

Practicum in Preschool Teacher Education: The Role of Pedagogical Supervision for Students Professional Development

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Abstract : Practicum is a central dimension of teacher education programs. Learning how to teach is, in effect, a complex process that integrates periods of observation, experimentation, reflection, planning, and evaluation in a real context of practices, providing opportunities for prospective teachers to understand the various dimensions of education and to implement the knowledge built over the theoretical courses they have taken. At the pre-service training of early childhood teachers, specialized guidance and in particular pedagogical supervision assumes a key role in the professional development of students in training. The main goal of this study is to describe and analyze the supervision process that occurs during the practicum of preschool education master programs in Portugal. The objectives of the study are: (i) to describe the cooperative process of professional development experienced by student teachers during the practicum; (ii) to identify the strengths and weaknesses of supervision process; (iii) to identify the supervision styles used by university supervisors and cooperating teachers. The methodology used is the mix-method research and data was collected through semi-structured interviews and online questionnaires. The participants are newly graduated Portuguese early childhood teachers, university supervisors and cooperating teachers. The results reveal gaps in the specialized training of cooperating teachers and university supervisors, a large number of trainees per supervisor, which makes it difficult to support students, and those interpersonal relationships between university supervisors and students and/or cooperating teachers and students interfere in the development of the supervisory processes. The study highlights the need to invest in the specialized training of university supervisors and cooperating teachers to create better opportunities to support the professional development of prospective teachers.

Keywords : mentoring, pedagogical supervision, practicum, preschool teacher education

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