



7th International Conference on Intercultural Education Education, Health and ICT for a Transcultural World, EDUHEM 2016, 15-17 June 2016, Almeria, Spain

An analysis of teaching practices among newly qualified teachers working in diverse classrooms

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Abstract

This study examines the evolution in the teaching performance of 20 newly qualified teachers and their perception of the difficulties they faced during their first three years. Results show that across years, teachers were better prepared in some dimensions than in others. Teaching diverse students was the most frequent difficulty, which they attempted to overcome by seeking ideas from colleagues and the Internet to diversify their teaching and learning strategies. These results are useful for orienting the strengthening initial teacher education and for the design of induction programs.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of EDUHEM 2016.

Keywords: novice teachers; beginning teachers; newly qualified teachers; diverse classroom; workplace learning;

1. Introduction

In recent years, in universities and in public policies in Chile, newly qualified teachers (NQTs) have become a subject of interest. This interest reflects questions regarding their level of preparedness to implement quality-teaching processes in heterogeneous classrooms. New teachers are in a period of transition between initial training and professional life. The difficulties a new teacher must overcome during the first years have been associated with feelings of underpreparedness to be able to perform adequately and successfully (Alliaud, 2004; Gorichon, Ruffinelli, Pardo,

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& Cisternas, 2015; Marcelo, 2008, 2009; Veenman, 1984). Feiman-Nemser (2000) states that new teachers are both learners and teachers, considering they must learn about their students, the institution, the families, the school curriculum, and must also teach and take on the responsibility for students' learning. Successfully resolving these demands, which seem difficult to face simultaneously, will pave the way in the process of becoming an expert teacher (Britton, Paine, Pimm, & Raizen, 2003).

Studies have identified the difficulties NQTs encounter during their first years, aiming to understand the gradual loss of innovation and the rapid adherence to traditional teaching practices entrenched in their schools. Based on the literature review, Marcelo (2009) identifies a set of recurrent problems. These include classroom management, internalisation of institutional regulations, working with peers, relationships with parents/guardians, and student behaviour. The review by Ávalos, Carlson, and Aylwin (2004) identifies other problems faced by NQTs in Chile, such as lack of time for lesson preparation, a high number of students per class, poor quality infrastructure, and lack of materials.

Some studies have grouped the difficulties of new teachers into categories: personal, pedagogical (classroom management and direction of the teaching/learning process and evaluation), and institutional (regulations and interaction with different school actors) (Huberman, Gonauer, & Marti, 1993; Thompson, 2007). In a study of primary teachers in Chile, Cisternas (2011) states that the difficulties NQTs face can be separated by their nature, level of complexity, and depth, depending on three factors: a) the opportunities provided by the initial training to engage in authentic teaching experiences, b) the characteristics of the school, and c) the personal characteristics of the NQT.

A study carried out in Chile by Contreras et al. (2013a) with secondary NQTs found that time is the most evident problem. They have too much work and little time to do all the tasks demanded of them, and they do not always feel prepared to take on those tasks. Not knowing the educational context in which they are working and assignment of complex tasks and functions, with inconsistent support from the school, represent additional problems. These NQTs stated that it is necessary to have a support network, irrespective of where it comes from. The schools, universities or government do not provide formal mentoring programs for NQTs in Chile.

The current study broadens Contreras et al. (2013b) study by analysing the evolution in NQTs' teaching performance during the first three years of employment. Through classroom observations, changes and continuities in the level of performance were examined as to classroom management, direction of the teaching/learning process, and the evaluation of students' learning. In interviews participants were asked about the difficulties in the process of integration into the school, ascertaining changes, and continuities in their concerns during the three years. This longitudinal perspective allows us to understand the performance for which more experience is not sufficient, thus suggesting the need for a more systemic process of guidance.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

To recruit participants, the directors of teacher education programs in six different universities in Chile were contacted to invite them to participate in the study. After they agreed contact information of their 2013/2014 graduates was requested. From that list, a total of 20 teachers agreed to participate in the study. Among them, 10 were working in primary schools--3 men and 7 women. The other 10 worked in secondary schools--4 men and 6 women. Of these teachers, 6 worked in public schools (municipal), 12 in state-subsidised private schools and 2 in private schools fully funded by parents.

2.2. Instruments and procedures

To assess teaching, NQTs were observed by two researchers during two or three 90-minute classes, one for each year of the study. Each class was video-recorded to be later analysed and rated by two judges. The judges rated the performance independently using the IOC class observation rubrics on a scale with five levels (see Table 1; Good et al., 2006 adapted for Chile by Contreras et al., 2013b). The IOC instrument is organised into three dimensions: D1: classroom management; D2: implementation of teaching, with three sub-dimensions – activities and resources; interaction in the teaching/learning activities; and content management; and D3: evaluation.

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