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Association of Teacher Education in Europe

HOW TO BECOME A SCHOOL TEACHER THROUGH PRACTICE **A model of easy practice**

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Paper presented at the 29th Annual Conference

Teacher Education Between Theory and Practice: The End of Theory, The future of Practice?

Agrigento (Italy), 23-27 October 2004

1. INTRODUCTION

In our opinion, a model of initial teacher training should include as a main aim the attitudinal change which implies being a student teacher with the perspective of becoming a full teacher in a near future. This paper presents steps and activities trying to solve this situation, and it also shows the relationship between theory and practice. We include a diagram presenting this relationship just mentioned.

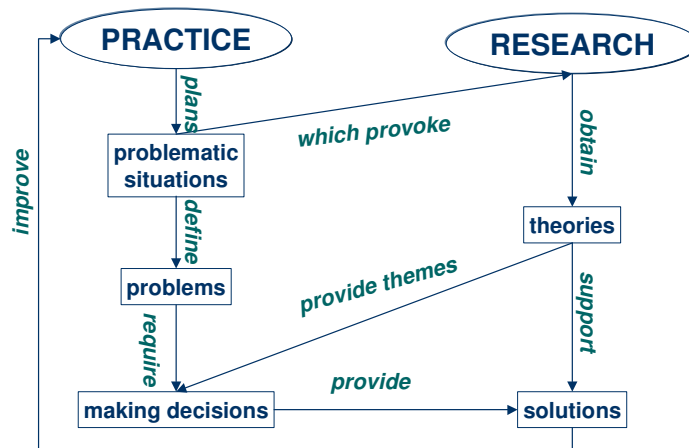


Diagram 1. Practice – Research

Practice in teacher training, as any other kind of practice, must be based on theory, thus theoretical aspects should be included in the materials for practice. Practice should also provide keys for analysing the theoretical lecture, we call this practice at school *practicum*.

General characteristics of *practicum*:

- It should be considered a subject as important as any other theoretical subject.
- Two student teachers are supervised by a mentor.
- Each student teacher should participate in any kind of school activity.
- After the practicum the student teacher should prepare a report informing about his/her experience at school.

2. HOW OUR TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM IS ORGANIZED

The program is divided into two parts: The theoretical part consisting of 435 hours and the *practicum* at school with 230 hours which is always supervised by mentors. The time-table is arranged as follows: in the mornings student teachers attend secondary school for the *practicum*, and in the afternoon they attend the theoretical lectures at the University.

There are several sessions of coordination between tutors and mentors all through the academic year trying to coordinate both parts, at least one session is held every month.

2.1. What is the main aim of the practicum?

The relevant aim of the *practicum* intends to change the attitude of the student teachers, we mean that at the beginning of the *practicum* the student teacher is simply a student, whereas at the end of the *practicum*, he should be a teacher.

How does this change take place? It is needed that the relationship between mentor and student teacher should be carefully organized so that it can be fluent and helpful. Consequently, the structure of the *practicum* should have sessions of planning activities, sessions to implement these activities, and sessions dedicated to analysis and reflection in order that the student teachers can evaluate themselves and reach conclusions.

The next diagram tries to show the three main periods of the *practicum*.

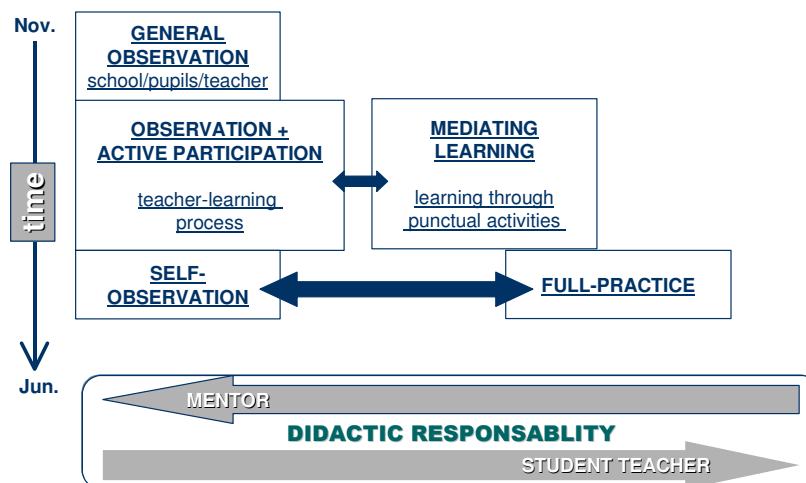


Diagram 2. The *practicum*

The general observation centres on student teachers' awareness of school reality, the relationships among the different sectors at school, and their links to the education community and the environment. The student teacher can observe the school organization, the pupils, the teachers, the social context, etc.

The next step is observing his/her mentor giving the lesson and the real situation in the classroom. He/she also can observe the pupils' behaviour, their process of learning, their active/passive attitude adopted in the class, type of questions, kind of learning activities, where learning difficulties appeared, etc. Concerning the observation of his/her mentor, the student teacher should consider how the mentor manages the distribution of time during the lesson, how he/she motivates the pupils, how he/she controls the process of learning, what teaching activities he/she carries out, how he/she answers pupils' questions, what didactic materials he/she is using, etc.

Finally, a period of self-observation is also required. The student teacher should analyse his/her own performance in the classroom and reflects on his/her didactic experience so as to evaluate himself/herself as a teacher

The path to reach autonomy as a full teacher is quite long, first the student teacher incorporates himself/herself little by little to teaching, he/she prepares some short activities with his/her mentor, activities which he/she will use in the classroom. Here we have some examples of possible activities:

- Partial presentation of aspects in a given subject matter.
- Implementing activities or exercises.
- Distribution and correction of questionnaires.
- Helping in laboratory tasks, for instance setting up the lab equipment, etc.
- Answers to some questions asked by the pupils, etc.

After some weeks working with these activities, the student teacher can be ready to be in charge of full-practice, he/she can plan a didactic unit which he/she will develop with his/her pupils. Then, the student teacher should:

- reflect on the topic chosen for the didactic unit
- select general and specific aims and establish the relationship among them,
- select and structure the contents,

- select and structure the learning activities and their relationship with the proposed aims,
- think about the teaching aids and resources used in the classroom,
- evaluate his/her pupils' learning process taking into account:
 - ❖ analysis of pupils' learning results,
 - ❖ opinion about the adaptation of aims and possible causes of failure,
 - ❖ real advantages of learning activities,
 - ❖ opinion about the adaptation of learning activities,
 - ❖ opinion about the adaptation and usefulness of evaluation tests,
 - ❖ analysis of real differences between the design of the unit and its implementation, and further reflection on the possible reasons that have provoked these deviations.

As we can see, when the student teacher has begun the *practicum* he/she was a student limited to observing lessons, and at the end of it, he/she is able to develop a didactic unit, and he/she is also able to evaluate his/her performance as a teacher.

2.2. *Practicum* assessment

The student teacher suffers a double assessment:

- His/her mentor evaluates him/her on the basis of the experience acquired as a teacher during the training. The mentor is considering the student teacher's characteristics as a prospective teacher.
- The *practicum* coordinator and the general coordinator, responsible of the teacher training program, evaluate the report written by the student teacher where he/she informs about his/her experience at school training highlighting the didactic aspects and relating them to theory, and justifying the decisions taken during the training.

2.3. Coordination of the *practicum*

We usually have three types of seminars that try to help tutors and mentors in their respective training tasks. The seminars bring together:

- each tutor with the mentors of a given subject or area (type a),
- the general coordinator of the teacher training program with all subject tutors and all mentors (type b),
- permanent meetings designed for all tutors dealing with topics related to course's contents (type c).

The *a* and *b* type meetings will be carried out alternatively in order to:

- check the work carried out by the student teachers,
- analyse the problems,
- establish the plan of action for the following month.

A calendar schedule of meetings is as follows:

A. September-November

Three seminar sessions will be held from September to November dealing with:

- course structure,
- analysis of theoretical syllabus of the different subjects by tutors and mentors,
- phases of the practicum,
- planning the student teacher/mentor time-table at the school: lessons, seminars, activities, etc.,
- planning evaluation process.

B. December-January

There will be held two seminar sessions from December to January dealing with:

- Report on the observation phase.
- Incorporation of the student teacher into the phase of mediated learning: planning of activities, tasks, exercises, etc.
- Strategies and techniques for carrying out the above mentioned activities, tasks, exercises, etc.
- Use of resources and audiovisual materials.
- Observation of the student teacher's mediated learning. Reflection and feedback.

- Comments on the progress of the classroom work; motivation, discipline, etc. Comments on incidents.

C. February

Then, two seminar sessions will take place in February concerning:

- Discussion on the preparation of the didactic unit: aims, methodology, techniques, materials, etc.
- Discussion on the final report requested from the student teacher.
- Comments on the progress of classroom teaching.

In this period it is convenient to have the first evaluation of the coordination between the theoretical lectures and the *practicum*.

D. March

There will be two seminar sessions in March where we will analyse the:

- Planning of the didactic unit with the student teacher.
- Attendance of the student teacher to:
 - ❖ The pupils' evaluation at school,
 - ❖ School Board of governors,
 - ❖ School Council.
- Comparison of student teachers' opinions about their due final report.

E. April

Another seminar session will take place in April to study the:

- Report on the student teachers' progress.
- Development of the didactic unit by the student teacher. Reflection and feedback.
- Comments on the progress of classroom teaching.

F. May- July

Finally, there will be three seminar sessions from May to July, one will be held in May, and two in June and July. In May we will study the:

- Final report on the development of the didactic unit given by the student teacher.

→ Comments about the student teacher' written report.

G. The June-July seminars will deal with:

- Final reports on the student teachers.
- Information about the reports written by student teachers.
- Evaluation session of the student teachers.
- Evaluation of the mentor's role.

As a brief conclusion, we expect that after this training program student teachers will acquire the required strategies to become teachers, furthermore we think that this type of training will highly help them in being aware of the responsibility that teaching and educating implies.