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Title: Virtues of Mentors and Mentees in the Finnish Model of Teachers' Peer-group Mentoring

Year: 2020

Version: Published version

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Please cite the original version:

Pennanen, M., Heikkinen, H. L., & Tynjälä, P. (2020). Virtues of Mentors and Mentees in the Finnish Model of Teachers' Peer-group Mentoring. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 64(3), 355-371. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2018.1554601>



ISSN: 0031-3831 (Print) 1470-1170 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/csje20>

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To cite this article: Matti Pennanen, Hannu L. T. Heikkinen & Päivi Tynjälä (2020) Virtues of Mentors and Mentees in the Finnish Model of Teachers' Peer-group Mentoring, *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 64:3, 355-371, DOI: [10.1080/00313831.2018.1554601](https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2018.1554601)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2018.1554601>



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Virtues of Mentors and Mentees in the Finnish Model of Teachers' Peer-group Mentoring

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated participants' conceptions of the ideal mentor and mentee in the Finnish model of peer-group mentoring (PGM). Existing mentoring research emphasises dyadic practices, yet there is a lack of investigation of participants' roles in group mentoring. The main concepts of this inquiry were *dispositions (habitus)* and virtues drawing on the theory of practice architectures and Aristotelian virtue philosophy. Methodologically, the study can be identified as philosophical-empirical inquiry that utilises a narrative and hermeneutical approach to analyse qualitative data from 30 respondents. As its central finding, the study identified a set of core characteristics that describe the virtues and vices of a mentor and mentee based on the participants' views. Overall, these characteristics reflected ideas of relatings (peerness, equality), proactive and reactive participation, and presence in the group. Characteristics focused on the social aspect of dispositions in peer-group mentoring.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 12 December 2017

Accepted 15 November 2018

KEYWORDS

Mentoring; dispositions; virtue philosophy; theory of practice architectures

1. Introduction

Mentoring is a globally and widely used method of professional development. In its traditional form, mentoring is understood as a scenario in which an experienced professional (mentor) transmits knowledge to a colleague who is in the beginning phase of his or her career (mentee) (Roberts, 2000). Recently, this conventional one-to-one mentoring approach has been increasingly replaced or accompanied with new approaches based on group formations such as group mentoring, peer mentoring, mentoring circles, and peer-group mentoring (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Darwin & Palmer, 2009; Fyn, 2013; Heikkinen, Jokinen, & Tynjälä, 2012; Huizing, 2012; Roberts, 2000). In our view, a paradigm shift has taken place from the metaphor of knowledge transmission to knowledge construction, collaborative meaning making and common creation of professional knowledge. In Finland, this paradigm shift has been manifested in the form of the peer-group mentoring (PGM), which involves teachers sharing and reflecting on their experiences, discussing problems and challenges that they meet in their work, listening, encouraging one another, and, above all, learning together and from each other (Heikkinen et al., 2012). However, this fundamental turn of the concept of mentoring into more collaborative and constructive forms changes the roles of mentors and mentees. Thus, the present study examines the characteristics of an ideal mentor and mentee in the context of peer group mentoring.

The transformation of participants' roles has recently been a focal area of research on mentoring (e.g., Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Butler & Cuenca, 2012; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Crasborn,

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Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2011; Dominguez & Hager, 2013; Gut, Beam, Henning, Cochran, & Knight, 2014; Hudson, 2013; Izadinia, 2015; Leshem, 2014; Orland-Barak, 2014; Orland-Barak & Hasin, 2010). Although the inquiry into participants' roles has been extensive, there are still gaps in our knowledge that need further attention. Previous studies (e.g., Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010) have focused on the practices of traditional dyadic (one-to-one) mentoring, whereas only a limited number of studies have examined roles in group mentoring contexts (Hobson, Ashby, Mالدerez, & Tomlinson, 2009). Orland-Barak's (2014) recent literature review also shows that the current research emphasises the role of mentor and that investigation of mentees' role in mentoring practices has been overshadowed (Hudson, 2013). The present study addresses the research gaps in the mentoring literature by investigating group mentoring activity and by drawing equal attention to the roles of both mentor and mentee.

Our motive was to investigate participants' views of how the ideal mentor or mentee constitute "good" practice in peer-group mentoring from the perspective of social and collaborative activity. We approach the topic of "ideal mentor and mentee" in terms of the theory of practice and practice architectures (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008; Kemmis, Wilkinson, et al., 2014). This theory led us to investigate the participants' role through the concept of *disposition*, which is quite close to the Bourdieuan concept of *habitus*; dispositions are what give the participant the "feel for the game" that makes it possible for them to act appropriately in the field (Kemmis & Smith, 2008b; Kemmis, Wilkinson, et al., 2014). In the next chapters, we discuss theoretical and philosophical starting points of our work, after which we present our empirical study.

1.1. Mentoring and Mentoring Roles in the Research Literature

Mentoring has intrigued educational researchers for many decades as is evident from the vast amount of articles and books on the topic. Many literature reviews (e.g., Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Butler & Cuenca, 2012; Dominguez & Hager, 2013; Eby, 1997; Hawkey, 1997; Hobson et al., 2009; Huizing, 2012; Orland-Barak, 2014; Roberts, 2000) have tried to collate and structure the research on mentoring, offering general descriptions of the progress and the research strands in the field. Dominguez and Hager (2013) organised mentoring research around three primary and broad theoretical frameworks: (1) developmental, (2) learning and (3) social. These theoretical frames elucidate different aspects of the progress and development of both mentoring practices and mentoring relationships, which we have summarised in Table 1. Although we give distinct attention to each of these frames in order to highlight the important conceptual changes occurring in mentoring practices, we understand that these dimensions are interconnected and that some aspects of progress and development might be related to more than one theoretical frame. Also these dimensions helps us to understand the various conceptualisations of roles in mentoring that foregrounds our investigation.

Developmental theories consider the questions and issues related to professional (career) development, career stages and transitions. This framework is greatly influenced by the work of Levinson (1978) and Kram (1983) who presented phase models of adult development. Mentoring roles are examined in relation to individuals' career progress and how a mentoring relationship can support

Table 1. Summary of the development in mentoring practices and relationships.

Theoretical framework	Development of practices		
		From	To
Developmental	Focus:	Career development	Psychosocial support
	Relationship:	Hierarchical	Lateral
Learning	Focus:	Knowledge transmission	Knowledge transformation
	Relationship:	Unidirectional	Reciprocal
Social	Focus:	Situational adjustment	Reculturing
	Relationship:	Admonition, judgementoring	Equal agents

such development (Dominguez & Hager, 2013). In the field of education, mentoring has played a significant role in teacher induction programmes, which are planned and implemented to support beginning teachers' career progress and to address the problem of teacher attrition (European Commission, 2010). Thus, mentoring is commonly used to retain teachers in the profession. However, the use of mentoring as career support has generated problematic and hierarchical aspects including assessment, supervision and judgements (Kemmis, Heikkinen, Fransson, Aspfors, & Edwards-Groves, 2014; Lejonberg, Elstad, & Christophersen, 2015; Long et al., 2012). Alongside the traditional hierarchical mentoring relationship, mentoring as lateral support has steadily gained consideration and become conceptualised as peer mentoring (Eby, 1997). Through these new meanings, mentoring is regarded not only as a support for career development, but also as personal and social support (e.g., Geeraerts et al., 2015). This development has highlighted the humanising features of a mentor as a friend and an empathic supporter in addressing important psychosocial functions (Kram & Isabella, 1985). These personal and social dimensions have inspired researchers to explore the emotional and affective elements of mentoring relationships that also contribute to learning and social aspects of mentoring (Hawkey, 2006).

Learning theories illuminate the critical change in views of learning in mentoring practices (Dominguez & Hager, 2013). Traditionally, mentoring has relied on the behaviouristic learning theory and models of knowledge-transmission (Haggard, Dougherty, Turban, & Wilbanks, 2011). Over the years, however, development of learning theories has shaped mentoring to reflect the ideas of critical thinking, knowledge transformation, and knowledge creation stressed by socio-constructivist theories (Richter et al., 2013; Wang & Odell, 2007). Modern learning theories emphasise reciprocal and dialogical relationship, as adopted in the collaborative and collegial conceptualisations of novel mentoring practices (Heikkinen, Jokinen, & Tynjälä, 2008). The goal of these practices is to create opportunities for formal, informal, and non-formal learning activities (Bottoms et al., 2013; Desimone et al., 2014; Fyn, 2013) that facilitate the development and learning of both mentee and mentor (Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011). On the other hand, the research literature underlines the importance of formal mentor education (over informal and non-formal activities) in supporting a positive mentoring relationship through mentors' professional development (Ambrosetti, 2014; Lejonberg & Christophersen, 2015; Leshem, 2014). As learning theories have progressed, the role of mentor has evolved from authoritative, senior expert (Roberts, 2000) to critical friend and partner in dialogue, while the mentee is regarded as an active, critical, and reflective thinker in the mentoring relationship (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010).

Social theories of mentoring describe mentoring relationships in connection to social networks and social environments. Understanding of mentoring has consequently expanded outward from a dyadic relationship to considering broader networks of participants, which has been actualised in mentoring practices based around group formations (Huizing, 2012). In addition, social theories are not only contributing to the recognition of social networks, but also to rethinking socialisation through mentoring. There is an identified risk that especially beginning teachers are unidirectionally socialised into the existing culture of the school community, causing them to reproduce prevailing practices and absorb taken-for-granted perceptions (Wang & Odell, 2007; Yuan, 2016) and so lose their potential as change agents (Lane, Lacefield-Parachini, & Isken, 2003). Hargreaves and Fullan (2000) outlined that mentoring should be an instrument for school reculturing, which can be accompanied with explicitly identified means and ends (Levine & Marcus, 2010). In this process of reculturing, mentors have a crucial position in defining the nature of socialisation (Butler & Cuenca, 2012, p. 301). By this, we mean that mentors can either hold on to the conservative approach of socialisation that tries to maintain the prevailing situation and compel the newcomer into those circumstances, or, instead, foster the empowerment of the mentees (He, 2009) and rebuild, transform, and recreate the culture of their professional community towards engaging in critical and sustainable change (Mooney Simmie & Moles, 2011). To actualise this change, social theories emphasise the mentees' role as active, empowered agents that make contributions to the work community in collaboration with mentors (Dominguez & Hager, 2013). Thus, according to this thinking, mentors should be considered as equal and supportive

colleagues who build and reshape the community together with mentees in a reciprocal relationship (Edwards-Groves, Brennan Kemmis, Hardy, & Ponte, 2010).

1.2. Peer-group Mentoring from the Perspective of the Theoretical Frames

The practice examined in this study is the Finnish model of peer-group mentoring, which reflects the contemporary view of mentoring practices described in the previous three theoretical frames. The model was established to support teachers' professional development and work well-being (Heikkinen et al., 2012; Pennanen, Bristol, Wilkinson, & Heikkinen, 2016) and is provided for a wide scope of educational professionals (teachers, principals, support staff) from general education to vocational education, ranging from early childhood education to adult education (<http://www.verme.fi>). The key ideas of the model are based on peeriness and professional autonomy (e.g., Heikkinen et al., 2012, pp. 38–39), the socio-constructivist learning theory (e.g., Heikkinen et al., 2012), and dialogue and narrative identities (e.g., Estola, Heikkinen, & Syrjälä, 2014). In the Finnish model of peer-group mentoring teachers work in small groups (four to eight teachers) on a voluntary basis to discuss work-related issues and experiences. A typical planned time span of a peer mentoring group is one academic year. Meetings are held once a month and each meeting lasts about two hours. Topics of discussions cover everyday life in schools and often deal with issues that the teachers are currently struggling with: classroom management, interaction with parents, collaboration with colleagues, teachership and professional development, stress at work (Jokinen, Heikkinen, & Morberg, 2012, p. 180).

The Finnish Network for Teacher Induction “Osaava Verme” was set up to coordinate, disseminate and further develop the peer-group mentoring (PGM) model in Finland for the years 2010–2017 with funding provided by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and includes 13 teacher education units from universities and universities of applied sciences. The network organises mentor education programmes covering the whole country. During the Osaava Verme programme over 700 mentors were trained in Finland during 2010–2017 (Osaava Verme, 2017). During years 2018–2019 development of PGM and mentor training continues within the Development Programme of Teacher Education funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture.

The PGM group members are committed to the meetings per school year and jointly plan the schedule and themes for the meetings. The reported outcomes of the Finnish peer-group mentoring activity have been mainly positive, and the following key benefits have been identified: time and space for reflecting and sharing experience; empowerment and increased self-confidence; professional identity development; and increased motivation and well-being (Aspfors, Hansen, Tynjälä, Heikkinen, & Jokinen, 2012). The main challenges of the model are system-related: (1) the shift from project-based (and project-funded) activity to a consolidated part of the educational system, (2) sufficient resources and allocated time for the professionals to engage in the activity, and (3) awareness and support for mentoring in the education system to promote availability (Markkanen, Pennanen, Tynjälä, & Heikkinen, 2015).

With respect to the *developmental* dimension, one main goal of the peer-group mentoring is to create a consistent support for teacher induction. The availability of induction support for beginning teachers varies widely from school to school in Finland. According to the TALIS 2013 survey, 54% of Finnish schools have no formal induction programme, and new teachers in these schools are typically only provided with informal support or a general introduction to the school and its administration (Taaajamo, Puhakka, & Välijärvi, 2015). Peer-group mentoring has shown potential as an effective and resource-wise approach to provide more systematic and relevant support for inducing new teachers in Finnish schools (Geeraerts et al., 2015). While the model functions well as an induction system, it also supports teachers' professional development in other stages of their career (Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011, p. 24).

Learning in peer-group mentoring is a process in which learners construct knowledge in social interaction on the basis of their experiences and understanding (Heikkinen et al., 2012, p. 22). A fitting description of peer-group mentoring is collaborative self-development, as group members

work as co-mentors and co-mentees to each other, sharing their experiences and expertise in the meetings (Kemmis, Heikkinen, et al., 2014). However, group members can make their own independent decisions on how to utilise the given support in their daily profession, and peer-group mentoring does not involve any level of assessment, evaluation or inspection. Participants are thus responsible for their own learning.

From the *social theories* perspective, peer-group mentoring emphasises social interaction as a central part of mentoring. Group formation is regarded as one possible approach to changing the tradition of acting alone towards a culture of collegial and collaborative support (Hiltula, Isosomppi, Jokinen, & Oksakari, 2012, p. 69). Peer-group mentoring provides advantages in the richness and variety of support that is offered by the group members. However, the Finnish model of peer-group mentoring is not intended to provide in-depth support for relieving heavy, accumulated, work-related problems and stress. This type of individualised support is addressed through work supervision and work health care in the Finnish context, whereas peer-group mentoring can be considered as preventive support for work-related stress.

In sum, the Finnish model of PGM can be defined as a collaborative group-based learning activity between equal partners, facilitated by a trained mentor, and conducted following the principles of social construction of knowledge, dialogue and peeriness.

2. Praxis Orientation to Understand Mentoring Dispositions

Within the broad research on mentoring, consensus on what is *mentoring* or who is a *mentor* seems to be unattainable (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007; Haggard et al., 2011; Roberts, 2000). A possible explanation for this lies in the practice itself. Mentoring is described as a complex social and psychological activity (Roberts, 2000, p. 162), which seems to be inherently contested (Colley, 2002, p. 259). Mentoring can be seen as a social practice wherein the individual, the practice and the setting are enmeshed in a complex set of structures and actions (e.g., Kemmis, Heikkinen, et al., 2014; Pennanen et al., 2016). Therefore, each practice of mentoring produces an understanding of the role of the participant, which should be considered within the structures of that particular practice located in the specific site inhabited by the specific individuals engaging in the activity. In mentoring research, Moberg (2008) argues that the focus of the mentoring literature has been more on technical, social and political issues rather than moral and ethical ones. As a response, Moberg provides a useful theoretical investigation of the character development of the protégé, although this does not explicitly address the issues relevant to group-based mentoring. To further the moral and ethical discussion, our study focusses on mentoring relationships in group settings. In this study, we are interested in the participants' role in the social interaction contributing to the practice of a specific mentoring activity: the Finnish model of peer-group mentoring. This research approach is facilitated by the resource of the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis, Wilkinson, et al., 2014; Mahon, Kemmis, Francisco, & Lloyd, 2017), yet it is a deliberate choice to focus on the specific aspect within the broad theoretical frame, namely dispositions.

While there are a variety of interpretations of the Aristotelian *praxis* philosophy, in this research we rely on the interpretation that is peculiar to the theory of practice architectures. In Aristotelian thinking, and simply expressed, *praxis* is a distinctive form of action cultivated by *phronesis*, which is a certain type of wisdom and reasoning that aims towards wise, prudent and moral judgement (Kemmis & Smith, 2008b). The theory of practice architectures distinguishes practice and *praxis* in terms of moral commitment: “*practice is used as a term to refer social practices more generally, when actors are not necessarily conscious or aware of the moral import and the social and historical consequences of their actions*”, whereas *praxis* is understood as “... *action that is morally-committed, and oriented and informed by the traditions in a field.*” (Kemmis & Smith, 2008a, p. 4). The Aristotelian roots are emphasised to elevate the meaning of *praxis* from the simple and technical view of “social practice” to morally committed action, however, the view of *praxis* in the aforementioned theory is also influenced by the Marxian tradition, in which *praxis* is considered also as transformative and history-making action (2008a, p. 4). The

view of *praxis* adopted in this study cultivates the idea of cultivating a sustainable, just and healthy society in a global sense as well as the humanising features of praxis, which, in its broadest sense, takes account of the whole of human life (Mahon et al., 2017) and is connected to education via a double purpose:

... the purpose of education: to prepare people to live well in a world worth living. On the side of the individual, it concerns the formation of persons; on the side of the social, it concerns the formation of communities and societies ... To achieve this double purpose of the good life for each person and the good life for humankind, education must be conducted in ways that model and foster the good life for humankind. (Kemmis, Wilkinson, et al., 2014, p. 27)

Kristjánsson (2005) notes that currently there is a variety of neo-Aristotelian perspectives in educational research and there is not a single view that would be “all-embracing” and in relation to Kristjánsson’s description of neo-Aristotelianism, the theory of practice architectures is not strictly Aristotelian, but inspired by it. In terms of research the aim is to guide the development of educational praxis and education itself (Kemmis, 2010). In our study, taking a kind of Hadotian view, we are not following a system of Aristotelianism, but rather we are in a dialectical exercise with the antique philosophy, giving responses to limited questions (Hadot, 1995, p. 106). Agreeing with Kristjánsson, the theory of practice architectures shares the view in which truths “must be seen as located in particular historical circumstances and social contexts, and as answers to particular questions asked in the intellectual context of a particular time” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

According to the theory of practice architectures, practice (or *praxis*) unfolds in *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings*. These are formed not only by the individuals on their own (Edwards-Groves et al., 2010), but also shaped and prefigured by the arrangements that exist beyond the individual, referred to as practice architectures (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). These arrangements are identified in three dimensions: (1) *Cultural-discursive* arrangements are the resources (language, ideas) that enable and constrain the activities of *sayings* (i.e., discussion, thinking); (2) *material-economic arrangements* are the resources (i.e., human and non-human entities, like physical environment, time) that enable and constrain the activities of *doings* affecting what, when, how and by whom something can be done; and (3) *social-political arrangements* are the resources (i.e., community, familial, and organisational relationships) that enable and constrain the *relatings*, the ways in which people relate to each other (Mahon et al., 2017). These practice architectures also enable and constrain the development of dispositions, which we will introduce next.

2.1. Dispositions in the Theory of Practice and Practice Architectures

We explore and explicate the meaning of the concept of disposition from two theoretical and philosophical perspectives: Firstly, we explore the concept by applying the Bourdieusian sense of *habitus* to understand the individual’s stance and ontology in the practice (as this view is present in the theory of practice architectures). Secondly, we take a teleological view of the concept of disposition from the point of view of the Aristotelian philosophy. Both of these theoretical frameworks are on the background of the theory of practice architectures. We view the concept of disposition (or dispositions) as having significance in helping us understand individuals and their actions: their development and ways of being and acting in practice, in the field of practice and in relation to the structures of practice, including also the past history and future potential of the individual. Our view represents a broad understanding of disposition that stands in contrast to many narrow meanings expressed through terms such as (1) temperament; (2) traits; or (3) habits (Freeman, 2007).

Shortly described and widely understood, disposition could be just “acquired personal state” (Nash, 2003). In the theory of practice architectures, dispositions include *forms of understanding* (knowledge), *modes of action* (skills), and *ways of relating* (values) (Kemmis, Wilkinson, et al., 2014, p. 39). However, knowledge, skills, and values are said to have passive and inert connotations (in the sense of cognitive representations). In the view of Kemmis and colleagues, dispositions constitute, in contrast, something that is active and responsive to others, to practices and to the world

(Kemmis, Wilkinson, et al., 2014, p. 66). For this notion of dispositions as having an active form they draw on Bourdieu's (1990, 1995, p. 214) concept of *habitus*, referred to as a set of dispositions that enable participants to operate in a *field* (cultural, economic or social) providing a "feel for the game" (Kemmis, Wilkinson, et al., 2014, p. 66). Describing the process, Nash (1999) conceived *habitus*

as a generative schema in which the forms of elemental social structures come, through the process of socialisation, to be embodied in individuals, with the result that people necessarily act in such a way that the underlying structures are reproduced and given effect.

Although these structures affect the way people act, *habitus* is not strictly determined by social structures but does have an individual line of development (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 81; Nash, 1999, p. 179). Dispositions (*knowledge, skills and values*) in the sense of *habitus* can be understood, then, as personally (and uniquely) developed and embodied qualities, or a structure of qualities, that are socialised and acquired through social practices and that also shape the individual's ways of being proactive, reactive and responsive to the arrangements that enable and constrain possible activities in the site of a practice.

While the Bourdieusian term *habitus* helps us to understand the process of developing disposition in social practice, it does not clearly outline the ultimate aim of development. In Aristotelian terms, *héxis* or *habitus* describes a similar idea to Bourdieusian *habitus*, that of an acquired or incorporated ability, skill, or disposition (Eikeland, 2008, p. 53). However, in Aristotelian virtue philosophy, explicit teleological principles are identified through different states of disposition. The moral development of a human being is teleological: according to Aristotle, everything has its own goal (*telos*) and the goal for a human being is a life worth living (*eudaimonia*; Kakkori & Huttunen, 2007, p. 18). The pursuit of *eudaimonia* is facilitated by the virtues (*aretê*), which come through learning, teaching and habit (Lockwood, 2013). Virtue is an equilibrium between two vices and is considered as a mean relative to each person. To preserve the state of virtue, one should avoid extremes and always hit the mean (Gottlieb, 2009, p. 19). Aristotle (2006, NE 1107a) explained virtue as follows:

... Virtue, then, is a state concerned with choice, in a mean in relation to us, a mean determined by reason, namely the reason by which the person of practical wisdom would determine it. It is a mean between two vices, one of excess and the other of deficiency; further, it is a mean in that some states fall short of and others exceed what should be in feelings and in actions, but virtue finds and chooses the mean.

Thus, disposition (*hexis*) can have two different states, virtuous and vicious. Eikeland (2008, p. 55) notes that there exists a virtuous disposition in every performing entity as a condition that makes this entity able to perform in the best possible way. For a human being, virtues are developed by acting and feeling in a proper way in any given social situation (Kakkori & Huttunen, 2007, p. 20). However, acting in a seemingly virtuous way does not mean that the person doing the act is virtuous. As MacIntyre (2007, p. 149) explains, according to Aristotelian virtue thinking, a "genuinely virtuous agent ... acts on the basis of a true and rational judgement" (*phronesis*). Along with wisdom and rational thinking, acting virtuously also involves the ability to act decisively—to take decisions with confidence and act without undue hesitation (Sherman, 1989, p. 56). Lockwood (2013, p. 27) summarises three characteristics required for an action to be judged as virtuous: that the agent doing the act (1) does the act knowingly, (2) chooses the act for its own sake, and (3) does the act in a "firm and unchangeable" way.

Kristjánsson (2015, p. 24) reminds us of the empirical assumption of Aristotelian virtue philosophy, arguing that there cannot be a reasonably developed philosophical theory of virtue without grounding in empirical knowledge of how people actually think about virtues and the way they inform their character. Hence, our aim for this research was twofold: to identify the relevant dispositions of the participants in peer-group mentoring and to identify the virtue states of these dispositions. These two goals were combined in the following research questions:

What are the participants' conceptions of

- (1) a good mentor's, and
- (2) a good mentee's

dispositions in the Finnish model of peer-group mentoring?

In PGM, mentee designates a group member participating in the meetings, and mentor the person mainly responsible for organising the meetings and facilitating the discussion. These definitions are based on the practices of PGM in Finland. In the Results and Discussion sections the definitions of mentor and mentee will be discussed on more conceptual level on the basis of empirical findings.

3. Methodology

The research data was collected during years 2012–2014 from participants ($n = 30$) in two occasions: (1) in the regional mentor training organised by the Finnish Institute for Educational Research, and (2) from the groups that were located in Central Finland and volunteered for the interviews. The participants represented teachers from general education (primary school, lower and upper secondary schools) as well as teachers from vocational education. However, most of the informants were from general education, and the majority were female. Different career stages (beginning, mid, late) were represented, although most of the participants were in the mid stage of their teaching career. The data for the study consisted of two data sets. The first data set consisted of essays written by 14 mentors during their mentor training. The mentors were asked to present two fictional examples of PGM meetings as written stories (Mottart, Vanhooren, Rutten, & Soetaert, 2009; Watson, 2011). The first story was instructed to be written as a bad example of a PGM meeting and the mentors were asked to reflect on what went wrong and for what reasons. In the second instance, the mentors wrote an example account of a good PGM meeting and explained why it was successful and for what reasons. Although the task instruction was quite general, the stories based on fictional events provided respondents' insights of the meetings, including descriptions of dispositions of both mentees and mentors. The essays provided 37 pages of data.

In order to supplement the data with mentees' points of view, we organised interviews with the mentoring groups. Thus, the second data set consisted of five semi-structured focus group interviews with a total of 16 participants (11 mentees and 5 mentors) and explored topics such as group composition, communication and interaction in the group, roles in the group, how the group was organised and its activities. The interviews were transcribed, producing 90 pages of transcriptions in total.

Our methodology orientation can be understood as a philosophical-empirical inquiry (e.g., Kemmis, Wilkinson, et al., 2014) in which we explicate the descriptions of the dispositions in the peer-group mentoring (empirical side) and engage with the contemporary theory and philosophy of disposition (philosophical side), and, with the use of theory, interpret the empirical circumstances. For the empirical side, we adopted a post-modernist, constructivist narrative approach as we aimed for local, personal and subjective knowledge rather than objective or generalised knowledge (Heikkinen, 2002) through the investigation of interviews and fictional written stories as narratives. We consider this mixture of fictional stories and interviews to fit with Kristjánsson's previously mentioned assumption of empirical grounding, as fictional stories provided an open channel for expression of thoughts and we could compare this with (ontologically) subjective experiences based on real-life events gathered in the interviews. For the philosophical side, our orientation is hermeneutical and we aimed for a construed and coherent interpretation of the subjective experience and fictional narratives through dialogue with the theories and philosophy of disposition and virtues based on the idea of a hermeneutic circle (Moilanen, 2002). The collated characteristics in the results contain items from both fictional stories and interviewed experiences based on actual meetings, which are exemplified through translated excerpts. Names appearing in the excerpts are used as pseudonyms.

Our starting point for the analysis was the scrutiny of dispositions in terms of thematical content analysis. Data was shared between two researchers who used the question "*What constitutes the social disposition of a mentor and mentee?*" to identify (theoretically informed) items that were considered meaningful to the research topic. The social aspect was emphasised for two reasons: (1) the data focuses on the peer-group mentoring meetings, which are an inherently social activity, and (2) the analysis was guided by the researchers' interpretation of dispositions in the peer-group

mentoring in relation to the theoretical frame, which constitutes social conceptions of disposition. Therefore, the end results do not fully explain or exhaustively describe the whole set of dispositions that a participant in peer-group mentoring could possibly obtain, yet our study offers a starting point for dispositional investigation of peer-group mentoring from the social perspective.

The analysis took place in two main phases. In the first phase, a thematic content analysis was carried out. The texts of the both data sets were repeatedly read to identify differences and similarities in descriptions of mentors' and mentees' dispositions. Identified items from the two data sets were initially (and roughly) combined into thematic categories for both mentor and mentee disposition using a conventional word processing programme. Six thematic categories for mentors and seven thematic groups for mentees were produced. The raw and unfinished categories described characteristics such as attendance, equity, trust, motivation, participation and commitment (to mention a few).

At this stage of the analysis the researchers proceeded in the sense of hermeneutical circle to re-evaluate the structure of the items, as it was noted that (1) mentors and mentees shared largely similar characteristics (although a few exceptions were found), and (2) extracts in the data also described different states of certain social characteristics. With respect to the former, the researchers decided to combine similar items as common characteristics, and with respect to the latter, in the second stage of the analysis, the categories were interpreted in the light of Aristotle's description of virtues and vices, as the initial descriptions of the characteristics seemed to bear some resemblance to virtue philosophy. During this process, we did not want to turn the respondents' characterisations into Aristotle's virtues through vigorous interpretation, rather we applied the architecture of Aristotle's virtues and vices, and incorporated the structure with the views of the respondents (for a similar structuring, see Kakkori & Huttunen). The chosen method strove to remain honest to the voice of the respondents, perhaps at the cost of devotion to Aristotelian philosophy. However, since the focus of this study was peer-group mentoring rather than Aristotle's virtues, we aimed for a condensed view of mentoring dispositions in peer-group mentoring. Table 2 shows some example excerpts that were interpreted by the researchers and assessed according to the different states, as either virtue (ideal) or vice (deficit or excess). As the example (Table 2) shows, the statements were either in the first person or related to another group member or the group as a whole. The utterances also seemed to explicate things that had occurred or been actualised in the meeting and how people related to each other in the group. The results can thus be understood as the researchers' interpretations of the respondents (ideal) views of the social characterisations (related to the PGM meetings) that are presented in the structure of virtues and vices drawing from Aristotelian virtue philosophy.

4. Results

As a result (Table 3), we identified 16 characteristics that represented the three dimensions of disposition *deficit*, *ideal* and *excess*, and three characteristics that were described as *bad* or *good* dispositions. These three characteristics were described using a *bad/good* axis since the data did not support any alternative interpretations. For example, the participants made no comments to suggest that a participant in the peer-group mentoring could be identified as overly *present*, too *trustworthy* or excessively *interested in professional development*. The one characteristic that was related only to mentees described their level of engagement in the group. The three dispositions appointed to the

Table 2. Examples of the content analysis.

Excerpt (translated)	Interpretation	Disposition
"... no one else cared to express any opposite opinions [against the 'pack leader']"	Submissive	Deficiency (Vice)
"to be one of the group members"	Equal	Ideal (Virtue)
"She won't listen to others but demands that everyone listens to her"	Dominant	Excess (Vice)

Table 3. Characteristic virtues and vices of a mentor and mentee described by the participants.

Deficit	IDEAL	Excess
<i>Common dispositions for a mentee and a mentor</i>		
submissive	equal	dominant
negligible	peer	superior
uncommunicative	communicative	too talkative
not taking any space	sharing the space with others	taking space from the others
reserved	sharing	thundering
ignoring	attentive	intrusive
dismissive	constructive	upraising
inadvisable	reflective	inconclusive
insensitive	empathic	over emotional
apathetic	calm	uptight
not committed	committed	obsessed
exhausted	energetic	hyperenergetic
<i>Disposition of a mentee</i>		
timid	courageous	arrogant
<i>Dispositions of a mentor</i>		
passive	considerate	commanding
reluctant	motivated	externally motivated
unprepared	prepared	over planning
BAD		GOOD
<i>Common dispositions for a mentee and a mentor</i>		
absent		present
unreliable		trustworthy
not interested in professional development		interested in professional development

mentors' role described their (1) sense of leading the discussion, (2) motivation and (3) preparedness. The remaining characteristics were considered to be dispositions common to both mentors and mentees, even though our research questions were formulated to separately examine these two roles. Since the ways in which the dispositions were expressed were similar irrespective of whether the participant was a mentor or mentee, it was reasonable to combine them as common characteristics. The relation was identified through following utterances:

"[mentor] is a peer, 'cause that's what this is about."

"Mentor was a peer in the discussion ..."

"Mentor perceived herself as one of the group members."

In the following section, each characteristic and its dispositions are demonstrated by example excerpts (derived either from the fictional stories or interviews) that typify each disposition. The statements of every characteristic are presented in the order of *deficit*, *ideal*, and *excess* dispositions. To begin with, *equality* was present in the participants' descriptions of relational hierarchy and how the group members acted towards each other. The submissive state was expressed, for example, by the statement "... *no one else cared to express any opposite opinions [against the 'pack leader']*"; the ideal state was described, for example, by "*to be one of the group members*"; and the dominant state was revealed in statements such as "*She won't listen to others but demands that everyone listens to her*".

Peerness was construed as self-image in relation to experience, where *negligible* was identified as the deficit state by, for example, the statement "*as a new teacher he didn't dare*". *Peer* as an ideal disposition was expressed in statements related to feelings of shared experience: "*That's when I felt like a peer, when I recalled my own starting out as a teacher ... it felt so familiar*". *Superior* referred to a negative "lofty" position as captured, for example, by the statement "*She seems to be satisfied [...] providing her 'expert' statements*".

Communication was naturally identified in the data, as discussion is the main tool of peer-group mentoring: "*He was mostly silent*" (*uncommunicative*, deficit state), "*I think everyone managed to talk*"

well” (communicative, ideal state), “to begin with, Elsa was constantly talking” (too talkative, excess state). Communication connects also with another characteristic, sense of (social) space, which captured the ideas of participation and belonging: “Lisa felt she didn’t actively participate in discussion and no one seemed to mind that” (not taking any space, deficit state), “group members were actively participating, yet they were polite enough to allow space for others to tell their stories” (sharing the space with others, ideal state), “she filled the space with her own opinions and ignored the others” (taking space from others, excess state). The next characteristic pertains to emotional and personal content of expression through reserved, sharing, and thundering dispositions, expressed in excerpts such as: “Tilda has been very restrained” (deficit state), “it was important that participants could also share their feelings of fatigue and the toughness of the work” (ideal state), “discussion turned into quarrelling and Annie is always in a such bad mood” (excess state).

While the above characteristics emphasise proactive participation, the following characteristics mainly describe reactive participation. Ignoring was expressed by phrases such as “one was focusing on her mobile phone, other was planning her lessons” (deficit state); attentiveness was expressed by phrases such as “deferential nodding” (ideal state); and intrusiveness was expressed, for example, by “She made a verbal attack on Hannah’s views” (excess state). The feedback tone or level of positive reinforcement was described by the phrases “She belittled others’ feelings and experiences” (dismissive, deficit state), “... and you were supported by the others [...], you received advice and were encouraged” (constructive, ideal state), and “attention and recognition is only given to the ‘attractive people’” (upraising, excess state). The amount of reflective feedback was referred to by statements such as “she made no comments on either this or that” (inadvisable, deficit state), “... others have their perspective too ... you were always shown new ways of thinking” (reflective, ideal state), and “... he is constantly sharing odd personal comments that come to mind during the discussion” (inconclusive, excess state). The emotional sensitivity characteristic was identified in its deficit state as insensitivity (e.g., “many of the comments were coloured by cynicism”), its ideal state as empathic (e.g., “... the kind of empathy in the group”), and its excess state as over emotional (e.g., “... and they had heated discussion”).

The remaining common characteristics outlined features of personal presence or appearance. Apathetic described a deficit stance with respect to stress, expressed, for example, as “He doesn’t seem to listen and repeats what is already said—feels like he’s in a torpid state”; calm (ideal state) was captured in phrases like “it was the kind of place where you could calm yourself”; and uptight reflected the excess state “he’s stressed and tensed up”. The characteristics related to commitment to group activity were expressed quite explicitly, i.e., “they are not committed to the activity” (deficit state), “it felt important that every member could attend every meeting throughout the school year” (ideal state), “If they’d have been more frequent, the amount of meetings might have felt too heavy” (excess state, expressed through negation). The last characteristic identified was level of energy, the deficit state revealed in utterances such as “None of the group members had the energy or will to discuss work-related issues.”, the ideal state, for example, by the statement “Others were inspired to share their positive experiences”, and the excess state, for example, by the statement “Sarah, the one who can sort out problems and her son’s ride to his hobbies on her phone all mid discussion—a real ‘power pack’”. Next, we will discuss these identified common characteristics in relation to theory.

5. Discussion

Our aim was to investigate the participants’ conceptions of good mentor and mentee dispositions in the meetings of the Finnish PGM model, as stated in the research questions. The findings highlighted characteristics that concerned the individuals’ stance and attitude, proactive, reactive and responsive participation in the mentoring and, as such, provided valuable information on the dispositional set of the participants in the peer-group mentoring. To answer our research questions, we discuss the features of the dispositions identified in relation to the background and the theory of practice

architectures, and then turn the discussion to different states of disposition elaborated in the Aristotelian structure of virtues and vices.

5.1. What Did We Learn about Dispositions in Peer-group Mentoring?

A clear finding was that the role of mentor in peer-group mentoring is conceptually different to the role of mentor in traditional dyadic mentoring. In relation to broad frames outlined in theoretical background, these dispositions reflect the contemporary views of mentoring by lateral relationship (developmental dimension), reciprocity (learning dimension), and equality (social dimension). Whereas in traditional models recognition as an expert or a skilled professional is a somewhat required attribute, in peer-group mentoring the mentor's role is more about facilitating the meeting (preparation, practical arrangements) and the discussion (guiding, asking questions). Likewise, the role of mentee is not about being subordinate, but being recognised as a member of the group. The designated roles of mentor and mentee in peer-group mentoring do not create fixed positions with respect to expertise. Instead, participants share their knowledge and experiences, and sharing is valuable as such without any formal titles to highlight or prefigure the expertise. Conceptualised roles can be regarded as *cultural-discursive arrangements* that enable and constrain certain understandings and sayings and shape the way people act and relate in practice. Thus, in peer-group mentoring, mentor takes on the disposition of facilitator rather than senior expert, which is an important difference especially in terms of expectations, activities, and outcomes.

Instead of aiming for divided roles, peer-group mentoring seems to promote a sense of equality and peeriness. In other words, in order to feel confident enough to share feelings and experiences with others, participants seek common features to identify and relate with. However, our data revealed an interesting dilemma: in addition to seeking common features, the participants also wanted a polyphony of perspectives and experiences in order to promote constructive and reflective discussion. Our interpretation was that a common denominator creates cohesion in the group while diversity serves as a catalyst for reflective discussion and constructive exchange of ideas. The risk here is that a common denominator may create biased or one-sided views while diversity can create distance between group members. Yet no distinctive or systematic items of cohesion or diversity were found in the data. The likely explanation for this variation is the participants' subjective experiences. However, one obvious element was the "flatness" of the group: any sort of hierarchy in terms of power (e.g., teacher vs. principal) was regarded as a negative disposition. The features mentioned above are enabled and constrained by the *social-political arrangements* that elucidate the relationships between the actors. A major question is whether an employee can participate in the same group with her/his supervisor? Based on the ideal views, the simple answer would be no, yet the power relations in the group in terms of organisational hierarchy is an interesting area requiring follow-up research.

From the perspective of the theory of practice architectures, the characteristics should include all three dimensions of disposition. For example, to be identified in the disposition of *equal*, an individual should (1) *know* how to be equal (*forms of understanding*), (2) perform *acts* that an equal person would perform (*modes of action*) and (3) *relate* to others as an equal (*ways of relating*). Evaluating our study in relation to these dimensions, we regard that *forms of understanding* and *ways of relating* are emphasised. Dispositions were expressed in fictional stories and group interviews either as a personal experience (e.g., "*I didn't feel confident*"), an evaluative utterance directed at another person (e.g., "*he acted arrogantly*"), or as a group description (e.g., "*we got along really well*"). These expressions display the different aspects of dispositions focusing on *knowing* and *relating*, which include self-evaluation or self-knowledge, interpersonal evaluation or judgement, and the sense of relating in a group. As *Modes of action* relies on respondents' subjective descriptions, no factual information on this aspect (other than interview responses) is provided in this study. For further investigation, the research setting could include alternative methods to document acts, such as video recording, that would make it possible to compare subjective experiences and factual events and actions performed. The most meaningful material-economic arrangements were time and

place displayed through characteristics of (physical) attendance in the meetings and the use of time, ensuring that every member had their temporal space for participating in discussion.

There is a clear connection between these characteristics and the core principles underpinning the practice of peer-group mentoring—peeriness, socio-constructivist learning and dialogue—as it should be, since the participants, the practice and the practice arrangements constitute an intertwined ensemble that is somewhat unique with its own distinct features. Yet, we want to emphasise that these identified characteristics are not confirmed to be the *only* characteristics relevant to peer-group mentoring, as entirely different sets of dispositions may exist that were not exposed in this study. The characteristics described above were the conceptual descriptions revealed by our specific study aimed at identifying the dispositions relevant to the Finnish peer-group mentoring model. Next, we will turn to the moral discussion of the “good and bad” of the dispositions in dialogue with Aristotelian virtue philosophy.

5.2. Dispositions from the Perspective of Virtue Philosophy

In our investigation of virtues and vices, we did not set the ambitious goal of revealing all of the human moral and intellectual virtues identified by Aristotle in our research setting. Instead, our scope was aimed at the entities of mentor and mentee in peer-group mentoring, following the Eikeland (2008) notion of virtue, to find the best possible way to act for the entities. Thus, our Aristotelian treatment does not strive for a holistic approach, but provides us with a useful theoretical structure to display features in a theoretically informed data-driven manner. Also, the refined philosophy of virtues and vices was utilised as an interlocutor to discuss some of the issues of dispositions.

The key question is if the participants act according to virtue and avoid vices, will this contribute to the good practice of peer-group mentoring? Based on an overall view of the identified characteristics, the immediate answer would be yes. As dispositions are suggested to construct a certain set of qualities that are intertwined, then exercising a virtue of one type could predict the success of another virtue, as long as the virtuous acts are not opposing each other. The internal comparison of the dispositions presented does indeed imply that they are connected to each other: a communicative person would also likely be sharing and attentive, for example. Moreover, these identified dispositions may relate also to other dispositions that remained implicit in this study. Granted, as noted, that the view obtained in this study is limited, the specific answer to the above question would nevertheless be that the identified virtues did contribute to the sphere of preferred social activity in the peer-group mentoring meetings.

The deeper or broader moral commitment, which in this study also remained implicit, is the connection to teacher daily work and the community, and whether their participation in peer-group mentoring is reflected in any way outside of the meetings. Based on the respondents' utterances, they did not explicitly point out any connections between peer-group mentoring and performing their daily work of teaching. However, we can make an indirect claim that it is likely that virtuous participants also act in a virtuous manner outside of the meetings. This claim is grounded on two arguments: first, the virtues are somewhat stable qualities, and, second, obtaining a virtuous disposition in one sphere would predict likely success in another dispositional sphere as dispositions are considered to form an interconnected structure (Kristjánsson, 2015, p. 14). In the data, respondents described the meetings, for example, as a place to seek relief, comfort, empathy and reflective discussion on issues encountered in their daily work. Therefore, relating the above arguments to the data, peer-group meetings could be an arena for teachers to develop their *habitus* and bring positive aspects back to the work community.

6. Conclusions

The characteristics of mentor and mentee identified in this study explicate the dispositions that were considered most relevant in peer-group mentoring in the view of the participants. The characteristics

form a certain consensus of what is seen as appropriate or inappropriate in peer group mentoring practice. That is not to say that these would be definite social norms for peer-group mentoring, but we acknowledge the value of these characteristics in giving a sense of what kind of activity is intended to be achieved and maintained in the meetings. As such, the set of characteristics can be used as a conceptual tool for understanding the nature of peer-group mentoring for participants, practitioners or educators, or anybody working with similar mentoring practices. For further study, the research set-up would benefit if the data would be gathered in alternative ways, such as video recording to provide comparison of the subjective experiences. Our research setting proved effective in identifying participants' views of ideal dispositions in peer-group mentoring. A key area for follow-up study would be investigation of how the participants act according to these virtues. Also the current approach relied majorly on researchers' interpretations, therefore it would be meaningful to investigate whether the participants in peer-group mentoring verify these dispositions.

Acknowledgements

We are deeply grateful to the many people who have supported this work along the way. Special thanks to the Finnish Network for Teacher Induction "Osaava Verme" and Ilona Markkanen, coordinator of the network, for providing support for data gathering, and also Anne Martin for her valuable contribution to the interviews. The preliminary work for this study was conducted during a research visit to the Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education (RIPPLE) at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, Australia, and we extend our very warmest thanks to the staff members and colleagues for taking such good care of us. Thank you, Stephen Kemmis, Laurette Bristol, Kathleen Mahon and Jane Wilkinson, for engaging with us in inspiring discussions, and also Rauno Huttunen and Leena Kakori for your philosophical reflections. To all our friends and colleagues, thank you.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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