

Requirements for the Development of Competencies to Mentor Trainee Teachers: A Case Study of Vocational Education Cooperating Teachers in Quebec

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Abstract : Quebec's vocational education teachers experience an atypical induction process into the workplace and thus face unique challenges. In contrast to elementary and high school teachers, who must undergo initial teacher training in order to access the profession, vocational education teachers, in most cases, are hired based on their professional expertise in the trade they are teaching, without prior pedagogical training. In addition to creating significant stress, which does not foster the acquisition of teaching roles and skills, this approach also forces recruits into a particular posture during their practical training: that of juggling their dual identities as teacher and trainee simultaneously. Recruits are supported by Cooperating Teachers (CPs) who, as experienced educators, take a critical and constructive look at their practices, observe them in the classroom, give them constructive feedback, and encourage them in their reflective practice. Thus, the vocational setting CP also assumes a distinctive posture and role due to the characteristics of the trainees they support. Although it is recognized that preparation, training, and supervision of CPs are essential factors in improving the support provided to trainees, there is little research about how CPs develop their support skills, and very little research focuses on the distinct posture they occupy. However, in order for them to be properly equipped for the important role they play in recruits' practical training, it is vital to know more about their experience. An individual's competencies cannot be studied without first examining what characterizes their experience, how they experience any given situation on cognitive, emotional, and motivational levels, in addition to how they act and react in situ. Depending on its nature, the experience will or will not promote the development of a specific competency. The research from which this communication originates focuses on describing the overall experience of vocational education CP in an effort to better understand the mechanisms linked to the development of their mentoring competencies. Experience and competence were, therefore, the two main theoretical concepts leading the research. As per methodology choices, case study methods were used since it proves to be adequate to describe in a rich and detailed way contemporary phenomena within contexts of life. The set of data used was collected from semi-structured interviews conducted with 15 vocational education CP in Quebec (Canada), followed by the use of a data-driven semi-inductive analysis approach to let the categories emerge organically. Focusing on the development needs of vocational education CP to improve their mentoring skills, this paper presents the results of our research, namely the importance of adequate training, better support offered by university supervisors, greater recognition of their role, and specific time slots dedicated to trainee support. The knowledge resulting from this research could improve the quality of support for trainee teachers in vocational education settings and to a more successful induction into the workplace. This communication also presents recommendations regarding the development of training systems that meet the specific needs of vocational education CP.

Keywords : development of competencies, cooperating teacher, mentoring trainee teacher, practical training, vocational education

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