

DID YOU SAY... COOPERATING TEACHER IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION?

Understanding your role to better fulfill it



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A DEFINITION

What does it mean to be a cooperating teacher for a student teacher in vocational education?

In fact, the role of a cooperating teacher is “to assist teachers; their main requirements are to interact and share information with, support and stimulate the student teacher. It is therefore a help role, including one of psychological, moral or emotional support to cope with the turmoil experienced during university training and the transition into teaching” (Gagné, 2019, p. 237).

WHAT IS IT USED FOR?

Cooperating teachers are part of the group of educators who are involved in the university training of vocational education teachers, particularly during practicums at vocational education centres. It is a responsibility that they share closely with university supervisors, but which officially more or less rests on the shoulders of many stakeholders (see figure 1).

In vocational education, the role of the cooperating teacher is particular. In fact, in contrast to their counterparts in elementary and high schools who collaborate with future teachers, a cooperating teacher in vocational education assists, most of the time, an actual teaching colleague. Therefore, the cooperating teacher is mainly a seasoned colleague, one who usually has completed the university teacher training and the practicums, and who enters into a relationship with student teachers to help them develop their professional teaching competencies. The cooperating teacher is also a resource person for easing entry into the teaching profession and progression through the university training.

Being a cooperating teacher also allows one to develop professionally by opening up to the other, by accepting to go in directions that were not foreseen. Therefore, coaching is a relational approach which helps both the student teacher in training and the cooperating teacher.

This brief is inspired from the following doctoral research:
Gagné, A. (2019). L'apport de l'expérience professionnelle dans la construction de l'identité d'enseignant associé en enseignement professionnel [Thèse de doctorat, UQAC]. Constellation. <https://constellation.uqac.ca/5270/>

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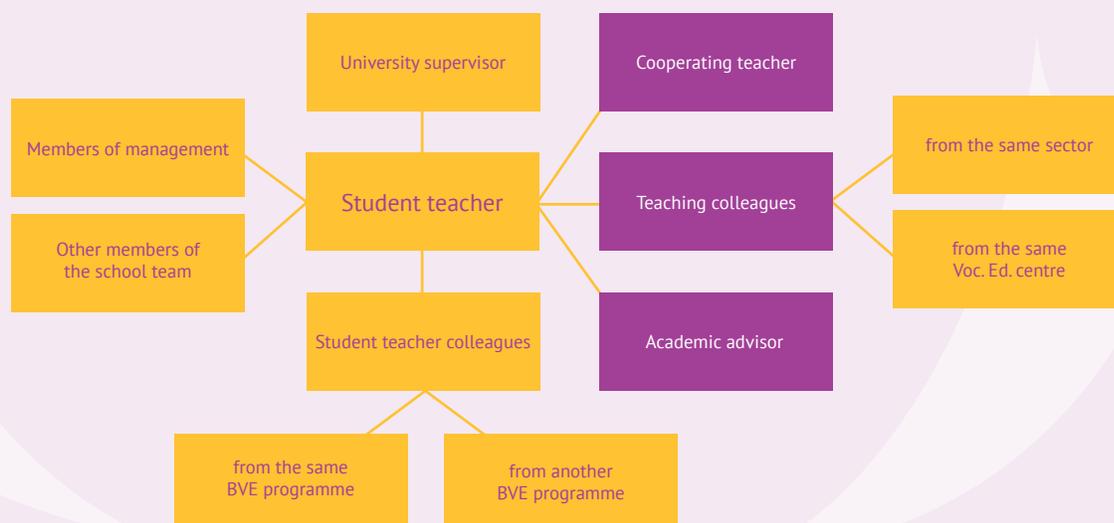
HOW ABOUT IF WE EXPLAINED IT IN SIMPLE TERMS...

The role of the cooperating teacher can be defined by its responsibilities, of which some are shared with the university supervisor. The latter were organized into a list by 133 cooperating teachers who were consulted as part of a study.

1. Interacting with the student teachers, meeting with them and establishing a relationship based on equality and trust.
2. Informing the student teachers about their work, their practicum and their practicum location.*
3. Supporting and assisting the student teachers in their teaching tasks and school work.
4. Stimulating and encouraging the student teachers as well as providing moral support.
5. Guiding the student teachers, allowing them to discover and to try out new things in the field.*
6. Reviewing their practice, giving them feedback and constructive criticism.
7. Ensuring that the activities are in compliance with the practicum requirements.
8. Collaborating with the student teachers and their university supervisor, working together as a team.
9. Welcoming the student teachers, facilitating their integration at the vocational education centre and in the classroom.*
10. Favoring a differentiated approach with the student teachers, adapting their interventions.
11. Providing the student teachers with material, didactic, and human resources.
12. Observing the student teachers in teaching situations.
13. Participating in the evaluation of the student teachers, taking a critical look at their practicum activities.
14. Encouraging the student teachers to perform reflective analysis.
15. Planning and preparing with the student teachers to help them get organized for the practicum and for the work in the classroom.*
16. Taking the required training to be a cooperating teacher.

* These responsibilities are more to do with student teachers who do not have a teaching assignment or who have only been recently hired by the practicum host location.

Figure 1: Actors involved in training vocational education student teachers



WHAT IF I WANTED TO INTEGRATE IT INTO MY PRACTICE...

As a cooperating teacher, one must build professional knowledge to best assist a student teacher and be comfortable with that function. In order to help you start thinking about and identifying your proficiency training needs, here is a table that presents the various coaching skills that should be mastered.

Coaching skills	Description	Level of mastery
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Contextual knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the issues specific to vocational education and vocational education teacher training. The organizational, cultural, human, material and financial conditions of the sector. 	
Soft skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ability to build a relationship based on trust. The importance of mutual engagement, interaction, sharing and benefits. Posture, ways of acting, the soft skills and the characteristics amenable to this type of relationship. 	
Time skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The different periods of coaching: their duration and spacing over time, the frequency and interval of meetings. Each other's pace, that of the cooperating teacher. 	
Procedural knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The activities to be completed. The devices and modes of functioning implemented or the tools used. The evolving nature of the practicum process. The need to adjust the process undertaken. 	
Knowledge of the objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The aims and objectives of the university and professional milieus. The mandate conferred and the expectations with respect to the cooperating teacher and the student teacher. 	
Experiential knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The knowledge built up through the process of coaching and validated by it. Prior knowledge, built up over a lifetime, reinvested and transferred in the support process. 	
Curricular knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The knowledge and know-how required to practice the various trades to be taught. The trade training programme. The university teacher training programme. Practicum guides. 	

"Every man exists but to make his own way: no path that has already been traced would be good enough to take."
(Paul, 2020, p. 47)

TO FIND OUT MORE

Gagné, A. (2020). Quels savoirs pour savoir accompagner? Réseau d'information pour la réussite en éducation. En ligne.

Gagnon, C., et Rousseau, A. (2010). Accompagnement des nouveaux enseignants en FP : fantôme ou réalité? *Formation et profession*, 17(2), 13-16.

Paul, M. (2020). La démarche d'accompagnement. De Boeck.

