning teacher. This result is in line with the findings of Howe (2006), who concluded that reflection is an important element of effective support.

An important finding of this study is that a good support *culture* is important for beginning teachers. Much of the literature on effective support for beginning teachers focuses on the support *structure*, or the support activities that schools perform to support their teachers (Davis & Higdon, 2008; Howe, 2006; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Wang & Odell, 2002). This study also underlines the value of a good support culture, which has a large influence on how teachers judged the support practice at their school. Elements of the support culture that were of particular importance for beginning teachers were (spontaneous) collaboration between novice and experienced colleagues, encouragement of beginning teachers' development, and involved colleagues who were open to discussing experiences with novices.

The study suggests that the complexity of teaching in an urban environment may be reduced by offering adequate support. The urban challenges that the teachers encountered in this study were not perceived as real problems as long as the teachers were adequately supported in these issues. According to several respondents, teaching in an urban environment is more challenging and complex than teaching outside the city. Therefore, it is important that urban schools create a good support structure and culture for their newly qualified teachers.

Limitations

This study has some limitations, and further research on urban teaching is needed. First, this was a small-scale study, and the findings cannot be generalised. The small-scale design made it possible to obtain insight into teachers' experiences with the support practices at their school and to obtain in-depth information about the elements of the support structure and culture that were valuable for beginning urban teachers.

Another limitation of this study is the way in which the schools were classified by the researchers into particular categories. An initial classification of the schools was made on the basis of questionnaires in which teachers evaluated the support practices of their

school. These questionnaires were administered in the context of the evaluation of a professional development course and not for the present study. The teachers who completed the questionnaires were not always the same teachers who participated in this research. In some cases, there appeared to be a discrepancy between the evaluations of the teachers who completed the questionnaires and the evaluations of the teachers who participated in this study. One reason for this discrepancy could be that the evaluation of the support practice is personal; how a teacher values or appreciates support reflects not only the actual support situation but also the match between the teacher's needs and the support given. Another reason could be that three to four years elapsed between the completion of the questionnaire and the present study. In the intervening period, schools could have made important changes in their support practices.

A distinction was made in this study between the support structure and culture, but structure and culture are not completely independent. For example, a school may offer the support activity 'guidance of a coach who is an experienced colleague'. This support activity leads to collaboration between novice and more experienced colleagues, which is also an element of the support culture.

Practical implications and further research

This study identified several elements of the support culture that are valuable for beginning teachers, according to the respondents. These elements are also found in the literature as characteristics of professional learning communities. It would be interesting to further investigate professional learning communities from the perspective of novice teachers.

Despite the limitations, this study provided insight in the support structure and culture of urban primary schools. The study identified several elements of the support structure and culture that were perceived as valuable for beginning urban teachers. The findings can contribute to the knowledge of teachers educators, educational support services, schools, school boards, and researchers on the organisation of valuable support practices for novice urban teachers.