Improve the Teaching Competencies on Linguistic-Communicative Area of Future Teachers on Early Childhood Education by Using Service-learning

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Abstract

The pre-service training of infant teachers aims to awaken in students a commitment to their profession and educational improvement. It attempts to initiate them in rigorous processes of thinking about their competencies and how to regulate and improve them. We present the partial results of a mixed methodological research project1 that analyses how students of the Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education are impacted by an innovation that uses service-learning (SL) to teach students linguistic-communicative teaching competencies while they work with their lecturers in schools in underprivileged contexts that are promoting early multilingualism. We analyse how the students' perception of their competencies evolves and compare it with the lecturers' assessment. We observe that actions (SL) that involve designing, carrying out and evaluating real interventions in schools bring satisfaction because they combine theory and practice, and students need to be able to cope with important professional content. The experience also increases students' perception of their own self-efficacy, places the work done by the students and lecturers in the context of investigative professional communities and leads to learning processes aligned with the linguistic-communicative teaching competencies that are required in multilingual and inclusive schools.

Melhorar as competências pedagógicas na área linguístico-comunicativa dos futuros professores de Educação Infantil através do aprendizagem-serviço

Resumo: A formação inicial de professores de educação infantil (educação pré-escolar, 3-6 anos) destina-se a preparar estudantes empenhados na sua profissão e na melhoria da educação. Para isso, buscam-se fórmulas que os envolvam em rigorosos processos de reflexão, autorregulação e melhoria de competências. Apresentamos resultados parciais de uma pesquisa com metodologia mista que analisa o impacto sobre os alunos do grau de Educação Infantil de uma inovação em que um processo de aprendizagem-serviço (ApS) é realizado para aprender habilidades de ensino linguístico-comunicativo, enquanto estudantes e professores colaboram com escolas imersas em contextos desfavorecidos e cujo sistema educacional visa promover o multilinguismo desde a fase de Educação Infantil. Analisamos a evolução da autopercepção de competência dos alunos, bem como a avaliação realizada pelos professores envolvidos. Observamos que a incorporação de ações (ApS) que incorporam a concepção, desenvolvimento e avaliação de intervenções reais nas escolas, proporciona satisfação para a maior relação entre teoria e prática e para a abordagem de conteúdo profissional relevante; aumenta a sua percepção de autoeficácia de competências; coloca o trabalho conjunto entre alunos e professores universitários no âmbito das comunidades profissionais de investigação e permite a aprendizagem alinhada com as competências linguístico-comunicativas que são exigidas em escolas multilingues e inclusivas.

Palavras-chave: formação inicial de professores; educação infantil; aprendizagem-serviço; competências linguístico-comunicativas; relação teoria-prática.

Mejorar las competencias docentes en el área lingüístico-comunicativa de los futuros maestros de Educación Infantil mediante el aprendizaje-servicio

Resumen: La formación inicial de los maestros de educación infantil pretende estudiantes comprometidos con su profesión y con la mejora educativa. Para ello se buscan fórmulas que consigan su implicación en procesos rigurosos de reflexión, autorregulación y mejora competenciales. Presentamos resultados parciales de una investigación con metodología mixta que analiza el impacto en estudiantes del grado de Educación Infantil de una innovación en la que se lleva a cabo un proceso de aprendizaje-servicio (ApS) para aprender competencias docentes lingüístico-comunicativas mientras estudiantes y profesores colaboran con escuelas inmersas en contextos desfavorecidos y cuyo sistema educativo pretende promover el plurilingüismo desde la etapa de educación infantil. Analizamos la evolución de la autopercepción competencial de los estudiantes, así como la valoración que realiza el profesorado implicado. Observamos que incorporar acciones (ApS) que comportan el diseño, desarrollo y evaluación de intervenciones reales en escuelas, aporta satisfacción por la mayor relación entre teoría y práctica y por el abordaje de contenidos profesionales relevantes; aumenta su percepción de autoeficacia competencial; sitúa el trabajo conjunto entre estudiantes y profesorado universitario en el marco de comunidades profesionales de indagación y permite aprendizajes alineados con las competencias docentes lingüístico-comunicativas que se reclaman en escuelas plurilingües e inclusivas.

Palabras Clave: formación inicial de maestros; educación infantil; aprendizaje-servicio; competencias lingüístico-comunicativas; relación teoría-práctica.

Améliorer les compétences d'enseignement dans le domaine linguistique et communicatif des futurs enseignants de l'École Maternelle se servant l'apprentissage par le service

Résumé: La formation initiale des éducateurs pour l'École Maternelle vise à former des élèves engagés dans leur profession et dans l'amélioration de l'enseignement. Pour y parvenir, on recherche des formules qui les impliquent dans des processus de réflexion, d'autorégulation et d'amélioration des compétences.Nous présentons les résultats partiels d'une recherche à méthodologie mixte qui analyse l'impact sur les élèves du diplôme d'Éducation Infantile d'une innovation dans laquelle un processus d'apprentissage par le service (ApS) est mis en œuvre pour apprendre des compétences d'enseignement linguistique et communicative tandis que élèves et enseignants collaborent avec des écoles des contextes défavorisés et dont le système éducatif vise à promouvoir le multilinguisme. Nous analysons l'évolution de la perception que les élèves ont d'eux-mêmes et de leurs compétences, ainsi que l'évaluation effectuée par les enseignants. L'intégration d'actions (ApS) qui impliquent la conception, le développement et l'évaluation d'interventions réelles dans les écoles, fournit une satisfaction plus grandes pour la relation théorie-pratique et pour l'approche du contenu professionnel; augmente leur perception de compétence et d'auto-efficacité; place le travail conjoint d'étudiants et professeurs dans le cadre des communautés professionnelles de recherche et permet un apprentissage en harmonie avec les aptitudes linguistiques et communicationnelles requises dans les écoles multilingues et inclusives.

Mots-clés: formation initiale des enseignants ; école maternelle; apprentissage par le service ; compétences linguistiques-communicatives; relation théorie-pratique.

Introduction: Statement of the Problem

Studying the pre-service training of childhood teachers plays a central role in improving the quality of teachers and, therefore, their educational influence. In fact, the PISA reports insists on the idea that, in conjunction with the sociocultural and socioeconomic status of parents and being an immigrant, access to childhood education is one of the factors that significantly affects performance at school.

Teacher-training programmes must include competencies that give students a greater understanding of their profession, of themselves and of the institutions where they will do their work (Jackson, 2016), and not only of child development, the content of the curriculum and the teaching strategies specific to this period.

In regard to these teaching strategies, teachers need to understand how linguistic-communicative competencies develop in children because they are the base of all learning and facilitate social inclusion. In fact, there is sufficient codified knowledge on how to develop them in the intercultural contexts that are such a feature of present-day society (Brown, 2001; Cummins, 2000; Morrison, 2007). In brief, teachers need to be made aware of how to use functional and communicative models in which the skills of oral expression, listening, reading and writing are indissociable, and parallel approaches are adopted to the oral and written codes to reinforce the skills of expression and comprehension inherent in all efficient communication (Cassany, Luna & Sanz, 2002; Teberosky, 2001).

In Catalonia (bilingual society), schools are legally required to have multilingual curricula from childhood education onwards and a large part of the childhood school population learn through their second or third languages in immersion programmes. So, teachers must have the competence to teach in L2. When multilingual programmes are implemented in underprivileged socioeconomic contexts they need not only to master the teaching methodology for learning L2s but also to understand the principles of interculturality and social equity that should be encouraged in classrooms and schools so that multilingualism can carried out with the guarantee of respect and social cohesion (Cochram-Smith, 2004; Tedick & Wesley, 2015)

University education in general and pre-service teacher training in particular seek how to provide future teachers, in this case of childhood education, with competencies that integrate theoretical and practical knowledge, and which become deep learning experiences (Cano, 2011). The professional competencies required by childhood and primary education teachers according to current regulations in our context are so-called complex competencies and, as such, are better learned in real contexts which forces pre-service teacher training programmes to find largely 'practical' academic scenarios in which teacher-student-school interaction plays a central role (Whitehead, 2009).

These scenarios have usually been exclusive or limited to the periods assigned to teaching practice, at least, in Spain. Even so, although the work-experience period allows students to immerse themselves in many of the teaching and non-teaching components of the competencies required by bachelor's degree students, it does not guarantee 'specialisation' in the numerous aspects necessary if a teacher is to be well trained.

Finding formulas that guarantee greater mastery of competencies require educational designs that increase student involvement (Barnacle & Dall'Alba, 2017). As stated by Taylor & Parsons (2011), principles such as interaction, exploration, relevance, constructivist instruction, and authentic, learning-centred assessment can make the difference in terms of student involvement. In this regard, service learning (SL) provides students with learning that combines theoretical and practical knowledge, and involves them in solving community challenges (Deeley, 2015).

This paper focuses on service learning in terms of how the subjects organise spaces for reflection in which lecturers and students assess their perceptions of self-efficacy and engage in processes of self-regulation and improvement in order to solve real, relevant problems (Zimmerman, 2008). Engaging in this sort of interaction throughout the degree, in close contact with university lecturers and schools has the following advantages:

- Students have their first experience of working in the profession (Putnam & Borko, 1997) which raises their awareness of the context and their potentialities.
- Students begin to construct their 'teacher agency'. They perceive themselves to be teachers and professionals who can commit to and carry out intentional changes aimed at increasing the quality of education in both their own practice and in teaching conditions. They will be able to do this only as long as they are given support throughout the programme and, of course, they mobilise certain personal qualities (Biesta, Priestley & Robinson, 2015)
- University teachers and teachers rethink their own teaching. They combine theoretical and practical knowledge, and encourage processes of reflexive practice and innovation that that help students to overcome burn out and routine (Zeichner & Liston, 1996)

For all of these reasons, one of the challenges for pre-service teaching training is to develop teaching competencies, fundamentally didactic but also psycholinguistic, sociocultural and organisational, so that children can develop linguistic and communicative competencies during childhood education. There is also some evidence to suggest that students have difficulties with the specific competencies that are the object of our analysis: in their bachelor's degree theses, the head of academic issues had detected their weaknesses on countless occasions. This was the main reason underlying this research-innovation project.

1. Research Design

1.1 Framework

This project took place on one of the campuses of *Universitat Rovira i Virgili*, between 2014 and 2016.

In general, the designs of the curriculum of the Bachelor's Degree in Childhood Education leads to fragmented knowledge, largely theoretical and far removed from professional reality. In addition, students ask for more activities connected to professional practice.

At our university there are two factors which help to connect students and schools: the framework agreement with the Educational Authority that promote training schools and the institutional adhesion to the Service-Learning Programme (SL), since 2012.

1.2 Definition of Objectives

The research project on which this study is based aimed to:

- Diagnose the students' perception of their teaching competencies for the linguistic-communicative skills of children (3-6) and the needs on this area of university lecturers and schools.
- Design SL pathways that focus on language-related teaching competencies, in which students, teachers and lecturers 'learn together' to find solutions to real situations.
- Create instruments for assessing satisfaction, learning, transfer and the impact of the SL-based learning experience.

1.3. Methodology

1.3.1. Participants in the SL:

- All the students who were on the Bachelor's Degree in Childhood Education (2014-15) registered on the subject "Teaching and Learning of Language and Reading-Writing": 2nd-year, 3rd-year, 4th-year (49, 27 and 48 students, respectively)
- The 2 university lecturers from the area of language and the Responsible for the Degree.
- 20 school teachers from 3 schools (500 pupils from childhood education and the first years of primary education)

2.3.2. Organization of the SL Experience

The students, in small work groups, design, develop and assess activities for pupils from the 3 schools and at the 3 levels of childhood education and initial levels of primary education under the supervision of the practising teachers and the university

lecturers. The activities were planned according the specific content of the teaching unit in each year:

- Oral expression in the second language (2nd)
- Reading and writing stages. Text types (3rd)
- Text composition. Love of reading (4th)

2.3.3. Analytical Instruments

Our study adopts a mixed-method approach to analyse the teaching innovation experience. The aim is to improve the competencies of the students and encourage them to reflect throughout the process. From the perspective of research, we have used qualitative and quantitative research instruments during the whole process, to collect information from students, university lecturers and school teachers.

This paper analyses the information collected in the questionnaires and the students' individual self-reports, as well as the self-reports of the lecturers.

The questionnaire deals with 21 linguistic-communicative teaching competencies in 4 separate blocks (oral expression, writing and reading, text types and love of reading). Students must rate their level of competence, state to what they attribute this level and indicate the way to improve it, by choosing 2 types of actions from a list of 4 (Theoretical foundation, Tasks in the classroom, Tasks outside the classroom and Work on personal characteristics)

In addition, both students and lecturers were asked to develop self-reports to collect, in an open manner and in their own words, their perceptions on this subject.

The students were asked about: which teaching competencies they perceive as acquired (conceptual, procedural and attitudinal); how they have felt about their evolution as a teacher, the teamwork carried out and the SL project (organization, advice in class, reception in the school, and appraisal and overall opportunity of the project). Finally, their opinion on the role of schools and teachers in the pre-service training of future teachers.

A similar reflexion was asked to the university lecturers (in a guided self-report).

3. Results

3.1. Evolution of Students' Perception of their Own Competencies in Specific Linguistic-Communicative Teaching Content

The analysis focuses on the students' evolution throughout the experience and essentially compares the responses obtained from the initial and final questionnaires.

The perception that the students have of their own level of competence in the 4 content blocks evolves positively (see graph 1)

Graph 1: Students' perception of their level of competence - OVERALL
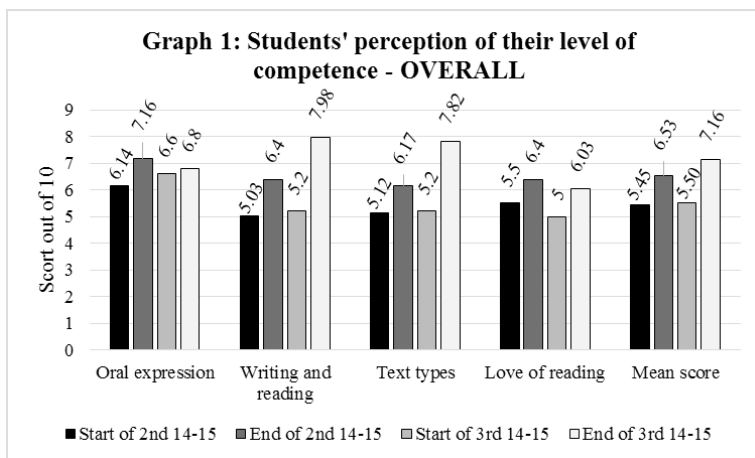
As is logical, the specific content that is worked on in each year is seen to have an effect. So, in 2nd-year, progress is greater on aspects related to oral expression; and in 3rd-year progress is greater in writing and reading, and text types. The competence in developing a love of reading in children increases only slightly in both groups (content specific to the 4th-year)

- **Competencies involved in the teaching of oral expression** in which there is an increase are: designing, implementing and assessing strategies of 2nd-language oral expression in contexts of drama, and to practise oral language. They also feel better prepared in theoretical foundations.

- **Competencies involved in teaching writing and reading** are one of the blocks that show the biggest increase, especially in: diagnosing the level of competence in the reading and writing of children; designing, implementing and assessing of activities for different levels and theoretical foundations

- **Competencies in teaching different text types** (description, narration, poetry, instructions, etc.) also have and strong increase. Although it should be pointed out that they perceive that they are less competent to assess the efficacy of specific strategies.

- **Competencies required to stimulate a love of reading.** It should be pointed out that these competencies are dealt with in the context of the classroom library. It is interesting to see that there is a slight improvement overall (by about one point) in the perception they have of their own competence. However, the greatest increase is in the acquisition of theoretical knowledge.

When they are asked to explain **what they attribute this perception**, answers to the initial and final questionnaire are quite different depending on the course. Graph 2

summarizes the attributions and shows the importance of the process followed at the University and by this project in particular.

Graph 2: How have you acquired your level of competence?
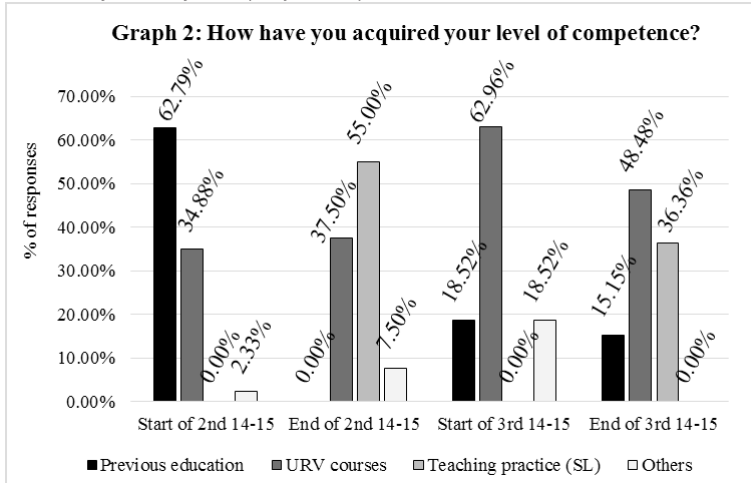
Most of 2nd-year students initially state their **education before they accessed university** as main reason for their competence level but, in the final questionnaire, most of them **change to their university training** (27%) or **the SL teaching practice** (55%)

However, in the initial questionnaire given to the 3rd-year group a high percentage (63%) state that the main reason is **their university training**, while in the final questionnaire, this figure decreases to 48% and grows the recognition of **the SL teaching practice** (36%)

In general, the **actions that have improved** (or **would improve)** their competencies show few changes between the initial and the final questionnaire or depending on the course (see graph 3)

Graph 3: Actions that would improve your level of competence - % OVERALL
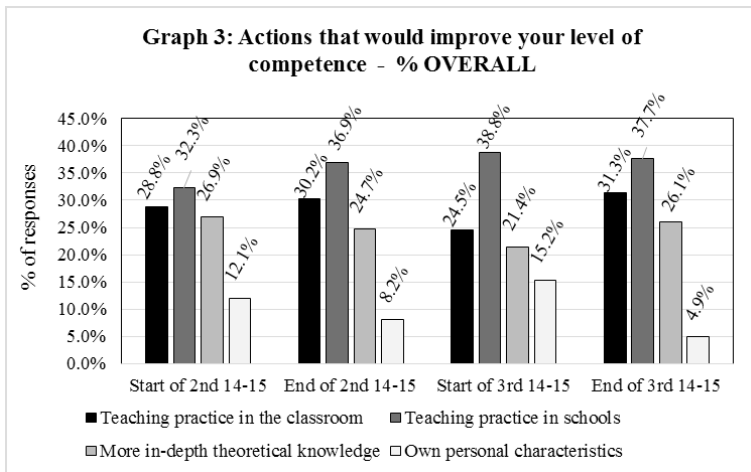
After the SL experience, from the actions that students consider suitable to improve their linguistic-communicative teaching competencies, we remark:

- **teaching practice in the classroom** is the only one that grows in both groups. In other words, work done in class is considered to be valuable.
- **teaching practice in schools** increases in 2nd-year group but it decreases in 3rd-year group.
- **more in-depth theoretical knowledge** increases in 3rd -year group but it decreases in 2nd -year group
- **to work on their own personal characteristics** decreases considerably in both groups.

3.2. Keys of the Process of Designing, Implementing and Assessing Actions in the Service-Learning Experience from of Students Perspective

This section provides a summary of the students' initial and final self-reports. The analysis of the days just before they start their teaching practice in the classroom but after all the classroom input, with their colleagues and lecturer, reveal which features of this input, teaching practice and appraisal are for them the most important.

As far as the **teaching competencies they perceive they have acquired**, they are unanimous in pointing to the key scientific and technical concepts of the subjects. They reveal that they have acquired didactic and pedagogical teaching competencies in terms of how to act towards the pupils in childhood education and their own identity and teaching style:

Golden rule: Before you schedule, assess (Final self-report, 3rd V.F.)

> *I must be open and flexible; I must have empathy (…) The teacher should not judge them but help them to have a successful educational experience. And as future teachers, we must be curious and take the initiative to cope with this task* (Initial self-report, 3rd M.B.)

There are also numerous allusions to the principles of constructivism (both concepts and procedures) or technical aspects (understanding educational objectives, observing, assessing, adapting activities to the children's needs) and axiological issues such as reflecting on practice and the processes of literacy teaching, being sensitive to the needs of context in the planning of the whole teaching process (flexibility, creativity, appropriating resources, be available, show affection and trust):

> *what you want them to learn, how you are going to focus it, making materials, rehearsing, putting it into practice and assessing it (…) creating our own guidelines* (Initial self-report, 3rd A.S.)

Half of the students say that at first they felt insecure because they did not master the content, or know the children and teachers at the schools. They also suffered from 'stage fright' although their commitment to the SL programme and their high expectations helped them to get over it. They all completed the experience with feelings of security, satisfaction and motivation which they attributed largely to the lecturer's help in preparing and providing resources, and the fact that they thought the subject to be 'very interesting'. And not only did they think the content was interesting, they also thought it was understandable, accessible and well-illustrated by the graph of the learning stages and by examples of the items or words from tests.

The relationship between theory and practice established in the project also lies at the basis of this feeling of security:

> *It allows the students to acquire the competencies more easily* (Final self-report, 2nd C.E.)
> *This project is what we always wanted* (Initial self-report, 3rd A.T.)
> *Practice on top of theory is one of our concerns* (Initial self-report, 3rd S.C.)
> *Practice is the most powerful way to learn after a good dose of theory* (Final self-report, 3rd V.F.).

They also attribute their high level of satisfaction to the support they received by being part of a working team, which meant that their interventions involved the collaboration of others, and were more creative and of better quality than if they had worked

individually. Team work, in all the stages of preparation, implementation and final reflection, is well valued by all and described as a highly positive and enriching experience:

> *…we complemented one another and learned from our peers (…) The SL project made us aware of diversity and promoted tolerance and adaptation* (Final self-report, 2nd A.C.)

More specifically, they point out that their satisfaction with the experience was because they pooled their resources, complemented one another, got to know one another's strong points, and were creative and enjoyed working as a team.

Of particular note is that they all not only value the assistance given by the team with the preparation of their classes, with the presentation in the classroom, with the children and teachers, but also with the *final reflections that help us to see how and how much we have learned* (Final self-report, 2nd M.S.).

The students unanimously rate the SL project very satisfactorily in terms of how they were treated by the school, the teachers and the children, and how they were advised by the teachers:

fits our needs (Initial self-report, 2nd M.C.), *gives us more responsibility* (Initial self-report, 2nd C.E.). Other opinions about the SL project are that it shows how a school works, makes students aware of the day-to-day difficulties, teaches techniques and encourages team work.

However, they ask for greater coordination with the schools because some teachers *are too managerial* or *had already worked on the activities that had been agreed on for the SL programme* (Final self-report, T.M.). They demand more information about the children and the syllabuses, and an adjustment of the university timetable.

In this regard, they believe that the role that in-service teachers should play the pre-service training of future teachers is the one that they have played in the project: to allow students to understand the relationship between theory and practice because *you learn a lot*, *theory is not enough* and *they open doors for students* (Final self-report, 3rd M.B.).

3.3. Results from Lecturers Perspective

The analysis of the reports by the lecturers directly involved shows that, as far as teaching competencies are concerned, there is a three-fold change in both attitudes and procedures: students move from a more lecture-type methodology to a more participatory methodology, they are more aware of the need to contextualise teaching-learning processes, and they understand the need to prepare for the transition from theory to practice before they embark on it:

I have had to add more practical aspects and for the next year I think it would be a good idea to do a role play to prepare for work in the classroom (final self-report 3rd-year lecturer).

On the other hand, the challenge of working with schools and setting up the teaching practice for students led to a learning experience:

the management of and mediation with groups, (…) with professionals from outside the university, and attention to diversity (because of the work done with my students and the work they did with the children in the schools) (Final self-report, 2nd-year lecturer).

The situation seems to have required more practice and greater contact with an educational system that was largely unknown, and "experiential" methodologies to complement the "declarative" methodologies that used to be the only ones available and thought to be quite sufficient. It also requires the subject to acquire new features so that students can 'enter into action' and this has organizational consequences that need to be catered for.

Both lecturers regard the SL project as a good way for students to acquire theory with a more practical, useful and attractive approach. Even so, at the beginning, they were under some stress because the start of the project practically coincided with the start of the academic year and this had a considerable effect on the initial stages. Particularly, the 2nd-year lecturer had more students to deal with which complicated the organization and involved a really dense schedule. This, in combination with other external factors, was an obstacle to good progress and had a negative effect on her satisfaction. These problems were dealt with as best as we could and prompted us to take measures to improve things in the following academic years.

The overall expectations about the project were high. The idea was not only *for the students to put into practice what they encountered in the theory sessions* but also for the students to cope with the difficulties of practice: *They come across the difficulties that can arise when working on a particular activity with particular pupils and they have to find solutions* (Initial self-report, 3rd-year lecturer). This same idea was confirmed at the end of the experience insofar as *the students have seen the influence of the school and the characteristics of the pupils* so *the concepts have taken deeper root and, because they have prepared specific material for particular pupils, they have had to adapt to the situation before and during the SL experience* (Final self-report, 3rd-year lecturer).

Finally, when asked about the roles of the schools taking part in the project and their teaching staff, they say that they have come across teachers who get very involved and

who have guided and advised the students in an attempt to make a success of things. But they have also found other teachers who attached little importance to the project:

> *When some students arrived at the school they had been assigned to they found that what they should have been working on had already been done. So something we have to improve next year is the agreements between the school teachers and the University* (Final self-report, 2nd-year lecturer).

Conclusions

The information analysed shows that students have a sense of considerable professional commitment to these educational contexts insofar as they regard SL as a service to the children, school teachers and schools with whom they have shared the experience (Deeley, 2015; Mbah, 2016). In addition, it suggests that the design of the SL experience has considerable professionalizing potential given the fact that, among other things, self-perception has an effect on self-efficacy and motivation (Zimmerman, 2008). This professionalization can be seen in the following aspects:

- The students who took part in the SL experience improved their perception of their own competencies. In some cases, these self-perception decrease, which we can interpret as an awareness of their own limitations and as yet another validation of the progress made in the blocks of competencies that are worked on in the subject.
- Their lecturers (involved by preparing, monitoring and assessing their interventions in the schools) consider that the learning was more contextualized and deeper than in other years (Escalié & Chaliès, 2016).
- The academic head and the research group conclude that the students show signs in their written work of having acquired a greater knowledge of the linguistic-communicative competencies and the educational challenges in the school environments in which they have worked.

As has been seen, the blocks of linguistic-communicative competencies worked on in each subject are the ones in which they make most progress according to the perceptions of the students, although all the others are affected because of the cross-sectional nature of language skills (Cassany, Luna & Sanz, 2002; Cummins, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 2013). They seem to feel that they have a greater mastery not only of the specific teaching competencies but also of the general competencies of theory, design, implementation and assessment. Even though many of them had encountered familiar concepts, they needed "new teaching competencies" because these were used with a different end in mind.

Particularly important for the students is the role of "theory" as necessary, rigorous preparation at the service of good practice. In this regard, the relationship between theory and practice could be considerably benefited by including in pre-service teacher training projects that put students into touch with schools, classrooms, children and teachers with whom they can take part in real-life interventions. The conceptual weakness of future teachers is on the international agendas as a challenge that needs to be addressed (Biesta, Priestley & Robinson, 2015). In this regard, we also feel that we should stress the role of the technical-professional contents that have been chosen as central elements to the SL project, as technical concepts and teaching procedures that are totally aligned with cognitive and social constructivism, and with the needs schools have for teaching quality. As the students have shown, the interest, articulation and illustration of the contents –in brief, their accessibility and value– mean that they are 'admired', regarded as a prized asset that encourages students to construct them and 'master' them. The importance given to the contents to be learned is the root cause of the students' involvement (Marcelo, 2009; Taylor & Parsons, 2011).

Learning is attributed not only to the teaching practice and the theoretical preparation carried out in class with the lecturer, but also to the feed-back and feed-forward given by the same lecturer in the preparatory sessions, the work done in the school, and the completion of the compulsory follow-up tasks designed so that students could record and reflect on their experiences (Escalié & Chaliès, 2016). Self-regulation is a fundamental part of developing competencies and it requires processes of awareness raising, of which academic writing – in the case of university students – is particularly important (Fullana, Pallisera, Colomer, Fernández-Peña & Pérez-Burriel, 2016). The type of academic writing that students have been asked to produce resembles the processes of subjective evaluation of perception and the self-evaluation of learning (Boekaerts, Pintrich & Zeidner, 2000; Boud & Molloy, 2013).

Team work is also important because it supports and constructs competencies; it involves cooperative activities that require team members to work together to complete the tasks. Several authors have underlined the importance of peer support in developing professional teaching agency (Barnacle & Dall'Alba, 2017; Talvitie, Peltokallio & Mannisto, 2000).

We would like to finish by stressing the importance of the processes of support in pre-service teacher training –in this case of childhood education– which encourage the self-regulation of students' competencies by means of collaborative experiences which involve a wider range of agents and open up the academic and professional contexts so that they can work together. As is suggested by many researchers (Biesta, Priestley & Robinson, 2015; Cochram-Smith, 2004; Jackson, 2016; Whitehead, 2009), this sort of experience has a considerable impact on their subsequent ability to be teachers committed to their own capacity of agency.

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