



Digging Into Initial Teacher Training Practices In Catalonia

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Contribution

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Transferring learning into professional practice should be one of the main goals of any training programme, thus dismantling the gap between the academic and work world (Correa, 2015). The analysis of elements affecting an efficient learning transfer has been, and still is, one of the more prominent research topic in the field of both, initial and continuous training (Grover, 2015; Van den Bossche & Segers, 2013). Most of these studies point to competency-based learning and training as one of the methodological options that facilitate learning transfer (Boahin & Hofman, 2014; Grossman & Salas, 2011). In this sense, competency-based learning has become one of the central axes in the reconfiguration of the European Higher Education Area and, specifically, of the Spanish Higher Education System (Chisvert, Palomares, & Soto, 2015).

Beyond the discussion about the competences that must be developed in higher education (Freire, Álvarez, & Montes, 2013; Gilbert, Balatti, Tunner, & Whitehouse, 2004) and the identification of factors affecting their development (Velasco, 2014), from a didactic approach, the study of competency-based learning in higher education has mainly focused on the strategies and activities that facilitate their development (Biggs, 2011) and on the way they are evaluated (Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia, Shavelson, & Kuhn, 2015).

In the specific case of teacher training, as pointed out by Rosales (2013), competency-based learning may be a way to promote professional development throughout teachers' career, since it would be naïve to expect that pre-service teacher training would be enough to develop each and every competence that Spanish Universities' curricula establish. In this sense, both Rodicio & Iglesias (2011) and Rosales (2013) state that the initial training should be directed to work on the competences increasingly demanded by the labour market.

Although there are several studies focusing on the importance of internships for professional competencies' development, for the consolidation of learning (Kilgo, Sheets, & Pascarella, 2015; Tejada & Ruiz, 2013) and for the transition to working life (Helyer & Lee, 2014), in the case of initial teacher training, there is a lack of research that provides empirical evidence on the factors that lead to a better acquisition of competencies during in-school practices, internships or practicum, as well as the conditions assuring the quality of these training periods.

Thus, the aim of the study presented here is to identify factors promoting better competencies development during the in-school practices period within the Early Childhood Education and Primary Education bachelor's degrees in Catalonia (Spain). The study focuses on the practicum organizational characteristics, the satisfaction expressed by students and the perceived impact on institutions and individuals involved in internships programmes.

Method

A survey was conducted during the 2014-2015 academic year with a sample of 567 student teachers from primary education (n=276) and early childhood education (n=291) degrees from four Catalan universities (two public and two private), covering a wide network of public and private schools. Regarding the distribution of students by courses, although there is a greater presence of third-year students (55.80% in Primary Education and 34.71% in Early Childhood Education), the sample includes students from the four courses for both bachelor's degrees, which gives us a broader view of the in-school practices throughout the training programme.

The independent variables used in this study are age, gender, enrolled bachelor's degree, university entrance pathway, school ownership, practicum organizational characteristics (situation of practicum in the programme and type of practicum), students' satisfaction related to (1) practicum as a subject, (2) relationship established with schools, (3) practicum management, and (4) information about the practicum programme, practicum impact related to (1) school and classroom activity, (2) professional development, and (3) school-university relationship. The dependent variables are the three types of identified competencies: relationships and ways of working, classroom management, and application of knowledge in practice

A four-level ordinal item ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" was used to assess students' satisfaction, practicum impact, competencies development.

The first approach to our data started with univariate and bivariate analyses that, then, led to the development of three multiple regression models to determine the relationship between the three types of identified competencies (i.e., relationships and ways of working, classroom management, and application of knowledge in practice) every independent variable, testing for separate effects and controlling for the other measures considered in the models.

Regression coefficients (B), standard errors (S.E.), t-tests of significance and their corresponding standardised versions (Beta) were calculated. F-tests and R² values were used to determine the significance and the overall fit of the three multiple regressions, and served as an indication of the explanation reflected in each model. No significant violation of the major assumptions of regression modelling was observed.

Expected Outcomes

As expected, results show that those competences associated with classroom management are the most developed during in-school practices (m=3.46, sd=0.57). On the other hand, although competences related to relationships and ways of working are well valued, they seem to be the least developed during the internship period (m=3.06, sd=0.65).

Multiple regression models showed no significant relationship between sociodemographic variables, school ownership, and competences development during in-school practices periods.

Regarding the practicum organizational characteristics, the type of practicum and, specifically, those practicums combining intensive and extensive periods appear to be slightly associated to a greater development of application of knowledge in practice competence (Beta=0.012, p<0.05).

The increase of students' satisfaction regarding the practicum as a subject (Beta=0.099, p<0.05), the relationship established with schools (Beta=0.116, p<0.01), and practicum management (Beta=0.114, p<0.001) are significant predictors of the development of competencies associated to relationships and ways of working.

A higher perception of practicum impact on school and classroom activity (Beta=0.240, p=0.000), students' professional development (Beta=0.120, p<0.01), and school-university relationship (Beta=0.150, p<0.01) are associated with the development of competencies related to relationships and ways of working. In regard classroom management competencies, we observed that they are more developed among those students who perceive a greater impact of internships on school

and classroom activity (Beta=0.179, $p < 0.001$) and, especially, on their own professional development (Beta=0.308, $p = 0.000$).

In short, results confirm not only the positive impact of in-school practices on the professional development of future teachers, but also that, beyond the type and period set for the practicum in bachelor's degrees, the identification of suitable "training schools" and strengthening effective cooperative structures school-university are key elements for successful pre-service teachers' training.

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