From learning to become to learning to belong: exploring three EFL teaching assistants’ induction process into the French university culture

Ana Laura Vega Umaña
Université Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3, France

This paper explores the induction process of three EFL teaching assistants into the French university culture and documents how they learned "to become language teachers in [this] particular community of teachers and learners" (Kanno & Stuart 2011).

From American or British universities, they acknowledged their limited understanding of the French university culture and felt "left in the dark", as one of them put it, regarding what was expected of them and what they should expect from colleagues, students, and the administration. Two of the three participants were novice teachers. Recently graduated, they went through a double transition: not only did they have to learn to see themselves as teachers, but they had to do so in an unfamiliar system. In other words, in addition to learning to become language teachers, they had to learn to belong as members of the institution. This implied understanding the functioning of the university, its norms, its values, its expectations of teachers, as well as the students’ learning culture and their views on learning English.

How did they make sense of the differences between their educational background(s) and beliefs and the habits and expectations of the new institutional culture they were now part of?

Through a series of classroom observations, semi-guided interviews and self-confrontation interviews, spanning a period of ten months, the evolution of their perceptions of the French university culture and their self-perceptions as foreign (language) teachers within this culture was examined.


Keywords: teacher identity, teacher induction, French university culture.