

## Chapter 6

### THE TEACHER'S DEVELOPMENT PLAN IN THE INITIAL TEACHING DEGREE

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#### ABSTRACT

The teacher is a key factor in the teaching-learning process, with a complex profile combining varied types of knowledge, a wide range of skills, and the teacher's own personality. In initial training a great deal of the knowledge and skills necessary to the profession are acquired, but such essential elements as personal and social competences are rarely explored to the depth they deserve. In this paper we present an innovation project carried out with trainees on their initial teaching degree, aimed at developing the personal and social competences. Our study includes a process of reflection designed to foster the habit of self-analysis a working teacher needs. In order to achieve this we devised and carried through a four-phase sequence of activities through which a personal development plan was drawn up and assessed.

*Keywords:* personal competences, personal-practical knowledge, teacher training, higher education.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Although recent trends have tended to shift the focus of the teaching-learning process, the teacher is still the cornerstone of any planned education course. Proof of this is that the figure of the teacher is still the main subject of many studies (Bain, 2006; Schön, 1998; Shulman, 2005; Perrenoud, 2004a, 2012; Elbaz, 1981), all of which attempt to answer from varying approaches questions such as: What does a good teacher need to *know*? What do good teachers *do*? How is *what teachers do* linked to *what students learn*?

The figure of the teacher is far too complex for us to answer these questions simply. However, although to a certain extent we remain in the dark, these studies can offer guidelines helping us to understand what the key factors in the educator's training and professional development are: i.e. specific knowledge (Zambrano Leal, 2006) and skills (Zabalza, 2007; Perrenoud, 2004b) that are blended and demonstrated in practice (Mas Torelló & Tejada Fernández, 2013).

In this practice we find a combination of different forms of knowledge (Clandinin, 1989; Connelly, Fullan, & Clandinin, 1985; Shulman, 2005) which, although indissociably bound together, can be broken down into: subject knowledge; the way the latter is put across; professional experience; and the teacher's own self-knowledge. Thus we can talk about expert or subject knowledge, didactic-pedagogical knowledge, experiential-practical knowledge and personal-practical knowledge.

Expert knowledge refers to the understanding all working teachers have of their subject: an awareness grounded in an in-depth familiarity with the discipline allowing them to go much further than mere formulaic repetition. This deep subject knowledge enables teachers to give detailed explanations accompanied by examples, analytical and synthetic exercises and other tools which can guide students towards a better understanding.

It is a type of knowledge which is acquired throughout the teacher's career and is indispensable to it (Medina Moya & Jarauta Borrasca, 2013).

To be effective, the teacher must also know how to adapt her/his expert knowledge to each and every classroom situation (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1986), and to do this other types of knowledge are required: pedagogical-didactic knowledge and practical-reflexive knowledge. Without these latter types of knowledge, practice tends to get bogged down in a vicious circle of constantly repeated tried and tested models.

Pedagogical knowledge enables teachers to adjust their practice to each particular situation and endows them with the strategies, methods and other tools they need for appropriate planning and assessment of their teaching.

Experiential knowledge, underpinned by the types of knowledge previously mentioned, promotes reflection on practice, guides decision-making, and drives innovation and planning based on valid pedagogical principles.

All these different types of knowledge combine to make up the teacher's professional knowledge. Yet practical knowledge cannot be uncoupled from personal (Elbaz, 1981). The teacher's self-awareness and awareness of her/his role as a teacher play a key part in the development of practice. The way the teacher thinks, her/his ideas, heritage and experience, shape a teaching persona which in turn influences practice. This unique persona unites all the other types of knowledge into one way of seeing and working since they are all interpreted and put into practice through the optic of the self and its background.

The teacher's self or personal knowledge is thus a key factor in the process; however it is not always given the importance it deserves.

In teacher education, expert or subject knowledge and pedagogical-didactic knowledge are implicitly and universally seen as indispensable; but the same does not always apply to personal knowledge. Yet for those undergoing training the first two types of knowledge are not the most important ones.

When we questioned trainees and trainers on the characteristics of a good teacher<sup>1</sup> (looking back on their experience as students and remembering teachers who had helped them), responses centred on personal and relational attributes and qualities, in contrast to any other type of knowledge or skills.

Thus it seems clear that all the different forms of knowledge are of vital importance, and from this we can infer that any teacher, in becoming a professional, must acquire them all in the course of training. Therefore a comprehensive integrated training for future educators should include all of these types of knowledge.

In the development of the EEES and all that this has entailed in the reshaping of higher education, reports have been published (González & Wagenaar, 2003; Delors, 1996; Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya [AQU], 2009) which foresee such an integrated training for students and which describe it in terms of *competences*. In the Tuning report (González, & Wagenaar, 2003), these competences are defined as those which "represent a combination of attributes reflecting knowledge and its applications, aptitudes, technical skills, responsibilities, etc" (González & Wagenaar, 2003, p. 80).

There are various authors (Perrenoud, 2004a, 2012; Le Boterf, 2001; Mas Torelló, & Tejada Fernández, 2013; Zabalza, 2007; Cano García, 2007) who in discussing the competences judge personal competences to be indispensable, since they have a specific or transversal nature and are considered inseparable or indissociable from the rest.

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<sup>1</sup> The sample consisted of 128 students from the UB and 200 professionals from a range of different fields on trainer training courses.

When we analyse the personal competences outlined in these documents we can identify and understand some of the underlying qualities and skills involved, namely: empathy, assertiveness, accessibility, responsibility, patience, enthusiasm, creativity, management of emotions, self-awareness, self-confidence, communication skills, the ability to observe, plan, organize, improvise, guide, motivate, and converse without dominating, and the possession of ethical values, amongst others. All of these are qualities identical with those emerging from research.

Since we are aware that the figure of the teacher is a key factor in the educational process and that her/his relationship with students is either motivating or demotivating, we cannot leave such an important dimension of practice to self-training. The role played by the educator is fundamental in students' construction of their learning. A teacher is simultaneously an expert, facilitator, guide, mediator, coach, mentor and communicator, and is both reflective and critical, bringing into play a whole spectrum of knowledge, skills, attitudes and personal qualities which are all blended in her/his practice.

In their initial training student teachers acquire abundant knowledge combining the scientific side – knowledge necessary for putting across the specific contents of the field – with the pedagogical side, including the pedagogic-didactic understanding which allows their interventions to be as focused as possible and skills enabling them to take decisions, work in teams and manage time, emotions, and information; on the other hand very few personal qualities or attitudes of respect, tolerance or professional ethics are taught which might help them to relate to those around them more effectively.

For both students and teachers the human and personal factor is considered paramount in establishing favourable relationships, whether between teachers and students or among teachers themselves. Some studies reflect this, for example: "I have often asked myself whether many of the problems which schools suffer are really produced more by disturbances in the emotional balance and maturity of teaching staff, and less by their lack of psycho-pedagogical or subject knowledge" (Imbernón, 1994, p. 18).

Building a form of integrated pre-service training which can raise trainees' awareness of their personal qualities and/or help them to develop these is the challenge which drives our work as teacher trainers. If we are to be true to this broad principle, all the competences we have discussed above should not only feature in the curriculum but also play an essential role in teaching practice and its assessment.

Despite this, on university teacher training courses the development of the personal/relational competences is still strictly limited, and their assessment almost non-existent.

This analysis of the current situation led us to design and carry out an innovation project integrating all the knowledge, skills, and attitudes which teachers should be aware of and proficient in.

The study presented here is an account of this innovation project, put into practice on two higher education training courses, both at the University of Barcelona, Spain; one on the Primary School Education Degree and the other on the Degree in Education. Below we explain how the project aimed at developing trainees' personal and social competences was carried through.

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

Our objectives were framed around the acquisition and assessment of teachers' self-awareness, and more specifically awareness of the personal competences an educator should have.

The general objective was two-sided: on the one hand we wanted trainees to observe and appraise the personal competences needed by a teacher, and on the other we wanted them to acquire tools for analysing and developing their own personal competences.

The specific objectives were:

- To identify the personal competences an effective teacher has.
- To recognize the qualities implicit in these personal competences and what is required to develop them.
- To promote self-awareness in the qualities identified.
- To provide strategies for the assessment and self-assessment of personal competences.
- To enhance trainees' personal skills.
- For trainees to learn to manage their own personal skills.

For trainees to acquire the habit of reflecting on their own behaviour as educators (or future educators).

### **3. METHOD**

The two subjects in which the study was carried out were both in their third year, one from the Degree in Primary School Education and the other from the Degree in Education, with 65 and 72 students respectively.

In both subjects the same design and strategies were applied. The project activities were not concentrated into a specific part of the course but, in order to optimize their transversal impact, spread over the whole semester during which our research was carried out. The project was divided into the following phases:

- Identifying teaching competences;
- Identifying trainees' own competences;
- Setting objectives;
- Assessment.

#### **3.1. Identification of competences**

This first phase was designed to enable the trainees to identify, analyse and assess in various teachers the competences and qualities relevant to their work. To achieve these objectives we devised the following activities:

- A brainstorming session in which we asked trainees (firstly individually and then in groups) to list the qualities of a good teacher. After debating the results, each trainee put the qualities agreed on by the group into a grid.
- Trainees watched a video of various teachers in action, where they could clearly observe the qualities and faults of each. This was followed by another brainstorm leading to a second list of qualities to add to the first.

These two activities enabled us to discover a good deal of the features defining an effective educator. Each trainee then organized and detailed these in a grid which served as a basis for subsequent observations and tasks.

- Direct teacher observations: starting from the qualities previously identified and the grid completed so far, we asked trainees to observe and analyse the performance of their teachers from other subjects. They were also asked to add further qualities they remembered from previous teachers.
- Documentary review of personal competences, analysing regulations and other legal texts, along with studies and works by a range of authors. The results allowed us to

confirm some of the qualities already described and enumerate others which had not previously emerged from our observations.

- A small number of voluntary interviews with other professionals: two teachers and school directors. These in-depth interviews enabled us to complete the initial list of competences.

Once the information-gathering stage had finished, the competences compiled individually were shared and a single collective list drawn up. The resulting grid of competences and qualities is shown below under 'Results'.

### **3.2. Identification of trainees' own competences, aiming to have each trainee analyse their own competences**

Basing themselves on the competences gleaned from the previous phase, each trainee was asked to observe and analyse their own competences.

To promote these observations we programmed and engaged in individual and collective activities such as oral presentations, group assignments, debates, case studies and materials design, in the course of which trainees could use the grid to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. These activities formed part of the subject syllabus and were double-sided, combining course studies with individual observation.

Peer assessment was also encouraged in some of these activities, and proved interesting, since the image each trainee had of her/himself was not always that seen by their colleagues. For many it was the first time they had been made aware of some of the competences they should have, as well as their weaknesses. This required individual monitoring of some trainees.

A grid was drawn up in which each student individually could compile the competences they had observed in themselves, or that others had observed in them, in comparison with the ideal teacher. By way of an example we show here how one subject was approached. It was divided first into sub-topics which were then shared out among small groups of trainees for them to work on. Once they had completed their tasks we asked each group to make an oral presentation about their part.

Subsequently each group member filled in a two-column grid of strengths and weaknesses, reflecting the communication skills observed in the presentations and in the group work.

Also, as the audience of the presentations, trainees observed their colleagues' performances and tried to identify at least one strength and one weakness in each.

Finally every speaker collected feedback from her/his colleagues and added this new information to their personal grid. To help them they used the grid drawn up in the first phase as a model.

This same procedure was followed in tasks actively encouraging trainee participation.

### **3.3. Objective-setting phase**

After completing the self-observation, each trainee noted her/his objectives in terms of strengths to be optimized and weaknesses to be addressed.

For each area trainees decided to develop, they sketched out the strategies they would use to achieve their objectives, differentiating between short- and long-term approaches. The complete process is shown below under "Results".

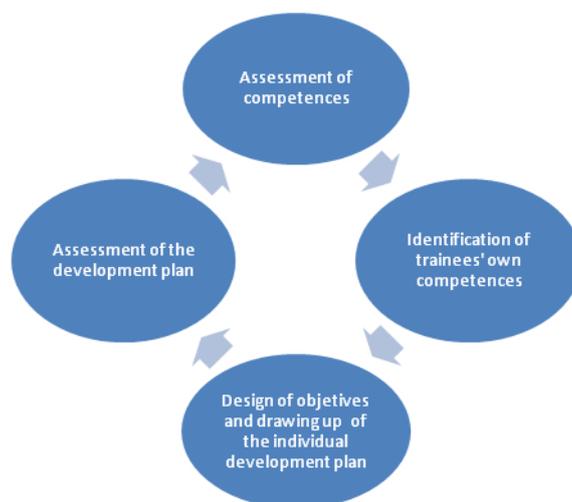
### 3.4. Assessment phase

The objective of this phase was to verify whether trainees had achieved their objectives. In designing our assessment of the development plan we took the following dimensions into account:

- The actions to be assessed;
- When assessment was to be carried out (before, during, and/or after);
- What tools were to be used;
- How results would be evaluated;
- What would be done if any objective had not been reached.

Changes in skills and attitudes were observed, although one semester was too short a time to see appreciable development in all trainees. However, determining how assessment would be carried out allowed us to close the circle of design, and provided trainees with tools for independent self-evaluation later in their careers.

*Figure 1. Phases in the drawing up of the personal development plan.*



To assess the innovation project as a whole and to enhance its future functioning, the following instruments were used:

- Discussion groups made up of trainees from the two groups participating in the project.
- A trainee satisfaction survey.

A guided written account of what trainees had learned from the process.

## 4. RESULTS

During the successive phases of the innovation project and through the activities involved (brainstorms, teacher observations and bibliographical review), the “ideal” competences of a “good teacher” were observed and analysed. In the students’ view, they were:

Table 1. Competences, skills and qualities of a good teacher.

Competence/knowledge	Definition	Skills/ Qualities
Expert knowledge	Having specialized knowledge of the subject taught and knowing how to apply this knowledge in different situations.	Cognitive skills: analysis, synthesis, organising, establishing interrelations.
Problem-solving	Finding solutions to problems or difficult situations arising in the classroom or outside it.	Cognitive abilities, decision-making skills, communication skills, strategic skills.
Communication	Being willing to communicate and having communication skills (active listening, dialogue and explanation)	Accessibility, patience, tolerance, ability to listen, speak, read and understand and write in all registers, open to dialogue
Creativity	Ability to be creative in any language.	Having initiative Proactive
Ability to innovate	Able to identify a problem situation, take the initiative, seek various solutions, be proactive.	Analytical Able to summarize Open Active
Information management	Mastering ICTs and using them in the teaching-learning process.	
Ability to improvise	Able to change plans or reorganize themselves in response to unforeseen circumstances.	Proactive, Adaptable
Leadership	Able to act as a leader without being authoritarian.	Respectful Ethical Assertive Friendly Motivated and motivating
Empathy	Understanding the other and what s/he is experiencing	Active listening skills
Responsive to diversity	Being respectful of all types of differences and helpful with difficulties	Tolerant Respectful
Ethical	Fulfilling regulatory and socially recognized standards and principles	Humble, unpretentious
Responsibility and commitment	Involving oneself and committing oneself both individually and collectively	Responsibility Taking on commitments Persevering
Knowing how to plan and organize	Ability to plan and organize both for oneself and others	Time management skills Efficacious and efficient Organized
Demanding	Being demanding with oneself and others	Personal management skills Ambitious Consistent Critical
Reflection	Ability to reflect	Self-analysis, establishing interrelations
Self-confidence	Confidence in oneself and others	Confidence Enthusiasm
Control	Ability to manage emotions	Control, self-knowledge Well-balanced

It was very important for trainees to define the meaning of each competence and associate each with its corresponding skills and qualities. Completing this task fostered self-observation. The individual development plans were drawn up on the basis of the qualities and competences previously identified.

The tables below, drawn up by one trainee (C.J.), exemplify the steps we have described above and allow us to observe the results obtained.

*Table 2. Competences self-observation.*

Strengths	Weaknesses
S1. I am creative; I find it easy to improvise. S2. I have empathy. S3. I am responsible and committed.	W1. I get very nervous when I have to perform in public. W2. I feel unsure of my knowledge and communication skills. W3. I suffer from stage fright and stutter without noticing. W4. I use 'OK' a lot as a filler. W5. Stage fright makes me use exaggerated gestures and adopt rigid postures. W6. I need to enunciate better so that students can understand me. My colleagues say that sometimes I'm difficult to understand, and that when I speak faster this gets worse. W7. It's difficult for me to organise everything to have it all ready on time.

From the above analysis of his strengths and weaknesses, the trainee designed his personal development plan:

*Table 3. Personal development plan.*

	To maintain		To develop	
	Qualities	Strategies	Qualities	Strategies
Short-term	S1.Creativity	Prepare creative and motivating presentations.	W1. Nerves W2. Insecurity	Prepare classes properly
	S2.Empathy	Take much greater advantage of tutorials and group assignments.	W3. Stage fright W5. Repeated use of 'OK' W6. Mastering body movements	Practice in public and allow myself to be assessed. Record and observe myself on video. Do enunciation exercises.
			W4. Diction W7. Lack of organization	Look for times during the week to get organized.

Table 3. Personal development plan (cont.).

Long-term		Attend courses on new methodologies.		Seek advice from various professionals.
		Assess myself regularly using written and/or audiovisual records and compare these through time to observe differences.		Read and practice to expand my vocabulary.
				Make my own dictionary with useful words for my everyday classroom language.
				Attend acting classes to improve my diction.

Taking the step from individual and group self-analysis to writing down specific objectives and strategies for achieving them was decisive in this trainee's learning process.

C.J.'s suggestions for assessing the competences he had identified were the following:

Table 4. Evaluation of development plan.

Evaluation of development
Record myself on video/audio and keep a notebook. Analyse my notes systematically to pinpoint changes.
Write a report on myself every term or year to evaluate my development and add new competences not previously included.
Start a blog to write about my most important personal experiences in the field.

We drew our conclusions using both the results of the trainees' development plans and their own assessment of this tool.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

From our analysis of the trainees' development plans and from their assessment of the innovation project it can be concluded that:

- Almost all our objectives were achieved, namely:
  - Trainees developed a good awareness of their own skills, attitudes and competences.
  - Trainees raised their awareness of the personal qualities and knowledge a teacher needs.
  - Trainees acquired strategies for observing and developing the competences they will need in their professional development.
  - Trainees engaged in building an action plan which could be extremely useful for them in their future careers.
- Trainees as a group successfully analysed how the personal qualities affect teachers' practical and expert knowledge.

- From the results of the satisfaction surveys and discussion groups we saw that trainees valued very positively not only our approach to the subject, but also the learning they had achieved through it, both because of the task sequence which enabled induction of the competences, and due to the self-analysis involved in completing the tasks.

All trainees stated that a subject of this importance should be explored in greater depth and throughout the degree. A more systematic treatment would not only allow them to assimilate personal competences but also to internalize self-analytical strategies on a personal level.

- On analysing trainees' written accounts we noted a significant change in:
  - The concepts trainees had of the teacher and her/his role.
  - The value given to their persona and to the personal qualities and competences needed for effective teaching.
  - The influence of the qualities in trainees' learning.
  - The degree of autonomy achieved through taking part in an experiential process rather than through theoretical learning. Self-analysis, reflection, induction and observation are strategies little used in university classrooms but indispensable in developing certain teaching competences.
- Despite the considerable difficulty they had in embarking on a complex process, for which they had no previously established habits, some trainees assessed the experience very positively. Thus we see the need to incorporate more assignments of this kind into teaching degree studies in order to boost the development of the competences in their other areas.

Both the positive evaluations received and the results of assessment suggest that working on the personal competences development plan is beneficial, and that this would also bear fruit if it were applied not only at one specific time during the course, but implanted transversally across the whole range of credits making up the degree.

### 5.1. Weaknesses of the Project

As weaknesses of the project we could draw attention to the following:

Due to the duration of each of the subjects in which the project was implemented (one semester) it was left slightly incomplete. Most of the activities planned by trainees for developing their professional qualities and competences were designed for the medium and long term, and the two subjects into which the project was concentrated finished before we had time to track and assess the resulting changes.

It was not possible to assess the transference of knowledge acquired in trainees who had completed their degree and started working as teachers. This could have provided us with evidence confirming the project's validity, but was not possible within the limits of the study; however, it can be foreseen in the near future.

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