Abstract

Numerous research studies have investigated the significance of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs and their practicum in preparing student teachers. The role played by the traditional triad of faculty associate, school associate and student teacher has been studied extensively. However, the principal’s role in the student teacher’s school-based practicum, is often neglected. This study fills that gap and provides Canadian-based data on principal beliefs, reported involvement and barriers encountered in their support of student teacher learning.

Principals’ beliefs regarding their role in supporting student teacher learning during the school based practicum were studied, as well as principals’ reported practices to support student teacher learning, the barriers they encountered and strategies they utilized to overcome these barriers.

A sequential explanatory mixed method design was used with initial data obtained through a survey of principals (N = 62) beliefs and practices in relation to the practicum. Results showed that the principals believed they could and should play a greater role, than is currently expected, but that they encountered various barriers to that involvement.

Six principals who saw themselves as having a duty and a unique opportunity to support student teacher learning were selected for semi-structured interviews to further examine their beliefs, practices and barriers. Specifically, they felt that they could work more closely with members of the ITE triad to connect student teachers to others in the school community who could enhance their learning during the practicum, and believed that such experiences would also prepare student teachers for, and incline them towards, collaborative professional relationships that would support ongoing learning throughout their careers.

Based on these findings, advice is offered for school districts, university ITE programs, and principals to improve student teacher learning experiences through more intentional and extensive involvement of principals in practicums.

Keywords: Initial Teacher Education; Practicum; School Principal; Practicum Supervision; Principal Leadership; Communities of Practice; Socialization