Chapter 11
Reflective Mentoring Practices:
Insights From Cooperating Teachers in an Online Mentor Training Program

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ABSTRACT

Motivated by the need for a training that would promote cooperating teachers' reflective skills in their mentoring roles to support the professional development of teacher candidates during practice teaching, this chapter focuses on the implementation of an online training program for the cooperating teachers who supervise the teacher candidates in an English language teaching program of an English-medium state university in Istanbul, Türkiye. The study aimed at revealing the reflections of cooperating teachers on their own mentoring perceptions, skills, and practices in the twelve-week training. The analysis of the data obtained from the cooperating teachers' written tasks showed that the new experience of the training program increased their awareness of their own teaching and mentoring practices. It is indicated in the findings that the tasks deepened cooperating teachers' understanding of mentoring skills such as how to establish rapport and engage in a fruitful observation and feedback process with the teacher candidates.

INTRODUCTION

The reflective practice is defined as a tool used to evaluate and raise teachers' efficacy, performance, and competence (Black, 2015). It enables teachers to improve their pedagogical choices by evaluating how those practices may affect their situated practice through a self-critical and analytical process (Tripp & Rich, 2012). Thus, it is an important practice to promote, especially during practice teaching, in teacher candidates who are in the process of learning to teach by using their practice teaching experience to formulate teaching philosophies.

In practice teaching process, cooperating teachers have the closest relationship with teacher candidates and fulfill the mentoring duty by undertaking "the roles of teacher, boss, assessor, counsellor and expert", through "assisting, befriending, guiding, advising and counselling" (Bray & Nettleton, 2006, p.849). Cooperating teachers must encourage reflective skills in teacher candidates so that they can be actively involved in practice teaching setting (Aderibigbe, Colucci-Gray & Gray, 2014). This necessitates that cooperating teacher should be critical reflectors themselves. Motivated by the need for a training that would promote cooperating teachers' reflective skills in their mentoring roles and accordingly supporting the professional development of teacher candidates, this chapter focuses on the experiences of cooperating teachers in an online training program, who supervise the teacher candidates in an English Language Teaching program of an English-medium state university in Istanbul, Turkey. The study in this chapter aimed at revealing the reflections of cooperating teachers on their own mentoring skills and practices in a twelve-week training.

CRITICAL CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH TO TEACHER EDUCATION

Teacher candidates' emergent teaching philosophies keep being nourished from not only their theoretical knowledge but also classroom experience in practice teaching. The study explores this "learning to teach" process using the theoretical framework of critical constructivist teacher education in an effort to provide an answer to the question of how cooperating teachers (and teacher candidates) successfully complete the practice teaching experience as an opportunity to learn and improve reflection skills.

According to the critical constructivist perspective, the learning teacher is the one who would implement change. Critical constructivist teaching has an emancipatory potential, the primary goal of critical constructivist teaching is to effect change by

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