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Remediating deficits? Problem representations in Norwegian policies for newly qualified teachers

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes how newly qualified teachers (NQTs) are conceptualized in Norwegian policy, specifically the green paper 'NOU 2022: 13: With Further Significance'. Utilizing Carol Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?' approach, we dissect policy proposals and solutions to uncover and examine a tension-filled conceptualization of NQTs as both 'valuable contributors' and 'being in need'. Our findings reveal a discourse that predominantly frames NQTs as the 'problem' while marginalizing potential deleterious conditions that shape their professional realities. We argue that this framing not only oversimplifies a complex issue but also risks perpetuating the very challenges it aims to solve. Considering these findings, we highlight the benefits of shifting from a discourse of remediating deficits to one of equality that acknowledges NQTs' capabilities and contributions. This reconsideration could have broader implications for enhancing the attractiveness and reputation of the teaching profession. While our analysis centers on Norwegian policy, the issues and consequential discussion have implications beyond the borders of Norway.

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Introduction

Creating a sustainable transition for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) from teacher education to the teaching profession is considered a key measure in combating teacher attrition (Findlay 2006; Frederiksen 2020; Ingersoll and Strong 2011; Schaefer, Long, and Clandinin 2012). Despite this recognition, common descriptors of NQTs' experiences are often negatively loaded, with labels such as 'practice shock' (Stokking et al. 2003), 'reality shock' (Veenman 1984) 'sink or swim' (Glazzard and Coverdale 2018; Howe 2006), 'lost at sea' (Flores and Day 2006), and even 'fed to the wolves' or 'keeping my head above water' (Curry and Bickmore 2013). To better understand these challenges, Kelchtermans (2019) outlines four key thematic lines that have shaped both educational research and policymaking concerning the induction phase of NQTs: (1) Overcoming the 'practice shock', (2) The socialization process, (3) The issue of teacher attrition and teacher retention, and (4) Mentoring as the best way to support NQTs.

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However, these four themes of the induction phase and common ways of describing the first years of working life for NQTs are associated with the idea of ‘deficit, of lacking, of “not being there yet”’ (Correa, Martínez-Arbelaiz, and Aberasturi-Apraiz 2015, 73; Kelchtermans 2019, 87). Further, Correa, Martínez-Arbelaiz, and Aberasturi-Apraiz (2015) argue that the construct of a reality shock is built upon a dichotomy between NQTs and an ‘expert teacher’, which neutralizes the opportunities for innovation that NQTs bring to schools. Deficit thinking assumes that NQTs lack certain qualities or skills. According to Kelchtermans (2019, 87), deficit thinking positions the conversation in a ‘narrow and reductionist frame’, which might result in a counterproductive understanding of how the transition for NQTs can be improved. Similarly, Schaefer, Long, and Clandinin (2012, 116) also argue that we must change our effort from *retaining* teachers to *sustaining* them, where NQTs are regarded as ‘knowledge holders’, ‘contributing members’, and ‘individuals from whom others can learn’. Ulvik and Langørgen (2012) show how ‘very qualified’ NQTs are rarely used as contributors in developing Norwegian schools, and they argue that this neglect might be because of systemic factors like time pressure, individualistic school culture, and a lack of formal structures for collaboration between the ‘experienced teachers’ and the NQTs. One of their conclusions is that “excessive emphasis on helping newcomers may undermine their role as contributors (Ulvik and Langørgen 2012, 54) and a successful induction should not only focus on problems and support. To go beyond thinking of NQTs as having a deficit, Kelchtermans (2019, 94) outlines three alternative ways of representing NQTs: As agents, as networkers, and as assets. To summarize, these alternative representations of NQTs envision them as sense-making agents with rich networks that bring valuable ideas and practices to the schools.

NQTs have both internationally (OECD 2019) and recently in Norway (NOU 2022: 13) been at the center of policy proposals meant to combat teacher attrition. Given the extensive attention directed towards NQTs by both researchers and policymakers, NQTs may find themselves in a uniquely vulnerable position compared to other occupational groups. This vulnerability may stem from the possibility that the policy attention aimed at helping NQTs has instead inadvertently cemented them as deficient, highlighting their perceived shortcomings, which could have potentially deleterious implications for how they are perceived, treated, and act. This way, and in line with Kelchtermans (2019) proposed paradox, the policy proposals may suggest solutions to problems somewhat constructed by the policies themselves.

This article argues how the challenges surrounding NQTs are represented matter. Norwegian policy proposals are particularly interesting to analyze, as NQTs in Norway have since 2022 graduated with master’s degrees and a research and development competence (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2018). Further, this article’s object of analysis, the Norwegian Official Report ‘With Further Significance’¹ (NOU 2022: 13), which proposes – among other things – ways to improve the transition from teacher education to profession for NQTs, was submitted to the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research in 2022. This article’s ambition is not to explain why or how the policy proposals might succeed, but rather to interrogate the ways in which NOU 2022: 13 frames or constitutes the challenges it aims to address (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, 8). Deficit thinking in policy documents about NQTs is pervasive in OECD countries (Kelchtermans 2019); therefore, this article’s primary aim and contributions extend

beyond merely identifying deficit thinking. We seek to widen our understanding of how policy might construct and perpetuate it and the potential deleterious consequences that arise from remedial induction practices rooted in a deficit-oriented perspective. To do this, the article will conduct a problem-driven discourse analysis, inspired by the ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ (WPR) approach and the associated concepts of subject positions and subjectification (Bacchi 2009; Bacchi and Goodwin 2016).

The article is organized as follows. Firstly, the theoretical framework and our analytical approach are introduced. Secondly, the research questions are presented, followed by a presentation of the policy context. In the analysis section, we unpack the policy proposals and solutions for NQTs in detail. After that, we discuss the potential implications of our findings, considering their impact on further research, educational practice, and policy. Finally, we explore alternative framings of the challenges that NQTs face, suggesting new ways of understanding the teacher induction and new ways of thinking about the NQTs themselves.

Theoretical framework and analytical approach

Policy as discourse

Policy is not just a static document, but a dynamic process, an outcome, a site of practice, and a tool of governing (Asdal and Reinertsen 2021). Importantly, policy can be understood in two ways: as text and as discourse (Ball 1993, 10–11). When we understand policy as discourse, we adopt a Foucauldian perspective, focusing on how policy shapes people rather than how people shape policy (Ball 1993). In this context, ‘discourse’ refers to socially constructed forms of knowledge that set limits upon what is possible to think, write, or speak about. However, these forms of knowledge are not synonymous with ‘truth’ – they rather reflect what is constructed as ‘true’ (Ball 2015). This perspective highlights that policies not only influence our actions but also shape our identities and our interpretation of the world. This exercise of power creates a ‘regime of truth’ that shapes how we perceive ourselves, others, and how we act (Ball 1993, 307). Furthermore, it reveals that policies might create problems rather than solving them. Bacchi and Goodwin (2016, 6) claim that policy permeates every aspect of modern society, and from birth to death we are ‘classified, shaped, and ordered according to policies.’ This ubiquity exemplifies what Foucault (1982, 777–778) called ‘dividing practices’ through an ‘objectification of the subject’, which describes how we are either divided inside ourselves or divided from others as political subjects. For example, it can create distinctions between ‘experienced teachers’ and ‘newly qualified teachers’, or a ‘motivated teacher’ and an ‘unmotivated teacher’. Through these opposites we are made governable by a dichotomy of desired and undesired behavior, where our behavior is regulated or defined by marking the ‘other’ as deficient (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, 51).

The WPR approach

The WPR approach provides a framework that unpacks policy problems by interrogating the proposed solutions to a problem, and by identifying and analyzing the represented problem within those solutions (Riemann 2023). The WPR approach

moves away from the ‘linguistic turn’ and uses texts as a ‘lever’ to explore how different representations of a problem can lead to the implementation of particular forms of governance and their potential effects (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, 18). Here Bacchi (2009, 2016) elaborates that people are governed through problematizations, and policy documents are not only solvers of problems, but also producers of problems. This is a novel approach to understanding policy documents, a concept similarly described by Rizvi and Lingard (2009, 6), where policies propose solutions to the problem as it is constructed by the policy itself. Because the proposed solution to a problem will involve a particular representation of the problem, it will again involve different implications for how the issue can be thought about, and how the people involved are treated and made to think about themselves.

WPR is a versatile methodological framework for policy analysis, embraced by various theoretical and multidisciplinary approaches. For example, McInerney (2007) unpacks how the issue of educational disadvantage has been discursively reframed to a problem of individual deficits in literacy and numeracy skills and argues that if policies are not problematizing root causes, little will change. Similarly, Mufic and Fejes (2022) argue that ‘quality’ in adult education is hard to define, which has led to a definition outlined from deficits in quality or what is lacking. Further, Burgess, Lowe, and Goodwin (2023) analyze how indigenous education policies problematize indigenous students by representing them as being incapable or unwilling to succeed academically, framing people with an indigenous identity as being deficient, and Southgate and Bennett (2014) examined higher education policies and identified two subject positions: ‘The cap(able) student’ and ‘The proper aspirant’, which they argue constructs a discourse that attributes ‘capability’ as an individual trait, thus ignoring potential structural or systemic barriers. Finally, Mockler (2018) critically examined the evolving discourse around NQTs in Australia, where initially the low morale and status of the teaching profession was problematized as issues leading to teacher attrition, but by 2015, the teacher education and the teachers themselves were increasingly considered the problem which led to policy solutions aimed at standardization and increased accountability.

While not all of these studies are applying the WPR approach directly, or explicitly label it as a deficit discourse, we want to draw attention to what these policy analyses, ranging in themes and disciplines, have in common. Their findings show an individualization of problem representations, often framing the ‘problem’ in terms of individual deficiencies rather than structural challenges. Moreover, they illustrate how policies construct ‘problems’ as certain kinds, and by extension, how subjects are constructed as certain types of subjects within specific discourses.

While we use the term ‘structural challenges’ to analytically separate between individualized problem representations and those considered to be broader societal or institutional concerns – where the latter aims at solving larger challenges, like systemic ones, rather than the individual itself – it is crucial to recognize, as informed by social theorists like Foucault and Hurley (1978), that structures are not monolithic entities. Rather, they serve as governing frameworks that are actively practiced. For example, NQTs are not just positioned within existing structures, such as the education system, policy landscapes, and social expectations; rather, NQTs also actively engage with, resist, or even reproduce these structures through their individual practices, including what they say, think, or do. This suggests that structures and practices are not opposing entities but

mutually define and shape each other, forming a spectrum rather than a dichotomy. This perspective grants us a more complex perspective that avoids the pitfalls of deterministic or reductionist analyses. We recognize this as a methodological tension but keep the wording of structural challenges for the sake of readability and analytical clarity.

The WPR approach consists of six questions (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, 20). However, considering this article's scope, we limit ourselves to four questions in the analysis of the policy proposals:

- (1) What is the problem represented to be in a specific policy or policies?
- (2) What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?
- (3) What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be conceptualized differently?
- (4) What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?

Question one identifies the implicit problematizations in the policy proposals by working backwards to analyze them. Question two examines the formation of a problem representation by dissecting underlying assumptions and dichotomies. Question three highlights the unaddressed areas in a problem representation and considers different ways to conceptualize them. Finally, question four evaluates the political and practical implications of problem representations through their lived effects, like subjectification (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, 23). As such, the WPR approach provides a more nuanced lens for understanding policy discourses, revealing their deeper intricacies and implications than a surface-level interpretation would uncover.

While the WPR approach originally emerged as a post-structural method focused on avoiding normative judgments (Bacchi 2009), it has evolved into a more flexible method of analysis and is better characterized now as a 'flexible way of thinking' (Bacchi 2023), or a 'critical practice of thinking otherwise' (O'Hagan 2020). In this context, our analysis operates with an underlying normative viewpoint – granted, not an uncontroversial one – that it is preferable for NQTs to be conceptualized as subjects with agency and valuable contributions. This shift will mainly manifest itself in the discussion concerning the potentially lived effects on NQTs.

Subject positions and subjectification

The concept of subject positions refers to the spaces that policies suggest certain people should occupy to become a 'legitimate' subject in a policy field (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, 51). For example, a 'newly qualified' teacher will have different accompanying associations and implications than an 'experienced' teacher.

Subjectification, in this context, refers to the production of subjects through policy practices. This entails characteristics, behaviors and dispositions that political subjects are encouraged to assume (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, 49). The concept of subjectification provides the understanding that NQTs are both 'made' and 'becoming'; subject to their own actions as well as to power/knowledge structures and discursive practices. Further, the dual nature of the term 'subject' –

as being subjected to someone/something and connected to one's own conscience or self-knowledge (Foucault 1982) – nuances the concept, acknowledging it as both an external and internal process. The latter points emphasize the relationship between power and knowledge (Foucault and Hurley 1978, 1982) where policies are not only reacting to populations of people that exist, but rather are a part of shaping what it is possible for people to become, as often explored in education by Ball (2012). As such, power is not merely repressive, but productive (Foucault and Hurley 1978).

By combining these concepts, we can identify potential subject positions within the policy proposals and potential beneficial or deleterious effects regarding those positions. By beneficial or deleterious effects, we aim to understand 'political implications' such as subjectification effects, which refer to the ways subjects are portrayed in problem representations, governing their creation as specific kinds of subjects (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, 23), potentially impacting their identities, behaviors, and self-understandings, according to what subjectivities are considered 'legitimate'.

However, neither the concept of subject positions nor subjectification is deterministic concepts, and as Bacchi and Goodwin (2016, 50) explain, subjects will negotiate and even refuse the processes they are subjected to, embodying Foucault's and Hurley (1978, 95) assertion that where there is power, there is resistance. A 'political subject', then, is not a pre-existing entity but one that is presupposed by policies and is continuously formed and reformed as a certain type of subject, and in doing so, contributes to their creation (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, 49–50).

The research questions

Based on the background, theoretical framework, and analytical approach, we specifically investigate three aspects of how NQTs are conceptualized in Norwegian policy proposals and solutions within 2022: 13:

- (1) How are the NQTs problematized?
- (2) How are the 'solutions' to the problematizations of NQTs discursively framed?
- (3) What might the lived consequences (subjectification) for NQTs be, given the answer to question (1) and (2)?

The first question differentiates between a remedial perspective (which involves fixing a deficit) and a resource perspective (which involves recognizing and sustaining a potential). This allows us to explore if the policies see NQTs as 'problems' needing fixing, or as assets with valuable contributions. The second question seeks to determine the locus of the problem: Is it the NQTs themselves or is it structural challenges that are the perceived problems? This is crucial to understanding how the policy suggests NQTs should be positioned. The third question examines the potential lived consequences of the conceptualizations by linking it with the answers to the first and second research questions.

Methods

The Norwegian context

Skinningsrud (2014) argued that the Norwegian education system, and its nation-wide collections of institutions concerned with formal education, is centralized, not only because it is governed centrally by politicians who initiate reforms and educational guidelines, but also due to its high degree of unification and systematization. Hence, educational reforms and guidelines are crucial for conditioning individuals' agency. In keeping with the established practice of addressing perceived issues through formal investigation, the Norwegian government appointed a public committee in September 2021, with a mandate to assess and suggest different modes for continuing- and further education for teachers and employees in kindergarten and school (we concern ourselves solely with teachers in school). In September 2022, the green paper, NOU 2022: 13, was submitted to the Norwegian ministry of education and research. These *ad hoc* advisory commissions have a considerable influence on policy and are recognized as a 'core element' of the Nordic model of government (Christensen and Holst 2017, 821). Considering NOU 2022: 13's area of focus, the comprehensive research-based arguments underpinning their numerous proposals, and its role as the last major policy work concerning the induction for NQTs, it is reasonable to consider it a major discourse-framing document concerning NQTs.

NOU 2022: 13 comes at a time of momentous change in the Norwegian education system. Since 2017, the new five-year teacher education for primary and secondary school is meant to provide NQTs with research and development competence to develop themselves, their teaching, and the schools they work at (Jakhelln et al. 2019), which entails being able to apply theories of science and research methodologies to evaluate and use research to improve their teaching practice. In 2020, the Norwegian curriculum for primary and secondary school underwent a subject renewal, highlighting competencies like creativity, deep learning and interdisciplinarity. Additionally, in 2018, national principles and obligations for mentoring NQTs in schools were initiated (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2018). Combined, these changes and proposals for change are likely to have a profound influence on what it means to be an NQT in Norway.

To place the changes in the Norwegian teacher education system in a wider global context, it becomes apparent that Norway is following the same trends as Darling-Hammond (2017) calls 'well-developed systems for teacher development'. This is seen in countries such as Australia, Canada, Finland, and Singapore, which emphasize comprehensive induction systems, professional development opportunities, and policies aimed at raising the status and quality of the teaching profession. For example, Finland has required a master's degree for teaching since the 1970s, and according to OECD (2024), more than 75% of teachers in Croatia, Czech Republic, Georgia, Italy, Portugal, and Slovakia have a master's degree. In line with Norway's new focus on research and development competence for teachers, the Finnish teacher education curriculum has long aimed to prepare teachers as 'researchers and research users' (Darling-Hammond 2017, 297), a concept that has gained wider interest lately (K. Smith and Flores 2019).

Analysis

Initially, the first author read the document in depth, with a particular focus on the explicit policy proposals and solutions pertinent to NQTs, as well as the underlying knowledge base that justified them. Considering NOU 2022: 13 is a document of 204 pages packed with both implicit and explicit policy proposals and solutions, we had to make some delimitations. NQTs are all teachers, but not all teachers are newly qualified, so all the proposals concerning teachers can be understood as proposals for NQTs as well. Therefore, our selection criteria were the policy proposals and solutions that were either about NQTs, particularly relevant for NQTs, or interpreted as having significant impact on the induction of NQTs. Consequently, most of the selected data material comes from the first (NOU 2022: 13, 11–17), fifth (NOU 2022: 13, 70–83), and eleventh chapter (NOU 2022: 13, 151–161) of the document. The reading and analysis revealed differences between the research-based implicit proposals, which are presented as the normative context and intended to justify the policy proposals, and the explicit policy proposals themselves. The implicit proposals were identifiable in the text and could be discerned from the explicit policy proposals through the document's use of titles and normative language. For example, the document presented the implicit proposals through a normative lens by leaning on research of how 'it should be,' while the explicit policy proposals were always described under the header 'The Committee's Proposals'.

The reading revealed two relevant research-based implicit proposals: 'Newly qualified teachers must be viewed as equal contributors', and 'Intrinsic motivation provides the most learning and participation', and three explicit policy proposals: 'A year of introduction for newly qualified teachers', 'Ten percent of working time must be spent on introduction activities', and 'The year of introduction is based on the existing national framework for mentoring'.

Next, the first author applied the first and second questions of the WPR approach on the document's proposals and solutions pertinent to NQTs (as similarly done by, for example, Tawell and McCluskey (2022), Mufic and Fejes (2022), or Riemann (2023)). In the analysis, the first author distinguished between instances where NQTs were framed either as needing intervention and remedial support, or as valuable contributors (the first research question). The next layer of analysis identified whether the proposals or solutions were aimed at NQTs themselves, or at broader structural challenges (the second research question). Finally, guided by the third and fourth question of the WPR Approach, we interrogated how the 'problem' can be conceptualized differently and explored the potential lived consequences (the third research question).

Results

The results section follows the structure of the analysis: first divided into implicit and explicit proposals and solutions, then structured after the proposals and solutions themselves.

Research-based implicit proposals

Newly qualified teachers must be viewed as equal contributors

Provided as a normative context, we find the following description in NOU 2022: 13 (152): ‘An important starting point is that the first year in the teaching profession must not be seen as problematic, and that this does not become the main motivation for introducing introduction programs’.

Starting with the underlying premise that NQTs are equal contributors, the problem seems to be represented as the frequent failure to view NQTs as such. The problem representation is based primarily on two assumptions: First, that NQTs bring valuable skills, knowledge, and competencies from their teacher education, and second, that there may be a lack of recognition or unequal treatment for NQTs within the collegial community, and that viewing the first year as ‘problematic’ might be both harmful and demotivating for NQTs. It is described that it is the collegial community that must view NQTs as equal contributors, which could be interpreted as if the responsibility is placed on the NQTs colleagues. However, in reference to a popular science publication (Antonsen, Jakhelln, and Bjørndal 2022), it is noted that NQTs working in schools emphasizing cooperation, sharing, and development, generally had a more positive view of their first years of working life. Hence, it is problematized that schools which lack these virtues might be a structural reason as to why NQTs are not viewed as equal contributors.

If realized, a potential subjectification effect would be that the characteristics, behaviors, and dispositions of NQTs are centered around an idea of equality. Consequently, any perceived challenges in the induction of NQTs would not be seen as inherent flaws in the teachers themselves. Instead, they would be attributed to potential structural challenges, such as inadequate development opportunities or overwhelming administrative burdens, if such challenges were attempted to be solved.

Intrinsic motivation provides the most learning and participation

Competence development is one of the primary goals of NOU 2022 13, and the document gives us insight into how NQTs should apply and develop their skills, knowledge, and competencies. We have interpreted the emphasis on intrinsic motivation as a requisite for ‘learning and participation’ as a relevant implicit proposal for NQTs because ‘motivation and mastery’ is described as the goal for NQTs through a year of introduction (NOU 2022: 13, 11; 16; 77; 160). It is referred to as a ‘key insight from research’, when describing what competence development is purported to be and how it should be done:

The intrinsic source of motivation – the autonomous forms – has the greatest impact and is most significant for learning. Extrinsic sources – controlled forms – often have little influence and can have a negative effect on teacher involvement and therefore the benefits they have. (NOU 2022: 13, 70)

Intrinsic motivation is then portrayed both as a beneficial byproduct and a fundamental mechanism through which NQTs can achieve mastery and improve their learning and engagement in competence development activities. In addition, ‘key insights from research’ NOU 2022: 13 (71–73) refers to ‘competence development close to the

workplace’, ‘competence development within collegial communities’, and ‘informal learning as part of competence development’. These proposals in the form of a normative context can be tied in with the practiced structures that shape school cultures where NQTs could be recognized as equal contributors.

Starting from the premise that motivation and mastery are the goals for NQTs in their year of introduction, the problem is suggested to be that NQTs who lack intrinsic motivation may be less likely to engage in competence development activities and consequently may learn less; thus, intrinsic motivation is better suited for such a task than extrinsic motivation. The underlying assumption seems to be that challenges faced by NQTs are primarily psychological, such as a lack of intrinsic motivation and mastery. This framing might place the responsibility for professional development on the individual, rather than examining structural challenges (as many of the ‘key insights from research’ seem to refer to). Another underlying assumption is that teachers have the time and autonomy to act in accordance with their intrinsic motivation, but as seen with Ryan & Deci’s self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci 2000) (which NOU 2022: 13 refers to), it is famously not automatically aligned with either the individual’s professional goals or the broader goals of the education system.

A potential subjectification effect is that intrinsic motivation, or competence development, is assumed as the way to ‘succeed’ in the teacher role. Such an assumption might lead to connecting NQTs experiences of inadequacy with not being intrinsically motivated or just not working enough.

Explicit policy proposals

A year of introduction for newly qualified teachers

The most significant proposal in NOU 2022: 13 that specifically relates to NQTs is a year of introduction:

All newly educated teachers in . . . school will have the right to a year of introduction which will contribute to a good start to their working life with an experience of mastery and motivation, through mentoring, observation of teaching and networking with other newly qualified teachers. (NOU 2022: 13, 11)

It is elaborated that an introduction to the profession can include several elements in addition to mentoring: ‘Collaboration with colleagues, network meetings, observation of teaching, management support and time compensation, as well as courses and seminars for new graduates and possibly also their mentors’ (NOU 2022: 13, 151). However, it is described that the year of introduction should be developed based on the existing national framework for mentoring, which already includes many of these elements (NOU 2022: 13, 162).

Working backwards from this proposal, the most obvious – and perhaps most uncontested – problem representation suggests that the first years of working life for NQTs are problematic, and that NQTs will struggle without remedial support. However, upon closer examination of how the issue is framed, the challenge of the first years of working life is a burden primarily placed upon the NQTs themselves. This is partly because the aim of the year of introduction is to provide an ‘experience of mastery and motivation’, a goal inherently subjective and resting on individual responsibility. In turn,

the support resources that are meant to facilitate the experience of motivation and mastery are primarily oriented towards the individual and rely on a remedial-based image of NQTs. Again, the prevailing discourse seems to suggest that NQTs struggle individually to find themselves in the teacher role, and not because of potential structural challenges. It is explicitly stated that it is NQTs experiences, and the teacher role, that creates this challenge: ‘The first years of working life in the teacher role can be experienced as demanding’ (NOU 2022: 13, 151). Consequently, the implied issue lies with the NQTs themselves as the reason the initial years of professional life can be challenging.

Finally, NOU 2022: 13 uses the term ‘introduction’, but the literature they draw upon uses the term ‘induction’, see, for example, Ingersoll and Strong (2011) or Frederiksen (2020). It is unclear how the document deals with the differences in meaning between these terms. An introduction implies presenting or acquainting someone with something new, but induction implies integrating someone into something familiar (Kelchtermans 2019). The former implies a bigger deficit than the latter. Therefore, one interpretation is that it assumes that NQTs must be introduced – be presented or acquainted with – to their own profession. One implication of this is that the teacher education has not done enough to prepare NQTs for working life. The latter interpretation is a sentiment the document touches upon: ‘It is also important to recognize that not everything can be learned from the teacher education, but that some things are best learned in working life’ (NOU 2022: 13, 151). While some things are learned while in the profession, working backwards from this representation of the problem, NQTs are again somewhat positioned as the problem within a remedial perspective: as someone who lacks something and therefore needs to be introduced to what being a teacher ‘really’ entails.

Following these problem representations within the explicit policy proposal, it is noticeably left unproblematic that NQTs from 2022 and onwards graduate with a master’s degree, which includes a research and development competence. One would assume that such competence might prepare the NQTs for their profession and give them the necessary tools to learn what is best learned while in the profession. This is not an argument in favor of the new educational requirements; rather, it highlights that within this problem representation, the new context is under-communicated.

A possible subjectification effect of these problem representations is that NQTs are encouraged to assume characteristics, behaviors or dispositions framed within a remedial perspective, where the focus is on what they lack, rather than what they already possess. This could overshadow the unique knowledge and skills NQTs can bring into the school, and it might influence the public discourse to focus on the ‘struggles of new teachers’ instead of the unique opportunities they represent, possibly affecting how they are perceived by colleagues, administrators, parents, and the wider society.

Ten Percent of Working Time Spent on Introduction Activities

It is proposed that ten percent of working time must be spent on planned and structured introduction activities (NOU 2022: 13, 160). Working backwards from this proposal, it is also suggested that potential working conditions contribute to the challenges NQTs face in their first years of working life (for example, time pressure and workload issues are well documented for teachers (Koski et al. 2023; Stacey, Wilson, and McGrath-Champ 2022)). However, instead of providing the NQTs with the autonomy to allot their time as they see fit, the policy proposal describes that the time allotted must be spent on

introduction activities, which again, centers the NQTs as being the problem insofar as they do not know how to best use their time. Furthermore, it assumes that the benefits gained from introduction activities outweigh any other potential uses of that time: deficit thinking is inherent in the idea of time compensation, further exacerbated by the suggestion that it must be spent on introduction activities.

The motivation for spending ten percent of working time on introductory activities is, however, understandable. In a report by Rambøll (2021), they evaluated the mentoring of NQTs from 2014 to 2021. Their results show that only 68% of NQTs received mentoring in 2019 from the previous 58% in 2016, despite the ambitious goals set by the national framework for mentoring (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2018). These findings are used to legitimize this new, more forceful approach. The findings imply a resistance to mentoring schemes, either by the NQTs or the schools, as found in other studies (Antonsen et al. 2023). It is realistic to believe that not all NQTs would want to spend time on introductory activities, and an effect of the proposed solution would be a pressure to comply, paradoxically ending up yet another time-consuming activity. Even though it is made clear that the introduction activities must have room for local adaptations (NOU 2022: 13, 161), a danger might be that ten percent of working time will not be tailored to the needs of the individual, but rather a one-size-fits-all approach – either within the municipalities, or within the schools, all depending on how they approach mentoring. This more forceful approach reflects Mockler’s (2018) analysis, which asserts that constructing teacher education and the teachers themselves as the ‘problem’ has led to policy solutions aimed at increasing standardization and accountability.

Similarly, this could shape discussions about how prepared NQTs are, placing emphasis on the necessity for structured introduction. This could result in NQTs – and teacher colleagues and the wider society – internalizing the belief that NQTs need a distinct, quantifiable period for adjustment, thereby framing their self-perception in a remedial light.

The year of introduction based on the existing national framework for mentoring

It is proposed that the year of introduction should be developed based on the existing national framework for mentoring (NOU 2022: 13, 162). It is described that there exists different definitions of mentoring, but it is explicitly defined as the interaction between mentor and mentee with professional development for the mentee as the goal (NOU 2022: 13, 151). This definition does not align with the national framework for mentoring, which defines mentoring as ‘A planned, systematic, and structured process that is carried out individually and, in a group’ (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2018, 6),.

By proposing that the year of introduction should be developed based on the national framework for mentoring, NOU 2022: 13 solidifies mentoring as the encompassing term for the induction – or the introduction – of NQTs. The positive impact of effective mentoring by qualified mentors is well-documented (Kutsyuruba, Walker, and Godden 2019), but due to the definition given, and even inherent in the term ‘mentoring’,² it further grounds NQTs as those who need their deficits fixed. As Kelchtermans (2019) argues, the deficit perspective of NQTs uncritically assumes mentoring as a positive contribution and does not acknowledge that the nature of a mentoring relationship can

potentially be a problem rather than a solution. For example, as seen in the definition of mentoring, it assumes an asymmetrical relationship between the mentor and mentee, where the goal is only the mentee's professional development, because both a lack of autonomy for NQTs, and over-generosity from mentors, might jeopardize NQTs development. This is a real risk within NOU 2022: 13, because despite hailing qualified mentors as a requirement for good mentoring and describing that '... unqualified mentors can contribute to increased frustration and attrition from the profession' (NOU 2022: 13, 153), the document paradoxically also states that '... the committee believes that formal mentor training should not be a requirement' (NOU 2022: 13, 161), which is a puzzling contradiction.

Discussion

We have interrogated how NOU 2022: 13 might represent or constitute the problems they address and identified potential consequences. Notably, while the general 'solution' put forth by NOU 2022: 13 emphasizes the competence development of teachers, this focus shifts somewhat when it comes to the chapters concerning NQTs and their transition from education to professional life. The research-based implicit proposals state that the first year in the teaching profession must not be seen as problematic and that NQTs must be considered equal contributors. However, when applying the first two questions of the WPR approach to the explicit proposals, it becomes evident that the first year in the teaching profession and the NQTs themselves are framed as the problem. From this analysis, we have identified two subject positions for NQTs within NOU 2022: 13: (1) Newly qualified teachers as equal contributors, and (2) Newly qualified teachers in need. This dual framing of NQTs illustrates a contradiction, potentially shaping the lived experiences of NQTs and reflecting an inherent tension in the document's approach to competence development. The first subject position (as equal contributors) refers to the normative context described in the research-based implicit proposals, but the second subject position (in need) refers to the explicit policy proposals. In the latter position, NQTs are primarily positioned in a remedial-oriented perspective; as someone lacking the necessary skills, knowledge, and competencies, in need of introduction to their profession as a way to deal with the first years of working life successfully. These two subject positions are based on two opposing conceptualizations of NQTs. We argue that this contradiction can have deleterious subjectification effects for NQTs, because the intention behind the normative context is merely a disclaimer – or a rhetorical cushion – for policymakers down the line and is not expressed in the explicit policy proposals. Consequently, there is a discrepancy between the policy's stated intentions and its operationalization, a tendency found in other policy analyses, such as participation in higher education (Southgate and Bennett 2014); or indigenous education policies (Burgess, Lowe, and Goodwin 2023). In line with the arguments of Burgess, Lowe, and Goodwin (2023), McInerney (2007), and Mufic and Fejes (2022), we also point to the deleterious consequences of policies that fail to address root causes by focusing on individualized interventions, which fail address structural challenges. These approaches risk shaping the targeted people in ways that may reinforce existing inequalities or generate new tensions rather than solving the constructed problem.

Aligning with Kelchtermans' call to move beyond deficit thinking (Kelchtermans 2019), we argue that if NQTs are to be seen as equal contributors, explicit induction policies should focus on leveraging their existing skills, rather than emphasizing their perceived shortcomings through remedial 'band-aids'. A potential consequence, and subjectification effect, is that the policy proposals (to help NQTs in need) are solutions to problems they contribute to themselves (the NQTs are in need), and as such the NQTs are encouraged to assume characteristics, behaviors and dispositions that are based on their perceived deficits. For example, to reframe one of the narratives described by Correa, Martínez-Arbelaz, and Aberasturi-Appraiz (2015), if NQTs are positioned as agency-less in their 'community of practice', they might start to self-position as powerless. To state the obvious, when suggesting a year of introduction, the NQTs will spend the first year as a professional teacher being introduced, which will set the tone for how NQTs are viewed by administrators, colleagues, and even themselves: as probationary figures within the educational system, as explored, for example, by O'Sullivan and Conway (2016).

The represented problem is dependent on a construction of opposition, or a dividing practice between 'experienced teachers' (NOU 2022: 13, 15; 73; 161; 180) and 'newly qualified teachers', as similarly described by Correa, Martínez-Arbelaz, and Aberasturi-Appraiz (2015). This binary framing is a potentially harmful simplification because it implies that experience is the primary marker of a good teacher but fails to recognize the unique skills and knowledge that NQTs bring, such as specialized knowledge from their master's theses (Jakhelln et al. 2019). According to Bacchi and Goodwin (2016, 51), dividing practices is how policies promote desired behavior to make political subjects 'governable'. One implication within this dichotomy is that experience equals better teachers, but experience does not have to be the most important factor when it comes to being a 'good teacher'. For example, Graham et al. (2020) questions the claim that new teachers would be less competent than experienced teachers, and their results show no evidence of lower teaching quality for NQTs. It is left unproblematic that more experienced teachers might have developed strategies and resilience to endure the challenges of the teaching profession, rather than be 'better' teachers.

If the latter is the case, then the remedial perspective of NQTs is particularly inconsistent, if these coping strategies and resilience is what improves their experience of motivation and mastery. This is obviously not an argument against experienced teachers, but rather a way to show how such a dichotomy and the concepts of motivation and mastery (especially self-perceived notions of mastery like self-efficacy (NOU 2022: 13, 71; 152) and intrinsic motivation (NOU 2022: 13, 70) may be flawed aims when it comes to retaining or sustaining teachers in the profession. The emphasis on motivation and mastery is non-objectionable – because who would not want teachers that experience motivation and mastery? However, when they become a main concern, they might lead to deleterious 'spillovers' or 'blind spots'.

Also, considering that since 2022 NQTs will graduate with a research- and development-competence, it is noticeable that none of the explicit policy proposals involves how NQTs can apply, develop, and share their newly acquired knowledge, skills, and competencies. For example, it is stated that: 'In a way, all the studies and conclusions mentioned earlier in the chapter revolve around the

idea that teachers must be active participants in their own professional development and collaborate in professional communities ... ’ (NOU 2022: 13, 77). If the goal is to not frame the year of introduction as a compensatory measure and allow NQTs to become equal contributors, then it might be problematic with predominantly remedial-oriented problem representations.

When the policy proposals related to NQTs are primarily aimed at individual issues (the problem represented as the NQTs themselves), rather than structural issues, it will involve different implications for how the challenges surrounding NQTs are perceived by policymakers, school employees, and NQTs themselves, as similarly argued in comparable analyses (Burgess, Lowe, and Goodwin 2023; Horsell 2023; McInerney 2007; T. L. Smith et al. 2022; Southgate and Bennett 2014, etc.). This is true for both NQTs ‘as equal contributors’ and NQTs ‘in need’. For example, the issue of teacher retention would be understood differently if the proposals were aimed at broader challenges within the educational system, instead of attempting to enhance experiences of motivation and mastery for NQTs through remedial measures.

Practical implications

If the goal is to not represent NQTs as the problem themselves, then there must also be explicit policy proposals directed at structural issues. That said, policy proposals problematizing NQTs are not inherently bad things, as it might be necessary for policymaking. Nevertheless, *how* NQTs are represented as the problem might have deleterious consequences. This is evident in the persistent idea that NQTs are somehow deficient. This perception shapes evaluations, feedback, self-assessments, and induction practices in general, thereby reinforcing the stereotype of the ‘deficient new teacher’. This might create a feedback loop and a self-fulfilling prophecy, such as experiencing tension between needing support and being a resource, as illustrated by Kvam et al. (2023). While we do not intend to minimize the real challenges that NQTs face, we argue that it is not controversial to claim that if the real challenges are inherent in the educational structures, then it seems counterproductive to attempt to ‘fix’ the NQTs for them to ‘succeed’. From a practical standpoint, a more equitable approach for policymakers and educational stakeholders would be to address the constraining structures NQTs must navigate to – not succeed – but just exist as teachers. Moreover, in alignment with Ulvik and Langørgen’s (2012, 54) assertion that stable frameworks can cultivate trust and thereby enable a culture of sharing – which may offer a better induction into the teaching tradition than mentoring – we suggest that by identifying, problematizing, and dismantling constraining structures and practices, it is possible to move beyond remedial induction methods. Much like Biesta (2021), who reframes the question of education ask, ‘What kind of society does the school need?’ we too should shift our perspective. Instead of implicitly asking, ‘What kind of new teachers do schools need?’ – a question that underpins remedial induction methods and deficit thinking – we should be asking, ‘What kind of school do new teachers need?’ Simply reframing policies to avoid casting NQTs in a deficit light could be a significant step toward this goal.

Implications for further research

Building upon our findings and from Kelchtermans (2019) three suggestions for positioning NQTs as agents, networkers, and assets, there is a need to investigate alternative ways of problematizing the induction period in policy that might create new ways of thinking about the issue of teacher attrition, and new ways of thinking about the NQTs themselves. Future research should aim to understand how policies can better facilitate the multiple roles that NQTs take, as agents, networkers, and assets in the educational system. For example, NQTs graduate together with many fellow teacher students, but they will end up in very different schools, and sometime alone as the ‘NQT’ in that school. Therefore, policy could promote arenas for an exchange of experiences and professional development, like inter-school meetings, either within the same municipalities, or even spread across the country. This is a widespread approach in Norway, predominantly within the municipalities. Such an approach could be inspired by the ‘Peer Group Mentoring’ model (Heikkinen, Jokinen, and Tynjälä 2012), perhaps reframed as a ‘Peer Group Network’ to further move beyond the remedial perspective. Also, all the freshly graduated NQTs in Norway have written profession- and practice-oriented master’s theses that are relevant for the school. It might be worthwhile for future studies to explore how these master’s theses can serve as a resource both for the NQTs and the school in which they work (see, for example, Jakhelln et al. (2019) or Eklund, Aspfors, and Hansén (2019)). By creating platforms where NQTs can showcase their master’s theses and other pertinent research or development work, we can better position NQTs as active agents and valuable contributors in their school.

For policymaking, this article shows how the prevailing conceptualization of NQTs, and the solutions related to teacher attrition, can have deleterious consequences. The results have implications beyond Norway, especially for countries with five-year master’s teacher education, and the countries currently debating whether they want to make that change. In turn, this article examines themes that are seemingly universal, where many countries have teacher attrition issues, and perhaps a re-conceptualization of induction practices and NQTs is a worthwhile consideration. As such, there is a need for further international comparative studies to address some of the limitations we have outlined.

Limitations

As emphasized by a post-structural understanding, political subjects are always emergent or in process, and interconnected with discourses and other practices (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, 4). Therefore, a weakness of this article is that its object for analysis is limited to one document and only one country. However, such a ‘snapshot’ of the discourse could be argued as a strength as well, as it allowed us to thoroughly investigate relevant proposals within the document. Post-structuralist analytical frameworks have been criticized for their lack of replicability and generalizability; however, as Riemann (2023) argues, the WPR approach provides a rigorous framework for analysis, which increases its reproducibility. A detailed description of our analysis makes it possible for others to use the findings in their own similar contexts, described as naturalistic generalization by Stake and Trumbull (1982). Additionally, the simplicity of our selection process aids in the reproducibility of this study in other contexts than Norway.

Conclusion

To circle back to our research questions, we found that the explicit proposals are predominantly framed in a discourse about remedying the deficiencies of NQTs, while the research-based implicit proposals highlight the problematic nature of that positioning. This tension centers around the dual framing of NQTs as both a valuable resource and a liability in need of remediation, which reinforces a subjectivity where each teacher is seen in terms of potential utility and potential risk to the education system. Moreover, considering NOU 2022: 13's 'solutions' to the issue of teacher attrition, it is the NQTs themselves that are predominantly the represented 'problem'. This discourse influences how policies are formulated and implemented, where individual responsibility is highlighted, and structural factors are marginalized. The omission of structural factors could be a strategic one: by leaving them out, the policy proposals might try to simplify a complex issue for easier implementation. Furthermore, although NQTs are recognized as entering the profession with a master's degree, this new context is under-communicated in the explicit policy proposals. We have thus argued that this might lead to the policy proposals creating solutions to a problem they have a role in maintaining, thus perpetuating the self-fulfilling prophecy of the 'new deficient teacher'. Based on our conclusions, we posit that this article makes a necessary theoretical contribution to the discourse surrounding NQTs, by challenging the prevailing deficit-based conceptualization of NQTs and remedial practices in the induction period.

While this article provides no final solution to the paradox of prevalent induction practices perpetuating the need for such practices, it has hopefully shown that reframing how the issue is problematized can offer valuable theoretical and practical insights. Because if we want to attract and sustain good teachers, it seems counterproductive to immediately position new teachers as deficient, thereby devaluing them, their education, and the teaching profession.

Notes

1. All translations were made from Norwegian to English by us if not otherwise specified.
2. Or 'veileder' in Norwegian, directly translated to 'way leader' or 'road leader', which assumes a similar asymmetrical power relationship.

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