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Novice teachers' professional development during the induction year

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Abstract

The key problem of the current study can be worded as the question: what are the changes that occur in novice teachers' development during the first year of work? The data sources include novice teachers' and their mentors' responses to the questionnaires focusing on changes in teacher competencies and self-efficacy beliefs during the induction year. The teaching skills of the novice teachers grew during their first year at work and their assessments were reasonably adequate. Self-efficacy grows through positive experiences of own classroom teaching. Novice teachers with high self-efficacy were more satisfied with their coping in the first year at work than the teachers with average and low self-efficacy. Positive first experiences and strong sense of efficacy are important from the viewpoint of the future career.

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Key words: Novice teachers, professional skills, self efficacy, induction year

1. Introduction

In autumn 2004, the induction year program was implemented in Estonia with the aim to help novice teachers adapt to their school culture and to support their professional growth as teachers.

The current study is based on the interest in investigating the transition of pre-service teachers from university life into full time teaching in a classroom. The first year of employment has been considered critical, because this year is the time when the concept of oneself as a teacher develops so that the experience and knowledge gained from this experience significantly influences the future professional development of the teacher (Calderhead & Schorrock, 1997).

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An important factor when reflecting on and improving his or her work as a teacher is the motivation to grow. A key piece of this motivation is a sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998) – the belief that they can make a difference in the lives of their students, in their schools, and in their communities. According to Colton and Sparks-Langer (1993:50) without such a belief, teachers will not be motivated to examine their own practice and look for deeper meaning. According to research, perceived self-efficacy is a strong predictor of behavior (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Teacher efficacy, as a motivational construct, proposes that level of efficacy affects the amount of effort a teacher will expend in a teaching situation and the persistence a teacher will show in the face of obstacles. Teacher efficacy has been linked also to level of teachers' professional commitment (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998:223).

Another important factor consists of professional competences. In order to cope, a teacher requires relevant knowledge and skills with respect to the subject matter and curriculum (content knowledge), the students they teach (knowledge of learners) as well as the general rules and principles of learning and teaching (pedagogical knowledge). Further, teachers must also consider the context (context knowledge). Context includes time of day; the cultural backgrounds and community; and school, district and regional politics (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993). Furthermore, teachers must have the ability and skills to analyze their behavior and the understandings and values underlying it because analysis serves as a basis for change and improvement of teaching practice (knowledge of self).

Competencies are generally conceived of as an integrated body of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. As such they represent a potential for behavior, and not the behavior itself. According to Korthagen (2004:80) whether the competencies are really put into practice, i.e. expressed in behavior depends on the circumstances because teacher competencies are determined by the environment but also by his or her belief. Competencies and beliefs are interconnected: beliefs start to change as soon as people experience that they possess or can develop the competencies to have a much greater impact on other people's learning than they thought was possible (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005:68). The beliefs, in turn, affect the degree to which we actually realise our competencies. Positive coping and feedback has a positive influence also on self-efficacy beliefs, leading to willingness to apply one's competencies to the fullest and improve them further.

The objective of this study was to analyze novice teachers' professional development during the induction year. More specifically, it aimed to describe novice teachers' and their mentors' perceptions of novice teachers' development and experience of learning to teach in their first year of work. The main tasks of the study were as follows:

1. To describe novice teachers' perceptions about their teaching competencies and self-efficacy beliefs across the first year of work as a teacher and ascertain what changes occurred in these during the school year.
2. To compare novice teachers' and their mentors' perceptions about novice teachers competencies across the school year.

2. Method

58 novice teachers from the cohort of 145 who completed questionnaires on three occasions – at the end of the first, second and forth semesters and their mentors participated in the study. The sample of novice teachers included 54 females and 4 males, age ranged from 22 to 32 years. The surveyed group also included 48 mentors of novice teachers, all of them were women. Mentors ranged in age from 28 to 61 and had an average of 22 years experience as teachers.

Questionnaires. Items designed to measure the teachers' perceptions of the competencies (37 items) were

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