



Thai cooperating teachers' motivations and challenges in supervising student teachers during their internship program

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Abstract

In Thai teacher education, cooperating teachers play a vital role in educating student teachers during their internship for the fifth and final year of the students' Bachelor of Education program. This study sought to understand Thai cooperating teachers' motivations and challenges in supervising student teachers for the internship. Outcomes are reported from a dataset consisting of 171 responding cooperating teachers who took the Mentoring Perspectives Inventory. All quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results indicated that cooperating teachers were significantly more motivated than challenged in this work. They were equally motivated by benefits to themselves and others and were equally challenged by interpersonal issues and systemic issues. Recognizing and understanding cooperating teachers' motivations and challenges can form the basis for reflecting upon and rethinking the components of teacher preparation programs in Thailand. Key outcomes from this study suggest: (1) empowering cooperating teachers; (2) designing professional learning for their mentoring practices; and (3) further investigating their thinking and reasoning in practicum settings.

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Introduction

It is well established in the literature that cooperating teachers plays a key role in the preparation of student teachers for the profession (Hudson, 2013). The cooperating teacher is an experienced practitioner who provides student teachers with the opportunity to work with "real students in real classrooms" (McDonald, Kazemi, & Kavanagh, 2013, p. 379). The cooperating teacher acts as a school-based teacher educator who judiciously guides the student teacher in learning how to teach and provides regular feedback and assessment on that process (van Ginkel, Verloop, & Denessen, 2016). When a cooperating

teacher engages student teachers in a critical dialogue about their practice, student teachers can move from a technical rationale to a more critically reflective approach to teaching. In short, cooperating teachers strongly influence student teachers in terms of the 'what,' the 'how,' and the 'why' of their teaching.

Although much of the literature on teacher education examines the on-campus (or coursework) component, there is much less research that focuses on the practicum or internship component (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2016), especially the way that cooperating teachers think and conceptualize their work in such contexts (Koerner, 1992; Li, 2009). In much the same way that it is important for student teachers to make explicit the assumptions that underlie their practice, it is equally important for cooperating teachers to do the same for their mentoring practice. Understanding the commitments that they bring to their work, often characterized in terms of what motivates or

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challenges them, provides an important starting point for cooperating teachers to explore the assumptions that underlie their mentoring practice (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2016).

In the context of Thailand, some studies have investigated cooperating teacher's supervisions. Faikhamta and Clarke (2015) and Janrakantee and Roadrangka (2010) indicated that cooperating teachers needed university supervisors to clarify their roles when they supervised pre-service science teachers in their teaching. Consequently, they had difficulties in giving pre-service science teachers suggestions and feedback regarding topic-specific pedagogy. However, these studies did not focus on cooperating teachers' motivations and challenges and were limited only to science teacher education programs.

In responding to the need for more research in this area, this study analyzes Thai cooperating teachers' motivations and challenges in mentoring student teachers. Understanding gained from this study will inform the ways in which universities conceptualize the work of and interact with cooperating teachers. In particular, the provision of professional development for cooperating teachers can be more deliberately planned and effectively implemented with this knowledge. Furthermore, the study adds to the growing body of literature on the practicum in national contexts thereby increasing the possibility for international comparative analyses of the work of cooperating teachers.

Theoretical Framework

The Importance of Making Explicit 'Why We Do What We Do'

In the past 20 years, research on teacher education has moved its attention from teachers' behaviors to teachers' knowledge: how they learn, how they think, and how they enact their practice (Bell & Gilbert, 1994). A teacher actively constructs, rather than passively receives, his or her conceptions of teaching and learning (Sillman & Dana, 2001). Like all learners, teachers' prior conceptions play an important role in the ongoing construction of their professional knowledge, whether it is with pupils in classrooms or as mentors to student teachers on practicum. Similarly, student teachers construct their knowledge about teaching and learning through their engagement with more knowledgeable persons such as their cooperating teacher. These experienced professionals act as facilitators and help to scaffold the construction of this knowledge (Bell & Gilbert, 1994). As such, it is important that cooperating teachers are able to articulate 'why they do what they do.' For example, unless cooperating teachers critically examine why they do what they do, their mentoring practice has the danger of becoming perfunctory, routinized, and imitative. These outcomes limit what cooperating teachers can offer student teachers. However, when cooperating teachers problematize 'why they do what they do'—that is, they reflect upon their practice—they become increasingly attuned to how and in what ways their mentoring supports student teacher learning. This reflective disposition allows cooperating teachers to better support student teachers in a generative and context-responsive manner (Li, 2009).

Navigating Mentoring as A Professional Practice

Clarke, Triggs, and Nielsen's (2014) review of the literature suggests that cooperating teachers participate in teacher education in 11 different ways: as providers of feedback, gatekeepers of the profession, modelers of practice, supporters of reflection, gleaners of knowledge, purveyors of context, conveners of relation, agents of socialization, advocates of the practical, abiders of change, and teachers of children. Further, they suggest that cooperating teachers are often unaware of and are unable to articulate the nature and substance of their participation and, as such, fail to fully understand the impact that they have on student teacher learning. When compounded with issues such as a breakdown in communication (for example, arising from differing expectations or a lack of a common language for talking about teaching), student teacher learning suffers even more. Additionally, when cooperating teachers fail to problematize 'why they do what they do' unexpected challenges such as being displaced as the central figure in the classroom or the disruption of their established norms and routines further impact the ways in which they support and facilitate student learning.

Even though challenges and difficulties can exist in being a cooperating teacher, most cooperating teachers still feel enthusiastic and committed to their work with student teachers. For example, Yendol-Hoppey (2007) revealed that once a cooperating teacher becomes committed to mentorship, that teacher enters into a special relationship with the student teacher that is very different from the teacher's daily relationship with the pupils in the classroom. Li (2009) indicated that there was a tendency of cooperating teachers to take an authoritarian role on the rights and wrongs of student teachers' teaching while managing to maintain trust and warm relationships. However, the cooperating teachers had a very positive attitude towards providing 'assistance' to the less experienced teachers. Accordingly, mentorship is a special form of teaching that requires particular skills and abilities (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2016).

This study recognizes that while cooperating teachers are given extensive support on the *what* of their mentoring—that is, the technical dimensions—more challenging and regularly neglected is the *why* of their mentoring—in particular, the commitments that give shape and meaning to their practice (Wang & Odell, 2002). If as Sarason (1996) argues, inquiry is a defining feature of professional practice, then failing to attend to the *why* of mentoring presents a serious impediment to the work of cooperating teachers. To ensure optimal environments for student teachers, cooperating teachers must be supported and encouraged to make explicit *why* they do what they do and thus make available for examination the assumptions that underlie their mentoring practice (Bullough & Draper, 2004).

Methodology

In order to answer the research questions, survey research was used as a research method. Participants, context of the study, data collection and analysis were described as follows.

Participants and Context of the Study

The participants of this study were 171 cooperating teachers who were supervising student teachers during their internship in the context of a five-year teacher education program (Faikhamta & Clarke, 2015). The internship is a highlight of current Thai teacher education programs. Since the introduction of the internship in 2004, the new five-year teacher education program has been considered an important opportunity to improve the quality of Thai teachers. This new program extended the period of internship from one semester in the previous four-year teacher education program to an entire year in the new five-year program. The year-long internship is expected to help student teachers gain a better understanding of the teacher's role, the school curriculum, action research practices, and pupils' growth and learning over the course of an entire year.

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to investigate cooperating teachers' challenges and motivation, Mentoring Profile Inventory (MPI) (Clarke et al., 2012) was used as a research instrument. The MPI provides a prompt for thinking differently about one's practice, offering new insights to individuals and researchers alike. For practitioners, individual MPI profiles have the potential to allow them, in the privacy of their own classrooms or offices, to receive feedback on the way in which they conceive of their practice and, more specifically, to reflect on the internal components that make up that practice. The MPI is a 62-item survey that captures cooperating teachers' commitments to mentoring rendered as eight motivator scales, six challenge scales, and three summary charts. It is a fully validated instrument and is freely available on the web in five languages including Thai (www.mentoringprofile.com). The MPI was translated into Thai by the first author and then back-translated into English by other researchers not involved in the original translation. Lastly, one English-speaking member checked the back translations and made the appropriate corrections for some items in order to convey the same meaning as the original English version. Detailed validation data and

psychometric properties for the instrument are described in Clarke et al. (2012).

The MPI was administered to the full complement of cooperating teachers ($n = 171$) for the Thai Bachelor of Education internship program at City University (a pseudonym), in the second semester of the 2015 academic year. The participants were asked to respond to the 62 items using a five-point rating scale. The choices for the 32 motivator items that constitute the eight motivator scales are: 'not a motivator', 'slight motivator', 'moderate motivator', 'significant motivator', or 'critical motivator.' A parallel set of choices is provided for the 30 challenge items that make up the six challenge scales (for example, 'not a challenge').

Once the respondents complete the MPI they receive (via email) an *individual MPI Profile* that includes the motivator and challenge scales rendered as 14 bars charts and an overall summary of their commitments and challenges rendered as three pie charts (see Figure 1). The 14 scales represent the type and extent to which cooperating teachers are motivated (8 scales) or challenged (6 scales) in their work with student teachers. The three summary charts represent:

- 1) the balance between 'self' and 'other' motivators, indicating the degree to which a cooperating teacher is motivated by the benefits they derive for themselves versus the benefits offered to others as a result of their work as a cooperating teacher;
- 2) the balance between the extent to which a cooperating teacher is challenged by 'interpersonal' (communication with a student) versus 'systemic' issues (unclear policies) in their work as a cooperating teacher; and
- 3) the overall extent to which cooperating teachers are motivated or challenged (based on all 62 items) in working with student teachers.

Individual MPI Profiles allow cooperating teachers to better understand why they do what they do by making explicit and available for examination (through the 14 scales and 3 summary charts) why they do what they do.

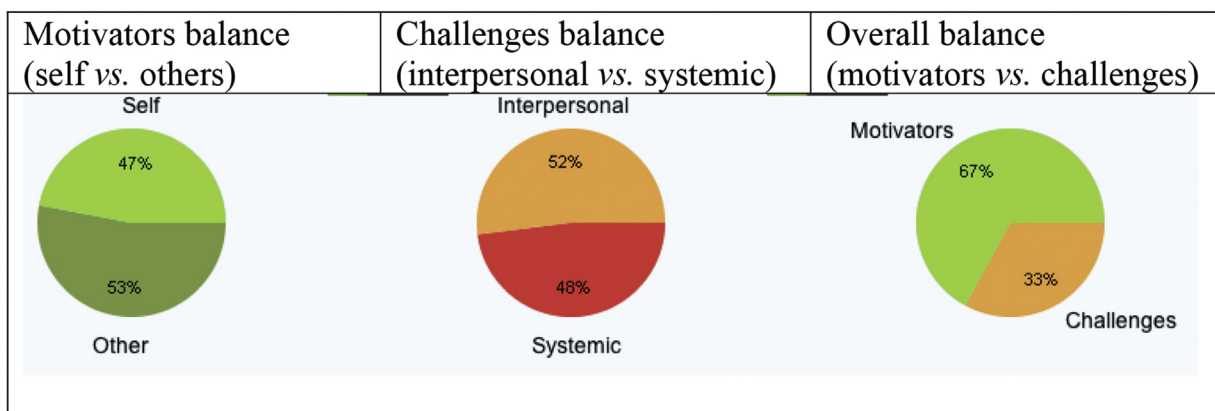


Figure 1 Three balance charts of the cooperating teachers

Furthermore, and importantly for this study, an *Aggregate MPI Profile* can be generated for a cohort of cooperating teachers that enables researchers to get a sense of what are the key motivators and, conversely, what are the most pressing challenges that cooperating teachers report in a particular jurisdiction.

Finally, in responding to the MPI, the cooperating teachers also provide basic demographic data (years of teaching experience, the number of student teachers supervised, among others). The demographic data are used by researcher as part of the *Aggregate MPI Profile* and not included in the *Individual MPI Profile* that is returned to the participants.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics for the demographic questions and the responses to the MPI Likert-type items.

Findings

The research findings are presented in four parts, with the first being a macro-level analysis using the MPI three summary figures (the pie charts), while the second involves a micro-level analysis of MPI drawing on the 14 scales (8 motivator and 6 challenge).

Macro-Level Analysis of MPI

The macro-level analysis of MPI draws on the three balance charts generated by the MPI: the balance between self-directed and other-directed motivators; the balance between interpersonal and systemic challenges; and the overall balance between being the degree to which one is motivated or challenged in working with student teachers. Each of these provide a window into Thai cooperating teachers conceptions of their work with student teachers (in particular, ‘why do what they do’).

The developers of MPI suggest that ideally the motivator and challenge balance charts (pie charts #1 and #2) should be relatively evenly balanced suggesting that neither one or other of the sectors within the two charts should be inordinately large compared to the other. Further, they suggest that the overall balance chart (Chart #3) should ideally indicate that cooperating teachers are more highly motivated than challenged in their work with student teachers.

As shown in Figure 1, the self-directed balance chart for motivation indicates a near balance between self-directed (47%) and other-directed (53%) motivation indicating a slightly greater sense of benefits to others.

The challenge chart also indicates a near balance with systemic challenges (48%) slightly outweighing personal (52%) challenges. Finally, the overall balance chart between motivators and challenges indicates that the Thai cooperating teachers in this study are more strongly motivated than challenged in their work with student teachers. All in all, these results present a very favorable window into how the Thai cohort are conceptualizing their work with student teachers.

Micro-Level Analysis of MPI

A micro-level analysis of MPI provides a closer examination of the eight motivator and six challenge scales (Figure 2). Consistent with the above analysis, all eight motivator scales show high levels of motivation by cooperating teachers in their work with student teachers. Three scales have scores in excess of 40—Renewing the Profession (43/50), Contributing to Teacher Education (41/50), and Mentoring in Classroom Contexts (42/50)—which suggest that respondents see these factors as ‘significant’ or ‘critical’ in terms of working with student teachers. Even the lowest score item for Reminders about SA Career Development (33/50) is still very high in terms of the cooperating teachers commitment to the internship program.

Looking a little closer at the motivator items that constitute the eight motivator scales, the top three items (rated as ‘significant’ or ‘critical’) for the majority of teachers are:

- 1) Producing more teachers is our social responsibility;
- 2) Supervising helps develop student teachers into teachers; and
- 3) It is gratifying to watch student teacher learn and develop (See Table 1).

This suggests that there is a strong social and professional commitment that underlies Thai teachers

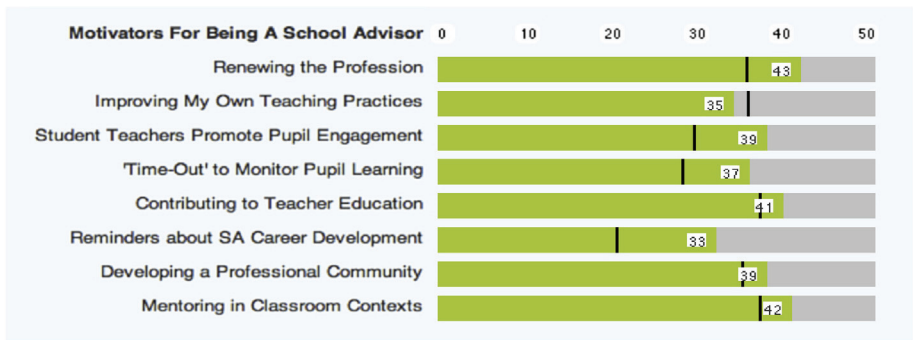


Figure 2 Thai motivator scale scores

Table 1
Top-10 Thai motivators (rated as either 'significant' or 'critical' motivators)

Rank	Motivator item	Number of teachers rating it as significant	Number of teachers rating it as critical
1	Producing more teachers is our social responsibility	60	102
2	Supervising helps develop student teachers into teachers	66	95
3	It is gratifying to watch student teacher learn and develop	55	104
4	It is the right thing to do to help student teachers	70	85
5	It is satisfying to know that I can facilitate a student teacher's development	68	87
6	Supervising is important to education and society in general	87	63
7	Mentoring student teachers helps them to connect theory to practice	101	46
8	Student teachers enhance student interest and classroom dynamics	96	43
9	I am making a difference when I coach beginning teachers	84	53
10	Student teachers in the classroom promote pupil engagement	90	47

involvement with student teachers. These are 'other-directed' motivators. Pleasingly, the third of the motivators suggests pleasure that the Thai cooperating teachers get themselves ('self-directed') from working with student teachers. As noted earlier, it is important that there is a reasonable balance between self- and other-directed items. Excess in either dimension (excess 'other-directed' might become self-sacrificing whereas 'self-directed' might become self-serving) might not necessarily allow for optimum practicum placements.

The analysis of the challenge's six scales (Figure 3), reveal that Thai cooperating teachers rate all at the moderate level. This means that the cooperating teachers have

indicated that these scales do not present a serious challenge to them in the work with student teachers. Three challenge scales are in the 20/50 range: 1) Challenges in Guidance and Mentoring (20/50); 2) Concerns about School Advising as a Sub-Specialty (19/50), Concerns about STs' Pre-Practicum Preparation (19/50), and Uncertain Feedback and Communication Practices (19/50), and 3) Inadequate Forms and Guidelines (16/50), and Unclear Policies and Procedure (16/50).

The first and the fourth of these refer specifically to challenges associated with how and in what ways the cooperating teachers engage with student teachers (the 'interpersonal' dimension in their work with student teachers). The second and third are related to 'systemic' issues that impact their work with student teachers. While it is important to pay attention to each of these issues, the degree of concern indicated by the cooperating teacher is not overly alarming to warrant drastic action. Instead, these four items suggest avenues to be explored by both the university and the schools as they continue to work to provide optimum practicum environments for both student teachers and cooperating teachers.

In a more fine-grained analysis of the challenge items, the list of the top-10 challenges reveals that one item in particular is deserving of closer attention within the context of Thai teacher education—the absence of systematic procedures to select and prepare Faculty and School Advisors (see Table 2). The cooperating teachers' response to this item, which represents approximately 22 percent of the participants, rated it as either 'significant' or 'critical', suggesting that both the university and the schools might do well to review the current practices with respect to cooperating teacher and university supervisor selection.

Conclusions, Discussion, and Implications

This study contributes to a better understanding of why cooperating teachers do what they do (Wang & Odell, 2002; van Ginkel et al., 2016) in Thailand and elsewhere, particularly in Asian countries. By examining the motivations and challenges cooperating teachers encounter in their work with student teachers, the results indicated that

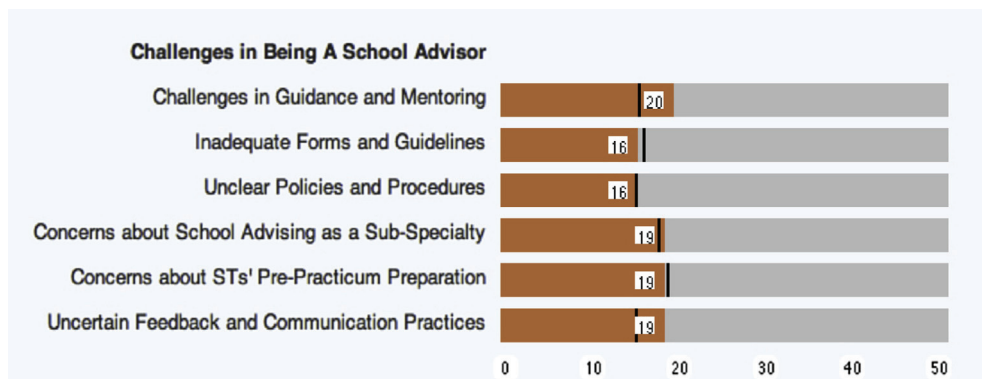


Figure 3 Thai challenge scale scores

Table 2
Top-10 Thai challenges (rated as either significant or critical challenges)

Rank	Challenge item	Number of teachers rating it as significant	Number of teachers rating it as critical
1	Absence of systematic procedures to select and prepare Faculty and School Advisors	31	6
2	Insufficient feedback from Student Teachers about what is working and what is not	18	7
3	Difficulties in focusing my ST's attention on pupil learning rather than just following lesson plan	20	3
4	Uncertainty about specific practicum preparation for Student Teachers prior to practicum	19	4
5	Absence of feedback from Administrators to inform me how well I am assisting STs	17	5
6	Difficulties in articulating the evaluation procedures at the start of the practicum	19	2
7	Little information about university course work for Student Teachers prior to practicum	16	5
8	Difficulties in outlining what Student Teachers can expect from me as a School Advisor	13	7
9	Absence of systematic procedures to select and prepare Faculty and School Advisors	16	4
10	Lack of evaluation procedures for Student Teachers' own self-evaluations	16	4

cooperating teachers are motivated more than they are challenged in this work. Based on the findings, it can be inferred that the cooperating teachers positively perceived that being a cooperating teacher is helpful, particularly in reviewing their profession and contributing to teacher education.

The research showed the evidence that the cooperating teachers were particularly motivated in terms of: Renewing the Profession, Mentoring in Classroom Contexts, and Contributing to Teacher Education. They believed that facilitating the development of beginning teachers is one of their social and professional responsibilities. Furthermore, they received personal satisfaction in terms of the pleasure they gained from watching student teachers learn and develop as beginning teachers. The results are consistent with the findings of [van Ginkel et al. \(2016\)](#) in that the motivation to mentor for personal learning was strongly associated with a developmental conception of mentored learning to teach. In the mentors' views, the motivation to mentor is for contributing to the profession. The findings are also consistent with the studies of [Schatz-Oppheimer \(2016\)](#) and [Spencer \(2007\)](#) in indicating that cooperating

teachers take their role in teacher education very seriously and get a great deal of pleasure from it. For example, in this study, modeling and supporting 'teaching as a moral act' was found to be an important element of Thai cooperating teachers' commitment to mentoring.

While the results were generally very positive and few challenges were seen as pressing, one challenge stood out and is worthy of further attention in the Thai context, namely the concern about the procedures used for selecting cooperating teachers and the university advisors for the internship program. Nomination of cooperating teachers is usually assigned by the school principal. The cooperating teachers might think that they did not have opportunities to select student teachers or even university advisors, by themselves. Other challenges were of a far lesser concern for Thai cooperating teachers but should not be dismissed entirely, such as finding ways to get feedback from student teachers about what is working and what is not in the internship.

This research makes a contribution at both the practical and policy levels. At the practical level, Thai teacher educators can use the findings of this study to better guide the way in which they attend to cooperating teachers wishes and needs (what motivates and what challenges them). As reported in the research findings above, cooperating teachers positively perceived that supervision of student teachers is a mutual learning process and developing this possibility (perhaps through the development of a community of practice for Thai cooperating teachers) might be worthy of consideration ([Hudson, 2013](#)). As suggested by [Bell and Gilbert \(1994\)](#) the cooperating teachers should have opportunities to share ideas, successes, and challenges as a way of developing their own professional practice. Doing so will empower cooperating teachers and, in turn, benefit the student teachers in a generative cycle of professional development for all involved ([Hoffman et al., 2015](#)). For example, mentoring can be professional development and lead towards supporting communication skills, developing leadership roles and enhancing pedagogical knowledge.

At the policy level, it is hoped that the explication of the commitments that underlie the work of Thai cooperating teachers will prompt both the university and the schools to think more deeply about how they design and provide the professional development for cooperating teachers—for example, how best to communicate (or perhaps negotiate) policy guidelines. Teacher education programs should take responsibility to provide a professional development program in which cooperating teachers are encouraged to learn how to mentor student teachers. Cooperating teachers should have time to reflect on their goals and roles as mentors ([Yendol-Hoppey, 2007](#)), so they would build up the learning community with their peers to learn new mentoring techniques in working with student teachers.

As researchers and teacher educators, we hope that the research findings of our study will contribute to the body of literature that attempts to connect theoretical frameworks of mentoring to desirable practices. In particular, cooperating teachers and university supervisors can use the findings of this study to guide their mentoring practices. For example, when university supervisors know what

cooperating teachers encounter with student teacher feedback, they may deal with this concern by sharing and identifying good mentoring techniques together.

This study will prompt educators to investigate more deeply into cooperating teachers' thinking and reasoning. We need to gather more evidence of cooperating teachers' mentoring practice. The existing research literature does not tell us much about how cooperating teachers work with or supervise student teachers, and what are the dialogues between cooperating teachers and student teachers. Furthermore, teacher educators and researchers should conduct research into which characteristics of a professional development program can particularly enhance cooperating teachers' self-motivations, interpersonalship, and mentoring practices and in what way the model enhances their professional development.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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