Identification of training needs of early career teachers in a mentoring program*

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Abstract

The development of supervision, monitoring, and support actions constitute relevant assistance for early career teachers since there are varied limitations of initial training and difficulties at the beginning of this professional activity. Given this scenario, the Hybrid Mentoring Program (HMP) works as an action to induce teaching in a constructive-collaborative research project that aims to offer early career teachers monitoring and support through a process called mentoring, in which an experienced teacher – with more than ten years of professional experience – accompanies early career teachers with a maximum of five years of experience, assisting them in the development of their professional skills, as well as in the foundation of new competence practices. In this article, we sought to identify and understand the training needs presented by early career teachers participating in a mentoring program. The theoretical frameworks involved early career teachers' challenges, difficulties, and training needs. The research is qualitative, with interpretative descriptive analysis of digital narratives produced through the dialogue between two early career teachers and their respective mentors via different tools in HMP's Moodle environment. The categories emerged from the readings of the data set, and the results indicate that the mentoring actions developed in the HMP made it possible to capture how the participants report their difficulties at the beginning of their teaching careers and how these configured as training needs to be worked on by the mentor-beginner dyad.

Keywords

Training needs – Early career teachers – Mentoring.

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Introduction

This article aims to identify and understand the training needs presented by early career teachers participating in a mentoring program. The Hybrid Mentoring Program (HMP)2 is a constructive-collaborative research project (Cole; Knowles, 1993), conceived and developed from 2017 to 2020 by researchers from the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar) with the participation of experienced teachers from the municipal education network of São Carlos and early career teachers from other regions across the country.

The HMP proposes to induce teaching through a process of monitoring and support, called mentoring, in which an experienced educator – with more than ten years of professional practice – accompanies early career teachers with a maximum of five years of experience, helping them in the development of their professional skills and the foundation of new practices in different stages of teaching: Early Childhood Education, early years of Elementary School and Youth and Adult Education. The hybrid nature of HMP stems from the articulation of virtual and face-to-face activities (Vaughan, 2010), the relationship between theory and practice, and the proximity between university and school (Nóvoa, 2019).

The partnership between experienced and early career teachers, proposed by HMP, aims to assist, minimize, or even overcome the main difficulties faced at the beginning of the profession since the set of knowledge and experiences built by skilled educators throughout the career can become a meaningful source of support for teachers who are starting their careers.

In this context, HMP involves the planned interaction between experienced (mentors) and early career teachers and offers subsidies for the professional development of all the educators involved. It is assumed in mentoring that skilled teachers have greater mastery in the development of the school curriculum and the management of knowledge and the classroom, which is why training processes conducted by experienced educators can favor (i) the sharing of ideas and understandings of actual problems in the school context, (ii) the construction of joint solutions, and (iii) the promotion of a collaborative professional culture among peers with diverse experiences. Such training processes can also: a) contribute to forming reflective educators; b) promote their autonomy and professional and personal well-being; c) provide support and didactic advice; d) promote the improvement of teaching action; e) facilitate the adaptation and critical integration to the educational system and the reality of the school, the community, and their peers; f) help teachers in their uncertainties, doubts, anxieties, and fears when facing difficulties; and g) contribute to continuing in the teaching profession (Cesário, 2021; Marcellus; Vaillant, 2009; Nóvoa, 2019).

Identifying and understanding teachers' training needs entails considering that they change according to their career stage and the more specific contextual characteristics in which they work. It also implies that early career teachers share a network of challenges and requirements marked by insecurities, fears, doubts, tensions, anxieties, and difficulties, demanding training support at the beginning of their teaching career (Reali; Tancredi; Mizukami, 2008).

The training needs of teachers: what does the literature say?

In order to understand the concept of training needs in teaching, it is fundamental to consider the meaning of the term in the educational area, as well as its characteristics, forms of manifestations, measurements, and analyses present in research in the area. Since this term is polysemic, it cannot be understood without its association with studies on the analysis of needs, demands, and challenges (Sousa *et al.*, 2020).

Studies by Roegiers, Wouters, and Gérard (1992) define the term "need" as the distance between an actual and an ideal situation and classify it as an ambiguous term since it has connotations of an objective character – because it reflects a natural and social need – and subjective – because it only exists through the filter of the individual's perceptions about reality. It is, therefore, a mental construction.

The need results from the confrontation between expectations, desires, aspirations, difficulties, and problems encountered in the professional routine (Rodrigues, 1991). Azevedo and Schnetzler (2001) explain training needs as gaps in teachers' knowledge related to the area of activity in their pedagogical practice development, which should not be considered only as a discrepancy or a hiatus between a current state and a desired one.

The studies of Pimenta (2007, p. 65) point out that "needs" can also be understood as "reflections of the desires and interests" that teacher educators have concerning their work. In this way, they are directly linked to the social, cultural, and professional conceptions and demands of the field of activity in which they are constituted.

Studies by Marcelo and Vaillant (2009) highlight that the training needs and the learning of teaching are related to *the development of survival skills*, such as in classroom management and the use of pedagogical didactic models; *educational competencies and skills*, perceived in classroom management and while reflecting and making choices when facing different pedagogical didactic models; *the instructional flexibility development*, in which the teacher is expected to manage the classroom and make conscious choices about the models, with a focus on student learning; and *professional competence,* which corresponds to understanding the classroom management integrated into the educational program (not in isolation), while having a considerable repertoire of models and use formative and summative assessment.

Rodrigues and Esteves (1993), Batista (2009), Galindo (2011), and Cavalcante (2012) point out that, as needs can be presented and manifested in different forms, they thus generate different relationships. Some necessities may be merged with others more perceptible (Rodrigues; Esteves, 1993), while others are unconscious (Batista, 2009).

A factor that hinders the perception of training needs is that they are unstable, which makes it impossible to establish constant needs, as they vary according to the contexts in which they occur and, even before being perceived, can give rise to others. Batista (2009) emphasizes that the need is uncertain insofar as it is always a need of/for someone in a specific context. After all, the necessity relates to the subject who feels it and, generally, is linked to personal or professional interests and demands, the latter being also situated in their context of action and the knowledge required for their practice. In addition, the necessity is also a source of motivation to develop a determined type of activity.

We add to this analysis that the needs may also not be consciously perceived by the teachers. However, Galindo (2011) reminds us that, once perceived, they can be susceptible to change, even if the condition that generated these necessities remains unchanged for the subject who feels it. Therefore, formative and continuing actions based on practice reflections help the identifying needs process and the collaboration to overcome them.

Studies by Pimenta (2007) highlight the importance of identifying training needs for continuing teacher education. Thus, the author adds that necessities, as situated in a determined context, are linked to the social, cultural, and professional conceptions and demands of the field of action in which these demands are constituted. Such a characteristic makes it difficult to apprehend it for a formative action.

Bearing in mind that needs originate primarily from the practice exercised by the teacher, Pimenta (2007) emphasizes the relevance of including, in needs analysis, the understanding of the performance of these professionals in addition to the observation of their daily work. Considering as a starting point the daily routine of in-service continuing education, these measures can contribute to the expressiveness of training needs, making it possible to organize actions for the continuous education of teachers when confronting new demands presented in this same context. In this sense, the author emphasizes that analyzing training needs requires negotiation and hierarchization of those evidenced facing the demand presented and situated in the context.

Galindo (2011) shows that needs are representations of reality perceived by the subject and conceived in each context. Given this, the author points out that such necessities are translated from situations and not from their nature, even though the former is often related to the latter. Thus, when assuming a perspective of instability and mutability, the needs "are still biased in the orientation of the subjects in search of their satisfaction, designing a motivational context for solutions that meet these needs through the (un)favorable conditions of the environment or context" (Galindo, 2011, p. 54). In addition, the author points out that the necessities manifested by the subject, despite being used as a reference to understand or validate the needs of the collective, do not truly express collective needs. Thus, the necessity occurs through a dialectic that can be manifested individually or collectively and determined externally to the subject and can be common to several subjects or defined as only individual needs when shared by a group with similar difficulties or desires (Cavalcante, 2012).

Galindo (2011) points out that, by analyzing teachers' needs, it is possible to establish a relationship of correspondence with culture and identity (and personality), learning to teach times and adult learning ways, teachers' thinking, and their knowledge and professional and personal characteristics and competencies. Cordeiro and Antunes (2010) reinforce the significance of teachers being listened to, as well as their conceptions, their lives, their difficulties, and their knowledge, to understand their stories and needs so that educational goals and actions can be outlined. Thus, teacher educators should constantly reflect on the demands that arise in the scope of personal and professional teacher development in order to identify new necessities that derive from pedagogical routine and, at the same time, remedy those that already exist in the training process. Given this context, there is also an echo of a position regarding the type of continuous

education offered to teachers today and the relationship between this education and the actual training needs of these teachers.

It is not easy to identify new training needs primarily because teachers are often unaware of the nature of the new demands of professional work. In other cases, they lack more systematic and in-depth knowledge of the function required from them (Rodrigues; Esteves, 1993). Although challenging, understanding the necessities of teachers is a primary condition to implement training processes capable of conducting teacher education in such a way that they become an integral part of their training process, evolving from mere objects of education to protagonists of their professional development. This outcome corroborates the studies presented by Rodrigues and Esteves (1993), who reiterate that analyzing the needs means seeking to know the interests and expectations of the population to be educated; that is, to discover their main demands, making them an integral part of the training process, a privileged subject of education, and not a simple object.

It is necessary not only to characterize the training needs but also to identify and remedy those that already exist, in addition to being attentive to those that constantly arise (Estrela; Madureira; Leite, 1998). The elaboration and discussion of narratives are compelling tools for analyzing necessities since such devices collaborate in the "understanding of teachers' thinking, culture, and perspectives, especially in the context of continuing education" (Galindo, 2011, p. 67). Also, for this author, the use of the technique allows, based on the reconstruction of past experiences, to associate meaning for the future, operating on current needs, and to dialogue with the life and work of the teacher, with a view to their career development.

For Silva (2000, p. 75), the life stories narrated by teachers and teacher educators constitute a process of reflection on practice and "lead to the identification, awareness, and definition of training needs." The same role is played by accounts referring to short episodes that occurred in the classroom/school during the teaching work or in the training processes developed, and that can be recorded by the teachers themselves, as well as by the teacher trainer in diaries, which are a powerful recording strategy to analyze and assess needs (Galindo, 2011).

Even though there are different methodologies and techniques for identifying training needs, as Batista (2009) points out, it is essential to encourage the involvement of teachers in this process. The closer teachers are to the analysis of their educational necessities, the greater the effect this will have on their professional development, which will result in self-knowledge within the pedagogical context and the frames of reference of their professional identity.

However, the search to solve and overcome the training needs cannot and should not be located only in individuals but also in school institutions and networks, which are usually where these professionals develop their teaching activities. Thus, the teacher is one of the protagonists in this process, not the only one, and therefore, must be integrated with the other agents in knowledge resignification and new training needs identification (Nóvoa, 1995). Conceived as a stage in the pedagogical training process, needs analysis can focus on the apprentice, aiming to open horizons for self-education based on awareness of their gaps, problems, interests, and motivations.

In the process of teacher continuing education, identifying the training needs not only before but also during the formative action plan is fundamental because, based on an evidenced need, followed by an educational action implemented to meet it, it is possible to identify new needs and contribute to new formative decision-making. Such processes are relevant planning strategies since they can provide information about the contents and teaching activities that allow for more assertive guidance on the formative objectives.

Although it is difficult to measure the individual and collective training needs of teachers, identifying and analyzing them can help guide the processes of continuing the education of teachers and, consequently, result in more effective and qualified educational actions, in addition to favoring the development of significant knowledge for pedagogical and formative performance.

Lima (2015) draws attention to the effectiveness of listening to teachers and understanding their educational needs. It emphasizes the basis of the formative proposal through data obtained directly from teachers, as opposed to the idea of pre-prepared training packages. For the author, the survey and analysis of educational necessities can indicate the type of action to be implemented.

Based on the studies presented so far, we consider that the service focused on overcoming the educational needs in an induction program must have well-defined objectives to adjust the training intervention process.

The demands of early career teachers

Sousa *et al.* (2020) point out the need as the lack of knowledge arising from initial education and linked to the challenges and tensions inherent to the daily life of the profession and the initiation period. The results also showed the relevance of the constitution of collaborative training spaces, as well as the elaboration of induction programs by education networks. Generally, in initial training, the undergraduate courses offer disciplines aimed at subjects related to the classroom context; however, when they enter the school gates, as educators, early career teachers are impacted by reality, a moment considered by the literature as a "shock of reality" (Lima, 2006; Veenman, 1984).

The initial stage of the teaching career is a period characterized not only by uncertainty, doubt, and tension but also a period of intense learning in little-known contexts, in which the main tasks are the construction of professional knowledge and the maintenance of emotional balance (Reali; Tancredi; Mizukami, 2008). However, this tends to be a markedly lonely phase when uncritical imitation of other teachers predominates and transferring previously acquired theoretical knowledge into practice is difficult.

In addition, the set of demands and challenges at the beginning of the teaching career can deplete the energies of beginners and convert optimism into discouragement and hopelessness. In view of this, Lima *et al.* (2007) indicate that this phase, full of challenges, can cause the new teacher a "reality shock" and may even lead them to abandon the profession when faced with a difference between what was thought/idealized in the initial educational courses and the reality they find in practice (Lima, 2006; Veenman, 1984).

Teachers face several difficulties at the beginning of their careers, one concerning teaching practices. Often, they feel insecure and report a sense of failure in some practice

situations (Guarnieri, 2005), and to deal with this, they appropriate the opinions and practices of other teachers or act based on the trial-and-error method (Lima, 2006; Pacheco; Flores, 1999).

However, given the perception of the training needs of teachers arising from the components of their daily lives, one way is continuing education (Galindo, 2011; Marcelo, 1999). Even though learning before and during initial training is part of the teacher's professional development process, continuing education, which occurs after initial training, can help to fill the gaps and contribute to the development of the teacher's professional performance (Reali; Tancredi; Mizukami, 2010).

The lack of support and follow-up actions during professional insertion is also a great difficulty for early career teachers (André, 2012; Romanowski; Soczek, 2014). The lack of working conditions is also a problem, as teachers tend to assume precarious contexts: schools located in peripheral and disadvantaged regions, with the most challenging classes, and the lack of an effective employment relationship, which leads these professionals to work in varied contexts and levels of education (Reali; Tancredi; Mizukami, 2010).

Still on the difficulties arising from working conditions, Gabardo (2012) points out pedagogical resources (lack of materials for classes); physical facilities and infrastructure (lack of space to develop the work); educational practices (large classes, students with difficulties and different learning rhythms, lesson planning, inexperience, continuing education, among others); relational aspects (disciplinary problems, relationship with families, lack of support for early career teachers, among others); and the career plan (devaluation of teaching). Finally, for the author, the great difficulties of teachers at the beginning of their careers are directly related to the working conditions offered.

The type of bond is also an aspect of concern. Precarious working conditions with temporary contracts or the lack of fixed classes made available to teachers make them available to the school system to meet the demands of teacher absences, "which makes the same teacher work in very different school contexts, teaching several grades throughout the first years of teaching" (Reali; Tancredi; Mizukami, 2010, p. 489).

Next, we present the context of HMP and the methodological choices involved in this study.

The context of HMP and the methodological choices of the study

The Hybrid Mentoring Program (HMP) was developed on the website of the Teachers' Portal of the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar) – a platform created to develop activities aimed at the professional development of Basic Education teachers – where there is dissemination of events, socialization of experiences, publication of didactic and academic materials and specific training programs for teachers.

At HMP, between 2017 and 2020, 80 early career teachers (ECT) participated, distributed in the three educational stages: Early Childhood Education, early years of Elementary School, and Youth and Adult Education, at different times and periods of interaction with 14 mentors (teachers with ten years of experience). In view of the

numerous participants, only two ECTs from the initial years of Elementary School were selected, each accompanied by an experienced teacher (mentor, M) working at the same level of education as their ECT), thus forming a dyad. The choice of the initial years of Elementary School was based on some observation criteria. Both ECTs a) had been participating in mentoring actions for a longer time; b) interacted with the mentors in an assiduous, committed, and engaged manner; c) carried out, with the same performance, all phases of the Program and actions proposed by their respective mentor; and d) maintained a frequent dialogue with the mentor so that it was possible to analyze that M and ECT developed formative dialogues, with a beginning, middle, and end. This information was conferred by accessing each of the mentors' follow-up rooms in the Moodle virtual environment and talking to them about the progress of their ECTs' participation in the formative meetings. Thus, the following dyads were selected: *Dyad A*, composed of ECT Ananda and Mentor Vanessa, and *Dyad B*, composed of ECT Lara and Mentor Sofia.

The initial period of the mentor's follow-up with ECT was called Phase – Digital Literacy. In this stage, the mentors planned vital content that helped them to get to know the ECTs, their work context, and those of their students in order to start the mentoring process; that is, the mentor identifies the difficulties concerning the educational contents, selects, and elaborates the activities according to the demands brought by the ECT, to then define the best tools and strategies to work with the content.

The mentoring process implied that, at first, the mentors monitored the digital literacy of each of the ECTs under their responsibility and, in a second moment, established interactions that would help – in individualized processes and with varying durations – the beginning teachers to deal with difficulties faced at this stage of their careers. Thus, the experienced teachers, through dialogue in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) with their respective ECTs, identified the demands and planned and carried out an individualized follow-up to support them in their difficulties, anxieties, and challenges of daily teaching.

In the HMP, even though the training plan was organized by mentor teachers, their actions, strategies, and objectives were discussed with the subjects to be trained. This measure was intended to legitimize and internalize decision-making by both parties and contribute to reducing resistance to the training process, consequently enhancing its effects. By sharing the educational goals and processes with the ECTs, the mentors helped them to take responsibility for their professional development.

In this investigation, the data sources for the content analysis were the digital narratives produced through the dialogue between two beginning teachers and their respective mentors through the Moodle virtual learning environment over approximately two years of participation in the HMP. The participation of experienced and novice educators took place, considering their agreement to the free and informed consent form regarding the research approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of UFSCar, process no. 68145717.8.0000.5504y.

The digital narratives were collected during the entire period of participation of the ECTs in the program and obtained through dialogue between them and their respective mentors – a dialogue derived from different tools obtained by the virtual environment, such as the elaboration of reflective diaries, reports and accounts in forums and discussions, written tasks, and *Moodle's internal e-mail.*

The analyses of the data obtained were carried out having as guidelines the elements that make up the learning of teaching, the training needs, and the professional development of teachers. The process required frequent readings, almost concomitantly to facts/situations considered, which took into account the triggering events of determined actions, their development, consequences, and unforeseen events to understand the learning that occurred through the dialogue between each of the mentor dyads and ECTs.

The categories emerged from the readings of the dataset. At first, the demands of the ECTs were identified. Then, through the analysis of the mentors' interventions, the training needs were characterized.
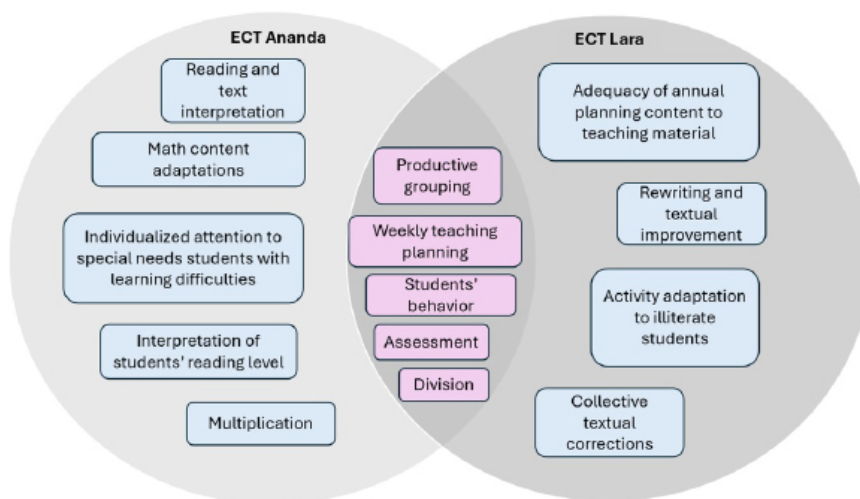
The two ECTs participating in this study are permanent faculty in the municipal school system, one working in the 1st and the other in the 2nd of the initial years of Elementary School. One has a degree in Mathematics and the other in Biological Sciences, and both have Pedagogy as their second degree. Both have approximately four years of teaching experience.

Next, we present an analysis of the difficulties at the beginning of teaching, evidenced in the dialogue between the ECTs and the mentors.

The identification of the demands presented by early career teachers

When we look at the demands presented by the early career teachers (ECTs) participating in the Hybrid Mentoring Program (HMP), we observe some alike and others specific to the context of the action of each of the ECTs analyzed. Among the similar demands, the following stood out: weekly planning, evaluation, teaching of the division, student behavior, and productive grouping. Then, we gathered the main demands presented by them throughout their participation in the program, illustrated in Figure 1:

Figure 1 - Demands presented by ECT Ananda and ECT Lara during participation in the HMP

ECT Ananda
- Reading and text interpretation
- Math content adaptations
- Individualized attention to special needs students with learning difficulties
- Interpretation of students' reading level
- Multiplication

(shared)
- Productive grouping
- Weekly teaching planning
- Students' behavior
- Assessment
- Division

ECT Lara
- Adequacy of annual planning content to teaching material
- Rewriting and textual improvement
- Activity adaptation to illiterate students
- Collective textual corrections

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Figure 1 shows the presence of a variety of demands and difficulties characteristic of the beginning of the educational career related to the knowledge base for teaching (Mizukami, 2004). When we analyze the varied demands – division, multiplication, adaptations of the Mathematics content for students, reading and interpretation of a text, rewriting and textual improvement, collective correction of texts, understanding of students' writing level, and adaptation of activities for illiterate students – we realize that they refer to the knowledge of specific content, as they involve the conceptual contents of the disciplines of Portuguese Language and Mathematics to be taught by early career teachers, but also to a general pedagogical knowledge, which includes understanding facts, concepts, processes, and didactic procedures in working with these contents.

The demands related to weekly planning, evaluation, adaptation of the contents of the annual planning to those of the didactic material, and individualized attention to special needs students with learning difficulties can be classified as general pedagogical knowledge. After all, such knowledge is associated with theories of teaching and learning, how students learn; knowledge about students' profiles, their characteristics, and their relationship with their learning; knowledge about classroom handling and management, time, and content; knowledge about cultures and other disciplines, which can be combined with theirs and facilitate learning; knowledge of the curriculum and how it is fulfilled in the classroom.

When we analyzed the demands presented by the two teachers, we identified accounts about the absence or insufficiency of support received, especially considering weekly planning, evaluation, identification of the level of writing, and students' behavior. The orientations of the management team proved to be inadequate to help them with their difficulties, mainly due to the lack of a closer and more systematic follow-up. The absence or deficiency of support received within the school by a more experienced professional or by the pedagogical coordination and school management further intensifies the challenges faced at the beginning of the teaching career (André, 2012; Gonçalves, 2016; Lima *et al.*, 2007) and significantly reinforces the need to monitor early career teachers to cope with struggles at this stage of their careers (Vaillant; Marcelo, 2012).

Although the lack of support was recurrent in the complaints of the two ECTs, most of their needs are associated with hardships arising from the working conditions present in their respective contexts of professional activity (Gabardo, 2012). Such demands were individualized attention to students with special needs and with learning difficulties, student behavior, productive grouping, weekly planning, and adaptation of activities for illiterate students, of the contents of the plan to the contents of the textbooks, and of the mathematics content.

Among the demands related to the context of action, some difficulties were highlighted due to the location of the school, the absence or insufficiency of collective training moments, and, mainly, the individual characteristics of the students; that is, many students with learning difficulties, with a learning level below the expected for the grade, with age/grade gap and different learning rhythms, in addition to the presence of more than one case of a student with disabilities in the classroom and indiscipline.

We noticed that both ECTs worked in institutions located on the outskirts and with little access to public services. In one of the schools, the context seems to have an additional aggravating factor: the children's experience with violence and drug trafficking and the difficulty in dealing with students' violent behavior.

Another aspect related to the working conditions evidenced in the demands presented by the ECTs was the absence or depletion of collective moments for the discussion of teaching planning and textbooks among the teachers and between them and the pedagogical coordination, making the ECTs take responsibility for their education and professional development alone, as well as for the learning of its students (Mariano, 2012).

Although the number of students present in the two classes assumed by the beginners is not excessive (18 to 20 students), we noticed that most of the demands presented are related to the difficulties arising from the individual characteristics of the students, such as the presence of many students with learning difficulties, with a learning level below that expected for the grade, age/grade gap, the presence of students with various types of disabilities and different learning paces.

Other demands narrated by the ECTs were linked to the difficulties of teaching experience, corroborating the premise that there is knowledge about teaching that will be acquired only through practice; that is, some pedagogical aspects beginning teachers will only learn in practice in the classroom. Considering the main challenges evidenced by teaching practices, the following stand out: teaching plan elaboration and execution, the evaluation and attribution of grades, and indiscipline issues coexisting with students' lag and learning difficulties.

When analyzing these needs, we noticed that both ECTs expressed feelings of anguish, fear, and insecurity about teaching; feelings of failure to individual teaching practice and even dissatisfaction with the results obtained; dissatisfaction with the pedagogical practices developed in the classroom; and lack of reference for their practice (André *et al.*, 2017).

Finally, the lack of support (André, 2012; Romanowski; Soczek, 2014) with the numerous attributions of being a teacher contributes to working conditions that are unfavorable to their professional insertion process and, consequently, to their teaching development. Such aspects, added to the difficulties of early career teachers, favor the devaluation of the educational profession.

How are the demands characterized as training needs in HMP?

By delving into the analysis of the demands presented by the ECTs during the HMP follow-up, we observed the configuration of some training needs, which is justified by the wealth of data presented by the ECTs regarding their context of action, the pedagogical practices developed, the teaching process, students' learning, among others.

When we analyze the mentoring actions developed, we see that the two mentors used different processes to teach the ECTs. Such processes form a set of actions, didactic strategies, behaviors, and attitudes of the mentors responsible for providing learning.

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During the HMP, mentoring actions were developed to meet these challenges presented by the ECTs. Such actions took place through dialogue, well-elaborated feedback, questions that trigger reflection, indications of various materials, speed of response to demands, support in hardships, suggestions of pedagogical practices and teaching strategies, proposition of activities and actions to face and overcome difficulties, appreciation of the pedagogical practices developed, and validation of some practices presented.

Thus, in order to identify the demands and propose different mentoring actions, the mentors used sensitive listening, asking the ECTs to report their stories, difficulties, dilemmas, and desires facing the exercise of teaching in the classroom and the professional phase in which they were. Such narratives enabled a fruitful analysis of the training needs presented by the ECTs (Rodrigues; Esteves, 1993).

The hardships reported by the ECTs were sometimes explicitly presented by themselves and sometimes identified by the mentor because they were not always able to be clear about their needs and had difficulties identifying their demands. Thus, given the demand presented and situated in a particular context, the mentor's role was to negotiate and hierarchize the needs evidenced (Pimenta, 2007).

Table 1 shows a synthesis of the training needs identified in the digital narratives based on the dialogue between mentors and ECTs. Each mentor considered the demands pointed out by the ECTs and elaborated a framework of the training needs to guide their work.

Table 1 – Characterization of demands in training needs

DEMANDS	TRAINING NEEDS
Weekly Teaching Planning	Elaboration, organization, and execution of weekly planning
Evaluation	Elaboration of the assessment for students with learning difficulties and special needs students
Student behavior	Managing student behavior
Productive grouping	Organization and execution of group activities
Division	Division Teaching
Adequacy of the contents of the annual planning to the didactic material	Selection, organization, and adaptation of the contents of the annual planning to the didactic material
Adaptation of activities for illiterate students	Selection and adaptation of activities for students who are still below the expected level of education
Rewriting and textual improvement	Elaboration and development of didactic sequences that develop the rewriting of different textual genres

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Based on the analysis of the demands presented by the ECTs with the mentoring actions developed by the mentors, we evidenced four significant aspects of the training needs, relating them to aspects of teaching-learning (Marcelo; Vaillant, 2009):

• The first aspect refers to the needs regarding the "development of skills for survival," such as in classroom management and pedagogical didactic models.

• The second aspect refers to the need regarding "educational competencies and skills," which are perceived in classroom management and in reflecting and making choices when confronting different pedagogical didactic models.

• The third aspect refers to the need for the "development of instructional flexibility," in which the teacher is expected to have the ability to manage the classroom and make informed choices about models with a focus on student learning.

• The fourth aspect refers to the need for "professional competence," which corresponds to understanding the classroom management integrated into the educational program (not in isolation) while presenting a considerable repertoire of models and training and summative assessments.

In the course of the follow-up carried out, we realized that, through mentoring actions planned and accompanied by the mentors during the Program, the ECTs built professional knowledge about education related to Teaching and Being a teacher, and such learning revealed that mentoring programs constitute a promising pedagogical tool to support the professional development of teachers with the possibility of being a relevant public policy for teacher education. These results indicate potential lines of study research on how the training needs in mentoring programs are formed and which mentoring actions and tools of the Virtual Learning Environment can contribute to overcoming hardships at the early stages of a teaching career.

Final considerations

During the follow-up and through mentoring actions planned and monitored by the mentors during the Hybrid Mentoring Program (HMP), it was possible to perceive that the ECTs built professional knowledge about education related to teaching and being a teacher. In addition, these learnings revealed that mentoring programs are a promising pedagogical tool to support the professional development of ECTs.

Another relevant aspect was to identify the mentoring actions developed by the mentors with their beginners and their implications to detect the training needs that guided the mentoring actions to favor the learning of ECTs.

The discussions about the training needs and the follow-up of beginning teachers through mentoring activities presented in this study can contribute to the formation of guidelines for the continuing education of teachers at the early stages of their careers. On the other hand, the demands expressed by the ECTs show how necessary it is to have moments of dialogue within the school and the sharing of responsibilities for teacher education. They can even indicate aspects that have been neglected by initial formation.

The HMP, as an induction program, was developed to meet the training needs of ECTs. The structure and content of the program, as well as the planning of mentoring actions, were discussed and carried out collaboratively with ECTs based on the demands presented by them during the follow-up in the program. As studies on training needs indicate, this is not an easy task. In the HMP, the mentors' actions to identify and understand the educational needs pointed out by the ECTs sought to take place through attentive and sensitive listening, placing themselves at the side of the ECTs to help them. In short,

based on the demands expressed by the beginners, the mentors sought to characterize the practicum needs, elaborating activities to be worked on by the mentor-beginner dyad to give them knowledge and security and assist in the development of professional identity, which ensured the success of the initiative. Finally, ECTs received subsidies to overcome the dreaded "reality check."

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