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The influence of induction programs on beginning teachers'well-being and professional development

Kessels, C.

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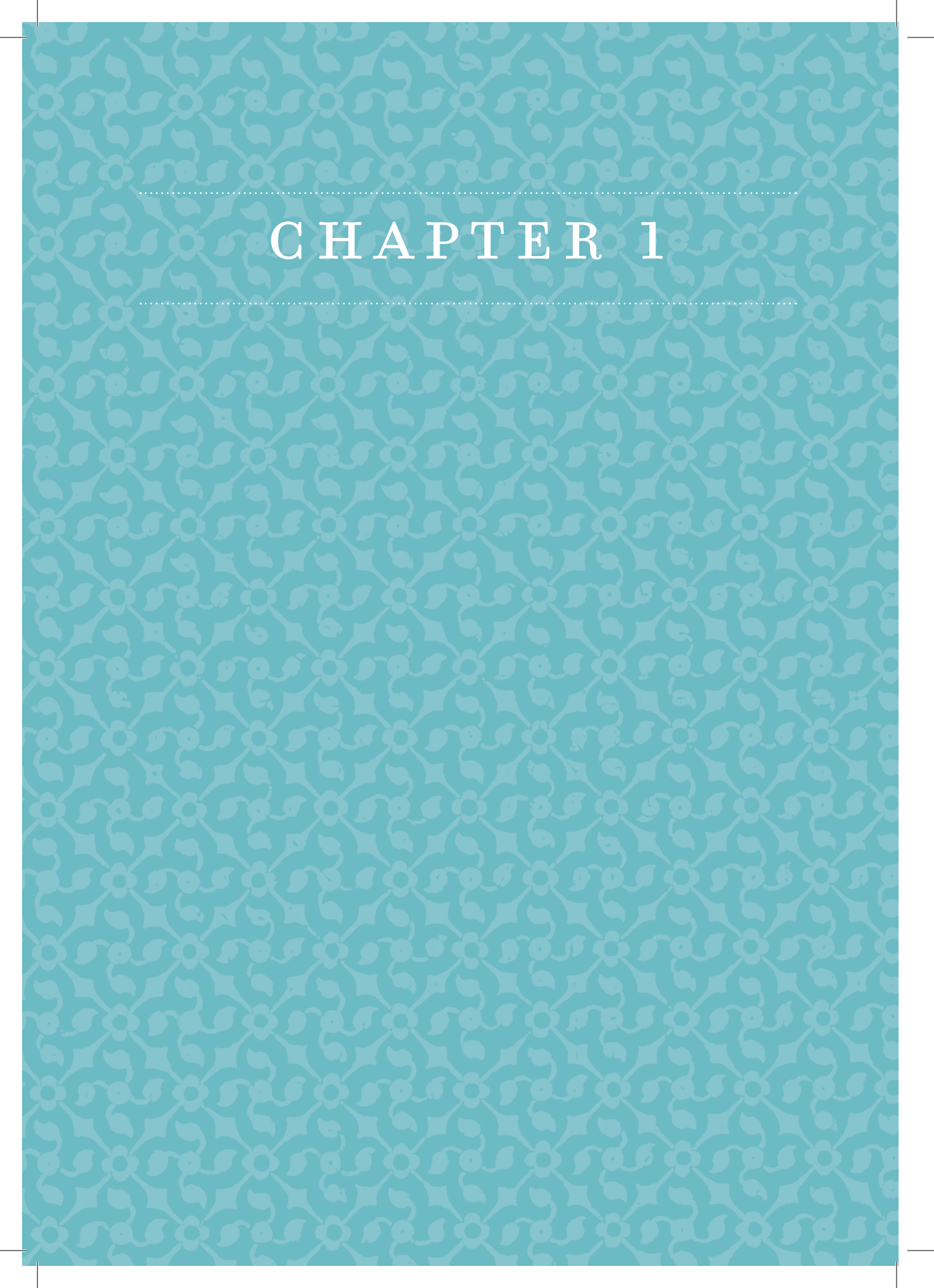
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Schools worldwide use induction programs to support beginning teachers in their first years of teaching. With induction programs, schools aim to contribute to beginning teachers' sense of well-being and professional development. But do induction programs have the positive influence expected of them? And what characteristics of induction programs are essential to contribute to beginning teachers' well-being and professional development? This thesis reports on two studies aimed at answering these questions, an interview study and a survey study. This chapter pays attention to the background of the studies (section 1.1), the problem definition and research questions (section 1.2), the relevance of the studies (section 1.3), and provides an outline of the thesis (section 1.4).

As the research literature available on teacher induction and induction programs in the Netherlands is limited, the first section is predominantly based on the literature from the USA and the UK (see also Beijgaard, Buitink, & Kessels, 2010). In the USA teacher induction programs have been the object of research for more than two decades. In the UK teacher induction programs are obligatory nowadays and thus explicitly part of policies regarding teacher certification. As a result, they have – though more recently than in the USA – become an object of research as well.

1.1 Background of the study

1.1.1 Defining the teacher induction period and induction program

The teacher induction period refers to the transitional period between pre-service preparation and continuing professional development, encompassing the first few years of teaching (Huling-Austin, Odell, Ishler, Kay, & Edelfelt, 1989). It is an intense phase in which teachers learn many things and have to deal with the typical difficulties of beginning teachers (Huberman, 1989; Veenman, 1984). Induction is a process of initiating new teachers into their new roles, both as teachers and as members of the school organization. As new members of the school organization, they often have to compete for a place amongst the more experienced teachers, adjust to the predominant school culture, and earn the appreciation of colleagues

(Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Zeichner & Gore, 1990).

Beginning teachers' induction period is very important in view of their further careers.

Teachers form their professional identity, construct a professional practice and often decide to stay in the profession or to leave it (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

A still increasing number of schools supports beginning teachers with an induction program: a more or less formalized program that is aimed to support beginning teachers in their first years of teaching after their pre-service education (Beijaard, Buitink, & Kessels, 2010).

Due to cultural differences and local policies, to some extent goals and content of induction programs in various countries differ. Nevertheless, it is increasingly acknowledged that induction programs are essential, for even a very comprehensive teacher education program cannot prepare teachers for their job completely (Britton, Paine, Pimm, & Raizen, 2003).

1.1.2 Goals of induction programs

In teacher education nowadays more opportunities are created for student teachers to practice and work like teachers in schools. It is supposed that this helps to reduce the so-called 'practice shock' (Gold, 1996), already described by, for example, Müller-Fohrbrodt (1978). After graduation, however, many new teachers still find themselves in a situation in which their knowledge and skills are tested in different types of classrooms, pertaining to other subjects, et cetera, than the ones they had become confident with during their teacher education period. They take on the responsibility of teaching on their own, and they have to balance contradictory views regarding their practice, which derive from the culture of their specific school, their personal expectations, and the professional norms in general (Beijaard & Papanaoum, 2002; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Tickle, 2000). The difficulties that beginning teachers have to cope with often lead to feelings of low self-efficacy, stress, and sometimes burnout (Gold, 1996). As a consequence of negative well-being, many beginning teachers choose to leave the profession (Harris & Farrell, 2007; Ingersoll, 2001; Advies van de Commissie Leraren, 2007; Smithers & Robinson, 2003). Against this background, many schools use induction programs with the aim of contributing to beginning teachers' state of well-being and professional development. An important policy argument is to prevent attrition amongst beginning teachers. Overall, induction should be seen as an investment in retaining teachers who – with assistance – can become effective in shorter time frames, and as an alternative to spending great amounts of money in replacing teachers.

Scholars plead for induction programs that enable new teachers not just to survive but to prosper during their first year(s) of teaching, and motivate them to strive for continuous improvement (Cole, 1994; Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Induction programs should contain a

balance in supporting beginning teachers in the following three areas (Beijaard & Papanoum, 2002; Gold, 1996; McNally, 2002; Tickle, 2000):

- 1 *The socialization of the teacher in the school culture.* This includes many aspects of the school on which beginning teachers have to be informed, varying from school rules for teachers and students to agreements on the curriculum, goals, and mission of the school.
- 2 *Further development of knowledge and skills which are necessary for good teaching.* This means, on the one hand, extension of the action repertoire, and, on the other hand, adjustment of this repertoire to the specific situation in the school. Central is the development of a style of teaching which is personal and fits with the goals and mission of the school.
- 3 *The care of personal development.* This means psychological help aimed at the development of self-confidence, a positive self-image, learning how to deal with stress, et cetera.

However, in practice induction programs are often criticized for having limited content, a lack of theoretical basis, and insufficient resources. Induction mandates in many countries 'do not rest on an understanding of teacher learning, a vision of good teaching or a broad view of the role formal induction can play in new teacher development. Often they lack the necessary resources to support effective programs' (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1031). Wang and Odell (2002) concluded in their review study that the content of the support from an induction program is often limited to technical and emotional support. Mentors often help beginning teachers feel comfortable, but they offer little professional support that fosters a principled understanding of teaching (Little, 1990).

1.1.3 Research perspectives on teacher induction

Though teacher induction has been described and discussed since the 1950s (e.g., Amar, 1952), it is only since the 1980s - 1990s that teacher induction has received serious attention in research and the literature. Many researchers began to describe the sudden and sometimes dramatic and traumatic experiences of the transition from being a student to becoming a teacher (e.g., Corcoran, 1981; Rosenholtz, 1989; Veenman, 1984). In relation to these studies, several scholars emphasized the importance of induction programs to support beginning teachers (e.g., Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992; Huling-Austin, 1992).

Since teacher induction is a frequently discussed topic in the literature, from a research perspective two shifts in attention can be distinguished. In the beginning, induction programs were seen as a means to help beginning teachers overcome their difficulties and problems, mainly with classroom management and instruction (Gold, 1996). Beginning teachers were typically seen from a deficit model: though they may formally be qualified to teach, in general, beginning teachers have deficits they have yet to overcome. From the mid-1990s this way of viewing beginning teachers and induction programs changed: teacher induction was seen as a phase in the continuum of teachers' professional development. Teacher induction was not

so much about overcoming deficits as about pursuing high standards in teacher quality. We currently see another change in perspective. Teacher induction is considered part of the wider school policy with regard to teachers' professional development and beginning teachers' own initiatives receive more emphasis. Beginning teachers are viewed as fully capable teachers who are co-responsible for their professional development. Instead of being seen as teachers with deficits, they are considered valuable for the school; beginning teachers bring new knowledge and visions into the school and can actively contribute to the development of the school (Tickle, 2000).

In sum, in a period of about three decades the research perspective on teacher induction shifted from seeing beginning teachers as rather passive consumers of knowledge and experiences provided by others (deficit model) to a view of these as active contributors to their own and others' professional development (growth model). This has undoubtedly been influenced by a more general shift in our thinking about the role of teachers and teaching in contemporary society. New developments in society continually affect the mission and goals of schools and, thus, the work of the teachers in these schools. As with professionals in other fields, teachers' lifelong learning and management of their own learning process are increasingly found to be important, and are often explicit aspects of school policy.

1.1.4 Current research on teacher induction programs

The influence of induction programs has been investigated in a number of studies. It has been shown, first, that induction programs are generally relevant to beginning teachers' well-being (e.g., Chubbuck, Clift, Allard, & Quinlan, 2001; Molner Kelley, 2004; Reiman, Alan, Bostick, & Dee, 1995). These studies have shown that induction programs contribute to beginning teachers' feelings of being supported and being part of the school. Even an online support community contributes to the well-being of beginning teachers. Helsel, DeWert, Babinski, and Jones (2003) reported a positive effect on a number of variables related to well-being, such as confidence in teaching, reduced feelings of isolation, and enthusiasm for work. Also, induction programs have proven to contribute to the retention rates of beginning teachers (e.g., Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Scott, 1999; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Strong & St. John, 2001; Wilson, Darling-Hammond, & Berry, 2001).

A more differentiated picture arises from studies in which the effect of induction programs on the professional development of beginning teachers was investigated. Several of these studies have demonstrated positive effects of support with an induction program on the professional development of beginning teachers (Athanasas & Achinstein, 2003; Achinstein & Barrett, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Luft & Cox, 2001; Napper-Owen & Philips, 1995; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005). The findings of these studies showed how beginning teachers reframed their thinking on several teaching issues, changed their instruction methods, were

able to redirect their attention to individual students, and gained more awareness of the students' thinking and understanding. Strong and Barron (2004), however, showed a very limited influence of support. Based on an analysis of 30 hours of conversation between mentors and teachers, on average, they identified ten instances of direct suggestions from the mentor, which only evoked an elaborate response from the teacher on three occasions. Also, Carver and Katz (2004) showed that a mentor was not able to truly contribute to the professional development of three beginning teachers. A recent large-scale experimental study (Glazerman et al., 2008) showed no differences in a number of variables between teachers supported by a comprehensive induction program and teachers supported by a standard induction program with limited content. In relation to teachers' professional development, no differences were found in teachers' classroom practices or student achievement.

Although there is some consistency in research data regarding the influence of induction programs, most empirical studies on the influence of induction programs provide little insight into the characteristics of the induction program that are responsible for the found effects. Often it is even questionable whether the effects can indeed be attributed to the induction program (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). This is due to a number of limitations:

- 1 Most empirical studies of the effects of induction programs are small-scale studies focusing on specific programs in particular schools, which makes it difficult to generalize. The studies document the value of teacher induction programs for teachers in a certain situation (school and/or district), but effects found in one situation do not necessarily apply in another situation.
- 2 Most studies do not include control groups, which makes it difficult to attribute certain research results to a treatment. For example, to be sure of effects of being observed and receiving feedback on beginning teachers' instructional qualities, it is necessary to compare these beginning teachers to other beginning teachers who are working in similar contexts.
- 3 Most studies only include the induction program and do not control for other factors that may explain certain effects. For example, supposed effects of induction programs may be attributed to, or heavily influenced by, the existing culture in schools. For example, it has been shown that school cultures characterized by structural cooperation have a greater impact on new teachers' experiences than school cultures that are more individualized (Williams, Prestage, & Bedward, 2001).

Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the literature referred to in the preceding sections pertains to teacher induction and induction programs in other countries than the Netherlands, particularly the USA and the UK. In the Netherlands, schools are not obliged to provide induction programs for beginning teachers. Many schools do have such programs, but there is no systematic information regarding their characteristics and their impact on beginning teachers. The literature nevertheless contains numerous recommendations of characteristics for induction programs.

Based on an international study including various examples of comprehensive induction programs, Britton et al. (2003) suggest that comprehensive induction programs consist of (combinations of) the following characteristics:

- 1 *Close contact with a more experienced teacher, i.e., mentor.* Generally speaking, hearing about another person's experiences helps. Assigning a beginning teacher to a mentor may result in more effective teaching in the early years because he or she learns from guided practice rather than from trial-and-error alone. Feiman-Nemser (2003) calls the mentoring of new teacher learning an 'educative practice' for which mentors must be trained. They may be good classroom teachers but might find it difficult to visualize what they think, explain principles underlying their work in practice, et cetera. Educative mentors do not only respond to here-and-now concerns; they also create learning opportunities and keep their eyes open for long-term goals, knowing that learning to teach is a long-term process. It is important that mentors are recognized and supported for their induction work in their schools.
- 2 *Collegial relationships with peers (other novice teachers).* Peers make it possible to share here-and-now experiences. Regular peer support sessions allow new teachers to interact, cooperate, and solve problems within a safe environment (Portner, 2001). Such sessions generally are very helpful in beginning teachers' development. Moreover, relationships with peers make them feel members of a 'community of practice'.
- 3 *Reflecting, inquiring, researching oneself and others.* It is widely acknowledged that a reflective stance, personally and professionally, is relevant to developing a teaching identity. In this respect, there is growing attention for research-based practices to enhance the teaching practice of new teachers (Gold, 1996; Tickle, 2000). Inquiry approaches are very promising for teacher learning because they require of beginning teachers to actively construct knowledge within learning communities, not in isolation from the environment, and to relate their experiences to other sources of information.
- 4 *Observing other teachers and being observed.* Observation of peers and other colleagues inside and outside the school may result in new insights. It is found to be important that new teachers have the possibility of observing good teaching practices modelled by more experienced colleagues. On the other hand, the formative feedback after being observed, usually by the mentor, addresses the new teacher's strengths and areas to develop. Adequate feedback may have a strong impact on professional development.
- 5 *Timing and sequencing of opportunities.* In the induction phase, beginning teachers learn many things. In the induction program it is important to consider beginning teachers' learning over time. Mentors ought to be aware of new teachers' topics of concern in order to adjust to these concerns by, for example, organizing appropriate learning activities and relevant literature.

Other characteristics that are found relevant for the induction of new teachers are: (orientation) meetings pertaining to aspects of school functioning, dispensation of extra tasks, reduction of the teaching load, no assignments to the most difficult classes, providing opportunities for interaction with colleagues, and a school leader who facilitates and encourages new teacher learning.

1.2 Problem definition and research questions

As discussed above, many schools use induction programs with the aim of contributing to beginning teachers' state of well-being and professional development. However, little is known about the actual influence of induction programs and the characteristics of induction programs that are essential to realize a positive influence. Also, we have no systematic knowledge about teacher induction and induction programs in the Netherlands.

The central question of the current research project is: 'What is the influence of induction programs on beginning teachers' well-being and professional development, and what characteristics of induction programs are essential to influence beginning teachers' well-being and professional development?' We wish to contribute to the existing literature by answering the central research question. In addition, we wish to gain insight into the ways in which beginning teachers in the Netherlands are supported by induction programs. For these purposes, we conducted two studies: an interview study with mentors and teachers from different schools, and a survey study amongst beginning teachers.

We conducted the interview study first. As a prerequisite for further research on induction programs, it was necessary to develop a frame of reference. Therefore, the first aim of this interview study was to develop an overview of the various characteristics of induction programs and to develop a system to distinguish elements of induction programs.

The second aim of this study was to conduct a preliminary exploration of how beginning teachers in the Netherlands are supported with induction programs and how teachers and mentors view the support provided by the induction program. The research questions to be answered by this study were:

- 1 What elements of an induction program can be distinguished?
- 2 How are beginning teachers in the Netherlands supported with an induction program?
- 3 What do mentors report on their ideas and actions concerning their role as mentor of beginning teachers?
- 4 What do teachers report on their experiences of the influence of the induction program?

In order to answer these research questions we used semi-structured interviews for both beginning teachers and their mentors. Appendix 1 contains the interview framework for the mentors, Appendix 2 contains that for the beginning teachers.

Based on the results of the interview study we developed a questionnaire and conducted a survey study among beginning teachers. The first aim of the survey study was to gain a more systematic insight into the way in which beginning teachers in the Netherlands are supported with an induction program. The second aim of this study was to gain insight into the degree to which induction programs contribute to the well-being and professional development of beginning teachers and into the relationship between specific characteristics of induction programs and the well-being and professional development of beginning teachers. We aimed to discover whether induction programs indeed fulfill the important role expected of them and, if so, what elements of an induction program are essential for induction programs to fulfill this role.

With this second study we aimed to take into account the limitations of many studies on induction programs (described in section 1.1.4) by conducting a large-scale study including many participants who had been supported by a variety of induction programs. In the questionnaire we distinguished between the various elements and sub-elements of induction programs found in the interview study. Several other variables were also included in the questionnaire. Because of this, we hoped to gain further insight into the relative importance of induction programs for the well-being and professional development of beginning teachers and, more specifically, into the characteristics of induction programs that are important to realize a positive influence on the well-being and professional development of beginning teachers.

The research questions answered by the survey study were:

- 1 What is the degree of the state of well-being of beginning teachers?
- 2 How are beginning teachers in the Netherlands supported with an induction program?
- 3 How do characteristics of the induction program relate to the well-being of beginning teachers?
- 4 How do beginning teachers experience the influence of an induction program on their professional development?
- 5 How can differences in experienced influence of the induction program on professional development be explained?
- 6 What are the characteristics of induction programs that teachers experience as influential on their professional development?

The questionnaire developed to answer these questions can be found in Appendix 3.

1.3 Relevance of the study

Teacher induction programs play a pivotal role in the period of transition from student to teacher. Besides other possible effects, such as contributing to the professional development of mentors and an open school culture, good induction programs are, above all, assumed to contribute to beginning teachers' well-being and their professional development. Contributing to beginning teachers' well-being is not only important for beginning teachers personally, but it may also help in decreasing the attrition rate amongst beginning teachers, which is an important issue for schools. A lower attrition rate amongst beginning teachers means more stability in the staff, fewer costs for seeking new personnel, and less investment in introducing new personnel. Contributing to beginning teachers' professional development means investing in the quality of (beginning) teachers and thus in the quality of education. Good induction programs, therefore, are of value not only for beginning teachers, but also for schools and students.

Up till now little knowledge has been available on what characteristics of induction programs are effective in the sense of promoting beginning teachers' well-being and professional development. The current research might contribute to our knowledge of the importance of various elements of induction programs and how beginning teachers in the Netherlands are nowadays supported by induction programs. The acquired insights into how beginning teachers are currently supported by induction programs and the importance of the various characteristics of induction programs also have practical relevance. The results of this study might provide useful information to policy-makers and schools for developing good induction programs or improving existing induction programs.

1.4 Overview of the dissertation

In this dissertation we present two studies in which it was investigated how beginning teachers in the Netherlands are supported with induction programs and how induction programs influence the professional development and well-being of beginning teachers.

Chapter 2 reports on the interview study with mentors ($N = 12$) and beginning teachers ($N = 22$). In this chapter the distinguishable elements and sub-elements of an induction program are described.

An element is a characteristic in which induction programs vary. For example, the intensity of an induction program or the facilities provided to beginning teachers and mentors are elements in which induction programs vary. The overview of the elements and sub-elements

formed the basis for the questionnaire developed for the survey study. Based on the interviews with mentors and teachers, this chapter also describes how beginning teachers in the Netherlands are supported by induction programs. Furthermore, two aspects of the role of the mentor are discussed to which mentors appeared to respond with different visions and practices. One aspect pertains to the mentoring approach: how mentors attempt to support beginning teachers in their professional development. The other aspect pertains to the focus of mentors: the content of the mentoring. Lastly, this chapter describes how beginning teachers experienced the influence of the induction program that supported them.

Chapters 3 and 4 report on the survey study. In the survey study we aimed to investigate on a larger scale how beginning teachers in the Netherlands are supported by induction programs. In addition, an important goal was to gain further insight into how induction programs influence the well-being and professional development of beginning teachers. The survey study was conducted using the internet. In order to reach a large group of respondents, we used a multi-stage method to approach beginning teachers. Teacher education institutes were asked to send their former students an email in which they were invited to participate in our study. Three hundred and sixteen teachers responded to our invitation and filled out the online questionnaire. The data were analyzed in a quantitative manner.

Because Chapters 3 and 4 are to be published as articles in scientific journals (requiring that they be compatible and independent of each other), there is overlap in parts of the method sections of these chapters.

Chapter 3 focuses on well-being. The concept of well-being, the results of previous research regarding induction programs, and the well-being of beginning teachers are discussed. With regard to the research results the chapter first reports on the data describing reports of beginning teachers in the Netherlands on how they are supported by induction programs. The degree of well-being felt by the respondents in their first year of teaching is described next. Lastly, the chapter reports on the relationship between the variables included in the questionnaire; we focus on the question: 'What is the importance of induction programs to the well-being of beginning teachers?' In order to answer this question, variables other than the elements and sub-elements of induction programs were also included in the analyses, namely, the school culture and several contextual and personal variables.

In Chapter 4 the focus is on the results of the survey study pertaining to the experienced influence of induction programs on the professional development of beginning teachers. In this chapter, previous research into induction programs and their influence on beginning teachers' professional development is discussed, revealing a differentiated picture. The results from our study pertaining to beginning teachers' experiences of the influence of the induction program on their professional development are presented, as are the results pertaining to the relationship

between characteristics of the induction program and the experienced influence on professional development. Again, other variables were included in the analyses. The results regarding the relationship between characteristics of the induction program and the experienced influence on professional development gave rise to further analysis of the data collected from a subgroup of the respondents, namely, the group of respondents that experienced a strong influence of the induction program on their professional development. By analyzing the reports of these respondents on how they were supported by an induction program, we aimed to gain better insight into the characteristics of induction programs that are essential to contribute to beginning teachers' professional development.

In Chapter 5, the main findings and conclusions of the interview study and the survey study are summarized, discussed, and related to each other. Suggestions for further research and implications for teacher induction are described.

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