

Article

Cooperating Teachers' Perceptions and Contributions to Preservice Teachers' Professional Identities

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Abstract: Research on teachers' socialisation years after they begin teaching in schools has not been extensively undertaken, and there are significant long-term consequences for how these experiences in organisational socialisation influence the quality of physical education programs. The purpose of this study was to determine how cooperating teachers perceive their role in the development of preservice physical education teachers' professional identities. We used a qualitative methodology, gathering data through semi-structured interviews. Seven cooperating physical education teachers (five female and two male) with between 22 and 40 years of service were interviewed. The data were analysed through thematic content analysis using a constant comparative modality. The interview questions were categorised into three themes: reasons for being a cooperating teacher, the role of the cooperating teacher, and the professional identity of the cooperating teacher. The findings suggest various interpretations of the cooperating teacher's role and ways of working. The most important skills to have in order to be a cooperating teacher appear to be related to how they were socialised and how they continue to experience the socialisation process during organisational socialisation, as well as the career phase in which they currently find themselves.

Keywords: cooperating teacher; preservice teachers; school placement; physical education



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1. Introduction

Lawson [1] examines how the various stages of the teaching profession affect the identities of physical education teachers via Occupational Socialisation Theory. It is described by Lawson [2] as all socialisation processes that prepare people to “enter the field of physical education and that later are responsible for their perceptions and actions as teacher educators and teachers” (p. 107). This theory states that there are three chronologically oriented phases of occupational socialisation: acculturation, professional socialisation, and organisational socialisation. Everything that affects a teacher's socialisation from birth until they start their initial teaching education is referred to as acculturation, which is the first phase of the Occupational Socialisation Theory [3]. Professional socialisation is defined as the time during which aspiring teachers adhere to the standards thought to be best for teaching physical education when enrolled in a formal initial teacher education program [1]. Teachers enter the third phase, known as organisational socialisation, when they start working in schools.

One component of the professional socialisation phase that is recognised as crucial to teachers' professional identities [4] and physical education teacher education [5,6] is the school placement experience. Barros et al. [7] conducted a study that revealed both favourable and unfavourable experiences in preservice teachers' school placement. Positive interactions with the school placement were linked to social factors, including the school subject department's openness, the preservice teacher's cohort relationship with the cooperating teacher, and the university tutor's pedagogical expertise. Active student learning strategies along with mentoring practices make up most of the preservice activities that were linked to satisfaction with the practices [8]. The studies of Fletcher and

Kosnik [9] and Alves et al. [10] emphasize the importance of the cooperating teacher during the school placement to the perspectives of preservice teachers. Their professional identities are developed via the interaction and support received from their cooperating teacher, according to Izadinia [11]. A professor from the university serves as the university tutor, while a cooperating teacher from the cooperating school oversees the preservice teachers throughout the school placement. Preservice teachers should be introduced to the pupils, their needs, their achievement levels, the classroom and work schedule, policies and procedures, and the responsibilities of other staff members by cooperating teachers. In addition, they are supposed to oversee teaching activities, help preservice teachers create programs for the community and school, organise school placement activities in line with university orientations, and promote group meetings [12]. Cooperating teachers continue to be primarily responsible for the academic successes of their students, while preservice teachers handle the pedagogical intervention, which cooperating teachers are required to monitor and assess. Cooperating teachers should also provide preservice teachers the opportunity to use a range of instructional techniques and engage in critical reflection on their work [12].

The third phase of Occupational Socialisation Theory, organisational socialisation, occurs when teachers assume their roles in school, and physical education teachers experience school life differently from teachers in other subjects [13]. In many educational contexts, physical education has a marginalised status [14], and teachers become physically and intellectually isolated as a result of this. As it changes their ideas of what it means to be a teacher, this marginalisation and isolation have a negative impact on the teachers' identities [15]. If we understand professional identity as being dynamically formed [16], teachers' perspectives might change at different stages and in different roles throughout their career. The career phases of physical education teachers are described by Farias et al. [17] as a five-stage linear progression that is measured in terms of duration, with the career cycle being delimited by in-service time. These are: career entry cycle (1 to 4 years of teaching experience), career cycle of professional competence consolidation (5 to 9 years of teaching experience), career affirmation and diversification cycle (10 to 19 years of teaching experience), career renewal cycle (20 to 27 years of teaching experience), and career maturity cycle (28 to 38 years of teaching experience). Since they have more stable jobs, established pedagogical skills, and an understanding of the school as a system, teachers typically take on a variety of responsibilities in these final two cycles of their teaching careers, including taking on the role of the cooperating teacher.

Research on teachers' socialisation during their initial teacher education has been extensively studied [3], but less attention has been paid to examining teachers' socialisation years after they begin teaching in schools [18]. There are significant long-term consequences for how these experiences in organisational socialisation influence the quality of physical education programmes and students' learning if we acknowledge that socialisation is a dynamic and dialectical process in which the teacher and their context are consistently shaping one another, and that teachers' socialisation influences how they think and perform their responsibilities [18]. This means that cooperating teachers' experiences during organisational socialisation might have a significant impact on preservice teachers' professional socialisation. This is particularly valid given that the literature has already highlighted the value of the cooperating teacher during school placement [9–11]. We have seen the importance of the cooperating teacher in the professional socialisation of physical education preservice teachers; however, this perspective is often focused on the preservice teachers' point of view of that socialisation agent. Less emphasis has been placed on cooperating teachers' perceptions and contributions to preservice teachers' initial teacher education [19], and research frequently focuses on supervisory strategies, power dynamics, or the type of feedback provided to preservice teachers. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine how cooperating teachers perceive their role in the development of preservice physical education teachers' professional identities.

2. Materials and Methods

This study used a qualitative research technique from a constructivist philosophical standpoint [20]. According to Amorim and Ribeiro-Silva [21], qualitative research is frequently utilised to investigate professional identity in physical education.

2.1. Participants

The participants consisted of seven cooperating teachers (five female and two male), ranging in age from 47 to 61 years old. The participants' experiences as physical education teachers ranged between 22 and 40 years, and their experience as cooperating teachers ranged between 5 and 26 years. Our criterion for participant selection was to have more than 5 years of experience as a cooperating teacher. As expected, all cooperating teachers had a permanent position at the school. In the context in which this study was developed, there is only one physical education cooperating teacher per school; therefore, our participants were drawn from seven different schools (three schools of basic education, and four of secondary education). Regarding the cycles of professional trajectory in physical education [17], participants were either in the career renewal cycle or in the career maturity cycle. Table 1 provides an overview of participants' in-service time, experience as cooperating teachers, and career cycle.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of participants.

Participant ^a	In-Service Time	Years as Cooperating Teacher	Preservice Teachers Supervised	Career Cycle
Dulce	22 years	7 years	±23	Career renewal cycle
Lara	25 years	10 years	±32	
Carmen	26 years	16 years	±50	
Rafael	28 years	25 years	±60	Career maturity cycle
Alice	30 years	5 years	±16	
Matilda	35 years	11 years	±43	
Peter	40 years	26 years	±80	

^a Pseudonyms.

2.2. Data Collection

Data were gathered via semi-structured interviews, and each participant was interviewed once. Using this standard approach of data collecting to research professional identity in physical education [21], it is feasible to observe the participants' impressions of their reality [22]. We designed this semi-structured interview based on bibliographical research [23–26] on the themes we wished to examine. Approaching the data with preset themes based on pre-existing knowledge provides a research-driven perspective that links and considers prior studies on the subject [27]. The interview included themes such as reasons for being a cooperating teacher, the role of the cooperating teacher, and reflections on cooperating teachers' professional identity. These themes were intended to be exploratory, with the expectation that categories would develop as a result of the data. Therefore, themes were predetermined, whereas categories were determined after data analysis.

The interviews were held at a time and place convenient for the cooperating teachers, in May, closer to the end of the school placement. Three interviews were performed in person, while four were conducted online (via zoom) at the request of the participants. All interviews were audio-recorded and hand-transcribed, and all personal identifiers were erased to safeguard the cooperating teachers' privacy.

2.3. Data Analysis

The average duration of the interviews was 1 h and 12 min (SD = 0 h and 30 min). A copy of the interview transcription was supplied to each participant to ensure that the

material correctly reflected their opinions and to lend validity to our study. We performed thematic content analysis [28], and to discover trends in the data, the interviews were analysed using a constant comparative analysis [29], which helped make categories more easily connected and dense [30]. An inductive strategy was used to evaluate each transcript independently. Our analysis was conducted in stages as we adhered to Braun and Clarke's [31] thematic analysis protocol. We began by going through the material several times and taking notes to become acquainted with it. Next, at the semantic and latent levels of meaning, we produced preliminary codes. Therefore, every time we identified something potentially relevant to the research, we coded it and cut and pasted the text into a Microsoft Excel file created for this purpose. One interview was coded at a time before moving on to the next interview, and the coding process was carried out by the two researchers separately and subsequently discussed until a consensus was reached. The next stage was categorisation, so we went over the coded data to look for trends and overlapping codes among the pre-existing themes. We looked at potential categories in light of the data set as we proceeded with our study. We finished the data analysis by giving our categories names and definitions. The data-driven categories and subcategories are described in Table 2. The findings will be highlighted using excerpts from the interviews.

Table 2. Categories and subcategories derived from cooperating teachers' interviews.

Theme	Category	Subcategory
Reasons for being a cooperating teacher	School's need	
	Development	
	Cultivate a desire to teach	
	Role model	
The role of the cooperating teacher	Transfer knowledge	
	Prepare preservice teachers for professional life	Guide Supervise School dynamics Behaviour modification
	Skills	Scientific-pedagogical expertise Interpersonal relationship Motivation Focus Assertiveness
Cooperating teacher professional identity	Preservice teachers' evolution as evidence	Pedagogical intervention Preservice teachers' evolution Pupils' evolution Preservice teachers' feedback Comments Cooperating teacher knowledge
	Definition	Guide Motivator Advisor
	Shaped by previous experiences	In school Outside school
	Impact on practice	Connection with pupils Up to date content Good pedagogical intervention
	Fulfilment	Bond with preservice teachers Tiring job Work well done

2.4. Ethics

The participants were recruited as volunteers via email and informed that participation was entirely voluntary. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw at any moment, remain anonymous, and that their data would not be used outside the scope of this investigation. All cooperating teachers signed a written consent form and were assigned a pseudonym for anonymity purposes.

3. Results

3.1. Reasons for Being a Cooperating Teacher

Under this theme, we wanted to determine reasons and motivations for accepting the cooperating teacher role. Therefore, participants were asked to respond to one question on their reason for being a cooperating teacher in this theme of the interview: (a) what made you want to become a cooperating teacher?

The category with the most expressions regarding the reason these cooperating teachers accepted this role pertains to the school's need to continue to honour the commitment to host school placements, mostly because the teachers who previously held the role left:

It was not an option. It was an invitation. Whoever was the cooperating teacher at the time requested unpaid leave. As a result, a cooperating teacher was required to replace them, and the school approached me. It was a temporary situation for a year. That year lasted 10 years because they never returned. (Lara)

The other reason these cooperating teachers embraced this role had to do with the teachers' need for development and to venture outside their comfort zone:

Leaving my comfort zone was what originally inspired me to become a cooperating teacher. I felt it was fascinating to spend some time in my life with preservice teachers and help them. I would not stay at school stuck in my thoughts and what I had learned 5 years earlier, so I would be able to progress with them. (Rafael)

There was relative agreement between the participants, as the main reason for being a cooperating teacher was the need to continue honouring the school's agreement with the university.

3.2. The Role of Cooperating Teacher

Within this theme, we aimed to determine what it meant for our participants to be a cooperating teacher. For that, we asked the participants to answer three questions regarding what they considered the role of the cooperating teacher to be: (a) what is your understanding of the role of the cooperating teacher? (b) Which skills are necessary to be an effective cooperating teacher? (c) What is the evidence of the quality of your work as a cooperating teacher?

3.2.1. Understanding the Cooperating Teacher Role

We did not find an agreement between cooperating teachers regarding their understanding of the role. In fact, we found several ways that our participants understand this role. For four cooperating teachers, their role was to prepare preservice teachers for their professional lives by guiding and supervising them, making school dynamics known, and being behaviour-modification agents:

It is, in my opinion, fundamental to preparing preservice teachers for professional life. When supervising preservice teachers, I believe it is equally critical to have someone who likes what they do. (Alice)

I think guidance plays a fundamental role. Essentially, it is about assisting preservice teachers to learn about the dynamics of a school in all its intervention areas and providing them with the tools to grow and explore. Above all, it is the role of guidance, of guiding preservice teachers. (Lara)

I believe we are agents that change behaviour for the better, not for the worse. The law requires you to prepare, organise, assess, and so on. I am aiming for what I believe is more essential, which is that it is our responsibility to guide rather than punish, cooperate, and establish a good connection through understanding and making each other understand. (Rafael)

One cooperating teacher mentioned that the role of the cooperating teacher was to cultivate a desire to teach:

With age, I realise that the most valuable asset we can provide is a passion for teaching; it is our mission. (Carmen)

Another focused on the fact that cooperating teachers should be an example for preservice teachers:

I believe we are an example. I believe that we have to be a good example to follow, that we have excellent practices, that we want to share our good practices, and that our example as cooperating teachers may aid learning for our preservice teachers. (Dulce)

Lastly, one participant highlighted that it was the cooperating teacher's role to transfer knowledge:

It is teaching preservice teachers something I have been learning my entire life. Everything I know about teaching comes from my life experience, the problems that have arisen, and how I have handled them. The cooperating teacher does precisely that: they share their knowledge. It entails transferring my professional expertise, techniques, and life experience into their teaching practice. (Matilda)

3.2.2. Cooperating Teacher Skills

Regarding the skills necessary to be an effective cooperating teacher, the participants mainly mentioned a set of skills that cooperating teachers should possess. Allied with several skills mentioned by the participants, the one that participants highlighted more often was scientific-pedagogical expertise:

I instantly think of scientific-pedagogical expertise. It is essential that there be no stratification between the two knowledges—mine and theirs. If they know, I also must know, and I have to know a little more to be able to help. (Rafael)

Aside from loving physical education, it is important to have knowledge of the content we are covering, knowledge of the law, and be comfortable discussing all the normative documents we have. (Dulce)

Another skill mentioned as crucial for a good cooperating teacher was the interpersonal relationship made with preservice teachers:

Being able to establish a relationship while respecting the preservice teachers' individuality. Trying to understand them and work around their differences. They are not all the same; they have distinct traits, and their backgrounds will differ as well. I provide the guidelines, but then I allow them room and freedom to explore. (Lara)

Lastly, motivation, focus, and assertiveness were also mentioned as important skills for being an effective cooperating teacher:

I believe it is essential to be motivated and to know well what the organisation and system expect from the physical education teacher. (Alice)

I think it has to do with focus, discipline, and assertiveness because we must have goals and accomplish things well. For me, the profile of a good cooperating teacher is being very focused on what they are intended to accomplish, and then needing a certain discipline, autonomy, and responsibility so that the preservice teachers reach that point with autonomy and responsibility. (Carmen)

3.2.3. Quality of Work as a Cooperating Teacher

The last question of this theme asked the participants for evidence of the quality of their work as cooperating teachers, to which they answered that they observed the quality of their work as cooperating teachers when observing the evolution of the preservice teachers:

Seeing how they evolve is proof that it is working and that my efforts are bearing fruit. That is what I always expect from my preservice teachers. Even their basic understanding of physical education, I believe, is a progression. I also note the knowledge of my department and of the administration about how preservice teachers offer something more to this school, which is proof that we are building and doing a good job. (Alice)

They also observed the evolution of the preservice teachers' pedagogical intervention, their evolution and growth as people and teachers, and the evolution of the pupils that preservice teachers teach during school placement:

I believe it has a lot to do with the dynamics, environment, and discipline that are instilled in the classroom. The environment/discipline, student control, your relationship with pupils, proximity, motivation, and teaching. I think that is, perhaps, the biggest focus. (Carmen)

For us, the greatest acknowledgment is witnessing how much they have matured. This, I believe, is the most enriching thing we have. It is really rewarding for us to understand that we can have an influence on others and help them grow and be successful in their future. I think that is fantastic. (Lara)

It is the result of my pupils' final learning. I am satisfied if I perceive that putting the preservice teachers in front of the class is not harming my students. I will be satisfied if I can turn my preservice teachers into good teachers. I can see it from watching a class from beginning to end; I see that they have the necessary tools to be good teachers anywhere. (Peter)

It was also mentioned by the cooperating teachers that they saw evidence of the quality of their work through feedback from their previous preservice teachers, as well as the comments made by the school community (peers, other subject teachers, staff) and by preservice teachers choosing to do the school placement in that school due to the techniques used by the cooperating teacher:

Only the feedback, perhaps more from the former preservice teachers. The current ones do not say anything until they are graded, and I do not generally inquire either. (Matilda)

I see from others how the preservice teacher is seen by their peers and others at school. When they arrive, I notice how relaxed they are at school. I see it also in their passion for education and their refusal to give up on the profession. This suggests that something remains. I feel enormous pride in going to schools where the teachers are recognised as good teachers with important positions in the school. It signifies that the school placement was beneficial and that we are on the right track. (Rafael)

I once had a preservice teacher who chose my school because they knew they would learn to work using the program's recommended methodology with me. Most preservice teachers chose the school because of its proximity or because of the school's name. I had a preservice teacher who chose my school because I work in stages and favour multi-subjects. This gave me a special pleasure. (Dulce)

Throughout this theme, we could observe that there was no consensus among all cooperating teachers on how this role is understood, what skills are needed to effectively perform it, and what constitutes evidence of work quality. It appears that each cooperating teacher views the role differently.

3.3. Cooperating Teacher Professional Identity

With the third theme of our interview, we aimed to identify how cooperating physical education teachers see themselves in their role as teacher educators. Therefore, we asked them to answer the following questions: (a) how would you define your role as a cooperating teacher? (b) How, and to what extent, has your teaching experience changed your mentoring? (c) What effect, if any, has the experience of being a cooperating teacher had on your own practice? (d) Do you feel fulfilled as a cooperating teacher?

3.3.1. Role Definition

The participants defined themselves in their role as cooperating teachers as guiding and motivating preservice teachers in their school placement. Their goal was to guide preservice teachers to get the best education and experience during the school placement year while also motivating and advising them on their journey:

A guide, someone who strives to lead preservice teachers in training to success, but what do I really want? I want them to learn from me, and I want my pupils to learn from me and my preservice teachers as well. That is essentially what I am interested in. (Peter)

Always guiding. My main objective is for preservice teachers to develop the abilities necessary to embrace the profession with the utmost professionalism, responsibility, discipline, and rigor. (Lara)

As a guide and a trainer. I believe I have a function as a trainer, and then I have another function that involves advising. It is not just training but also advising. I provide guidance and point them in the right direction since I believe this is essential for a preservice teacher. (Alice)

My function is primarily that of a guide for the best behaviours that encourage global success. (Carmen)

They do this through a high level of delivery, availability, and work capacity:

I am dedicated and available, and I enjoy being a cooperating teacher and seeing preservice teachers develop and grow. I have some sensitivity. (Dulce)

What distinguishes me is my willingness to work. (Matilda)

3.3.2. Teaching Experience and Mentoring

For six participants, it is obvious that their teaching experiences shaped and changed their mentoring throughout the years. The several and diverse experiences they had in school, such as coaching the school's sports teams and being class directors, and experiences they had outside school, such as coaching or being parents, all changed the way they saw the mentoring role:

Many years of teaching and training were involved. My concept of a cooperating teacher was formed not only by my experience but also by my connections with other cooperating teachers in initial teacher education. I believe that all these years, as well as the fact that I have always worked with preservice teacher cohorts, that I am constantly involved with school sports teams, and that I am also a class director, lead me to urge preservice teachers to have these experiences. As I gain experience at school, the way I guide also changes. (Alice)

Throughout my teaching career, I have always been a class director. Since I started, I have taken on various initiatives, and I have always had a strong role in the school. Always with school sports teams. I have always welcomed numerous initiatives as a teacher, and what I attempted to do was relay my experience and help preservice teachers appreciate the value of us becoming active at school. Without a doubt, the years of expertise were important in doing this work with preservice teachers. (Lara)

One cooperating teacher considered that their experience did not change their mentoring because they were still as demanding as they were when they began the role. What they expected of the preservice teachers was still the same after all the years of mentoring:

In terms of what I demand or believe a physical education teacher should demand, I believe it is the same as it has been for the past 40 years. In terms of rigour, I am not intransigent now, nor am I permissive; I do not think so. (Peter)

3.3.3. Experience of Cooperating Teacher and Pedagogical Practice

We then proceed to reverse this last question and asked the participants if the experience of being a cooperating teacher influenced their own practice as physical education teachers. For five teachers, the cooperating teacher role and their mentoring throughout the years had an impact on their own practice as it made them connect better with pupils and kept them updated on new information, without forgetting what a good pedagogical intervention was, which ultimately also made them better teachers:

This contact with preservice teachers is beneficial to us since it keeps us more involved and encourages us to seek out new knowledge and challenges. This carries over to the class as well, in the way we work, because it forces us to continually refresh our knowledge, and that is rewarding. (Lara)

It shapes me because I can never forget what good teaching practice is. Every day I must look at control issues, whether I am using appropriate strategies or not, feedback, and evaluation. That is something I must always be conscious of. (Peter)

For the other two participants, being a cooperating teacher did not have an impact on their own physical education teaching practice, as they still worked as they used to:

It did not change me that much. I do not perceive a significant change. I continue to work in the same manner as before. (Alice)

I think nothing bothers me anymore. (Matilda)

3.3.4. Fulfilment

The last question in this theme of the interview asked participants if they felt fulfilled as cooperating teachers. All but one cooperating teacher answered positively to feeling fulfilled as a cooperating teacher:

Yes, if not, I would not be. I am even considering staying longer than the years I have to retire, perhaps for another year or two. (Peter)

They highlighted that what contributes to the fulfilment of the role is the bond with the preservice teachers, even after the school placement ends. Although they mentioned how it is a tiring job (physically and emotionally), it is rewarding, as they have a feeling of a job well done and wish they had more time with the preservice teachers.

One cooperating teacher mentioned that they did not feel totally fulfilled with the role because there was still so much left to do and learn at the end of the school placement:

If I feel fulfilled, no. I feel like I do my best and that I have touched the preservice teachers' hearts with what they have learned, but there is still so much more to accomplish. I constantly have the impression that there is always a lot to do, say, or build. The feeling I have when I get to the end is when the preservice teachers are ready to start their school placement. I have a huge desire to teach, and they have a huge desire to learn, and there is no time left. (Carmen)

In this theme of the interview, we aimed to research how participants saw themselves in the role of cooperating teacher, which can affect the professional socialisation of preservice teachers.

4. Discussion

Throughout this research, we have reported on our participants' reasons for being a cooperating teacher, how they see this role, and their own perception of their professional identity as cooperating teachers, which we will now discuss.

The main reason for being a cooperating teacher was the need to continue honouring the school's agreement with the university. After the teacher who had the cooperating teacher role left the school, four of our participants were invited and challenged to step up to the role of cooperating teacher so that the cooperating school could continue to host school placements. Our findings are consistent with the research of Kuhn et al. [32], who noted that their participants indicated that their school thought mentoring was crucial for the institution. According to research by Sinclair et al. [33], some teachers may be persuaded to take on the role if they are asked to do so by the school's headmaster. Even though it may be accepted practice and the catalyst for cooperating teachers to begin thinking about accepting the role [32], being asked by someone else may not always be the primary incentive. However, it can serve as a motivator for cooperating teachers to reflect and assume the position. Although it was not our participants' original intention to be the teacher at school responsible for the preservice teachers' school placement, they say that it was something they enjoyed doing. As a result, it makes sense that while initial external incentives may motivate a teacher to engage in mentoring, cooperating teachers will eventually regard other motives as more important [33]. The other three teachers mentioned that they wanted the role because they felt the need to evolve and step out of their comfort zone, proving the previous point. Being a cooperating teacher responsible for the formation of new physical education teachers would provide this for them. This is consistent with the study of Snell et al. [24], which argues that cooperating teachers may regard the role as an extended type of professional development.

The cooperating teacher role is understood in a variety of ways, from preparing the preservice teachers for their professional lives and being behaviour-modification agents to being an example for the preservice teachers through their daily practice and experience. Similar to the works of Arnold [25] and Grimmett et al. [34], the participants in our study used words such as guide, supervisor, and mentor to describe the cooperating teacher role, indicating a commitment to aid and mentor their preservice teachers by acting as role models [35]. Our findings are congruent with the investigation of Albuquerque et al. [36], who found that Portuguese cooperating teachers believed their job was to develop preservice teachers to become competent and passionate teachers who were motivated, devoted, and effective. It is not surprising that there is not a consensus on what the role of the cooperating teacher entails. Our participants are distinct in their ways of working and in their experiences as physical education teachers and cooperating teachers, with several differences in their acculturation, professional socialisation, and organisational socialisation, leading to different ways of approaching the role.

As there are different interpretations of the role of cooperating teacher, there are also several skills highlighted by the participants, such as high scientific-pedagogical expertise, the ability to develop an interpersonal relationship with preservice teachers, as well as motivation, focus, and assertiveness while performing this role. Similarly to the results of Bjuland and Helgevold [37], our results highlight the cooperating teachers' perception that the function of the role is as a facilitator and "knowledgeable other" (p. 253). Just like in Silva et al. [38] and Gonçalves et al.'s [39] studies, our participants also made it clear that the role of cooperating teacher requires the skill to be able to develop a relationship with preservice teachers. According to Izadinia [11], it is crucial that cooperating teachers conduct themselves professionally and have a passion for what they do, as preservice teachers are likely to view them as the ideal model of a teacher. The cooperating teachers play a significant role in offering advice, support, and outlining parts of the teaching profession that can only be learned through experience in practice [40]. These findings confirm that the importance of this relationship is seen by cooperating teachers. It is a two-way, mutually beneficial relationship, and it is understood as such by both parties.

The cooperating teachers mentioned that the quality of their work is seen in the evolution of the preservice teachers they guide, mainly via an increase in the quality of preservice teachers' pedagogical intervention, preservice teachers' steady evolution as teachers after the school placement, pupils' evolution, the feedback from previous preservice teachers and the school community, and preservice teachers choosing to do the school placement in that school to know how the cooperating teacher performs their everyday practice. Although it is expected to develop teaching skills during the school placement, the teaching–learning process is the performance area that cooperating teachers prioritise [38]. With cooperating teachers perceiving the quality of their work as mentors from preservice teachers' evolution in pedagogical skills, we believe that cooperating teachers, during the school placement, focus on routine and day-to-day aspects of teaching [19], demonstrating a mentoring process that is primarily instrumental (by supervising lessons) and supporting the preservice teachers (aiding in problem-solving) [38].

Although there are legal directions that define conditions that cooperating teachers must meet to be considered for this role [41], and a university document [42] that guides both cooperating teachers and preservice teachers' expectations throughout the school placement, we believe that each participant makes their own interpretation of the role based on their own socialisation. This is exacerbated by being at different stages of the teaching career and seeing the role differently. As per Farias et al. [17], teachers in the career renewal cycle exhibit a willingness to stay in the profession, seeking out volunteer opportunities to participate in teaching activities and maintaining an active commitment to their own professional principals. Since they are informed on matters pertaining to the teaching profession, teachers in that career cycle emphasise providing support to newer and younger teachers. Teachers in the career maturity cycle exhibit distinct traits, such as a distance from their original teaching training, which causes them to defend their actions and practices with experiences in the workplace.

Their own professional identity as cooperating teachers can influence the ways in which preservice teachers develop their professional identity throughout the school placement. The participants in our study see themselves as someone who guides and motivates preservice teachers in their school placement towards the best education and teaching experience. Motivation and counselling were also mentioned by cooperating teachers as part of their role. As per Kemmis et al. [43], there is more than one aim of mentoring, hence the term not having a single and definite definition, which can lead to disagreement on how it should be performed and how individuals should interact with one another.

On the one hand, it is clear to them that their teaching experiences, their life experiences, and the different roles they occupy at school influence, shape, and change their mentoring throughout the years. However, on the other hand, it is also clear to them that the opposite occurs, meaning that their mentoring changed their pedagogical intervention. The most visible change for them had to do with mentoring, keeping them updated on new information without forgetting what a good pedagogical intervention was, which makes them better teachers to their own pupils. With this, we highlight that cooperating teachers' previous experiences are beneficial [44], as they encourage them to reflect on former teaching philosophies as well as how those earlier endeavours relate to their knowledge of their current practice [45].

The participants also revealed that they feel fulfilled in their role as cooperating teachers. Although it is a tiring job at various levels (physical, mental, and emotional), the bond with the preservice teachers contributes to that sentiment. Pungur [46] emphasises the need for a strong cooperating teacher–preservice teacher relationship for a successful school placement. The findings of Izadinia [47] also show that the cooperating teachers' initial expectations for their role were to foster a close, pleasant, and friendly connection or offer advice and assistance. However, one participant wished they had more time to work with the preservice teachers than just one school year.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to determine cooperating teachers' professional identities and their perceptions of the influence of cooperating teachers on the identity formation of preservice teachers, therefore understanding the role of the cooperating teacher as a socialisation agent.

There are legal directions to defining this role and a university document that guides what is expected during the school placement of both cooperating teachers and preservice teachers. Despite these documents, with this research, we understand that each cooperating teacher interprets the role depending on their personal socialisation. This is exacerbated by being in different cycles of the teaching career, and therefore having different career aims and perceptions.

These various interpretations of the cooperating teacher's role, ways of working, and the most important skills to have appear to be related to how they were socialised and how they continue to experience the socialisation process during organisational socialisation, as well as the career phase in which they are. This is aggravated by the lack of specialised training or education for the role of cooperating teacher [48]. We agree with the position of Livingston [49], which emphasises that for cooperating teachers to understand their roles and be respected as teacher educators, more focus must be placed on providing them with structured training. If we desire a certain socialisation during Lawson's [1] professional socialisation phase, we must also value these cooperating teachers by providing them with mentoring training programs [11] that meet the universities' and contemporary physical education's objectives. This is not to say that they are unfit for the role, but rather that the cooperating teachers must understand that preservice teachers arrive at the school placement with many subjective theories that cannot be confirmed or expanded upon by the cooperating teacher, who is already removed from their own professional socialisation, as cooperating teachers frequently draw on personal experience to support and reinforce conventional views of physical education [35], while preservice teachers mimic their cooperating teachers' strategies.

It is also critical for university and physical education teacher education programmes to recognise that it is these teachers with these disparities in training and perceptions that follow and aid preservice teachers daily; therefore, cooperating teachers' perceptions of their own mentoring should be made clear. Given that the law does not allow for any favouritism in career progression or remuneration for cooperating teachers, higher education institutions depend on the goodwill of those teachers, and must control the effort that performing the role requires in order to maintain the most experienced cooperating teachers in the role.

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