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Evolution of the Concept of the Teaching Profession in Secondary School Teacher Training

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Abstract

A key moment in the construction of Secondary School teachers' professional identity takes place during the Master's Degree that qualifies and enables them to be teachers for this educational stage. Thus, one of the main objectives of the initial training for future teachers is to spark a shift in their preconceptions regarding teachers.

The objective of this study is to analyze the shift in their professional image undergone by students in the Master's Degree in Compulsory Secondary Education, Upper Secondary Education, Vocational Training and Language Teaching in the Faculty of Psychology and Education at the University of Deusto.

Eighty-six students –graduating classes of 2013 and 2014– of the Master's Degree in Secondary Education Teacher Training took part in this study. They completed a questionnaire consisting of a series of open-ended questions regarding teacher identity.

Results indicate that the initial teacher training sparks a shift in the conception future teachers have of the teaching profession. The Master's Degree has helped them get to know teachers' professional profile and to become aware of the complexity involved in their performance, because of the number of duties and their difficulty. Initial training has allowed them to recognize the importance of the teachers' role and to change their professional concept.

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1. Introduction

The development of a professional identity is important for the training of teachers in all educational levels, but it is paramount for those in Secondary Education, as Spanish secondary school teachers are university graduates in disciplines unrelated to the field of education.

Students enter the Master's Degree with an image or idea of what a teacher is; an idea wrought by a lifetime in academia. This professional image is born from their own experiences as students in primary and middle school and it is further shaped by their years in Secondary School and University. Thus, future Secondary School teachers have each their own personal and academic history, during which they have gradually created their own conception of what being a teacher entails, which Rivas (2014) named the "sedimented knowledge of the profession". This professional image predating the Master's Degree will have a major bearing in the shaping of their professional identity.

This sedimented knowledge of the profession must be compared and adjusted in accordance to what they learn, live and observe during their Master's Degree. Therefore, training for future Secondary School teachers must necessarily include working on their professional image, in order for them to build their own professional identity, which will make Master's students into teachers (Tiana, 2011).

The curriculum for the Master's Degree is crucial, because it is closely linked to the construction of the teachers' identity (Ottesen, 2007; Poulou, 2007; de la Torre & Arias, 2007). It is governed by Order ECI/3858/2007, from December 27; the educational goals on which it is based foster the evolution of the students' concept of the teaching profession.

The Master's Degree is structured around four stages of training:

1. The first stage focuses on the pedagogical aspects, encompassing subjects belonging to the field of education: Learning and Personality Development, Educational Processes and Contexts, and Society, Family and Education.
2. The second stage is closely linked to the students' own areas of specialization. At this stage, learning focuses on how to teach the disciplines in each specialism. The subjects that define this stage are: Learning and Teaching, Specialty Training Complements and Educational Innovation and Introduction to /Educational/ Research.
3. The third stage comprises the Practicum, i.e. supervised training internships. First contact with professional teaching experience consists of an internship period under the supervision of an experienced Secondary School teacher. This external internship, which is carried out in schools, provides an opportunity to reflect on teaching (Zabalza, 2003) and to implement both learnings and preconceptions regarding the profession (Rosales, 2014). Through this Practicum, future teachers begin their professional career via a process of teacher socialization (Avalos, 2009).
4. The fourth stage in the training period encompasses the Master's Final Project. It provides an opportunity for the students to show their skill level regarding the competencies established in the profile.

Other contextual aspects such as classmates, lecturers and the educational institution itself play a role, along with the Curriculum, in the construction of their professional identity as teachers (Ávila & Cortés, 2011).

Once students graduate from the Master's Degree in Secondary School Teaching, there are other factors – professional practice (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009), the participation in educational teams, reflection on their own practice, and further training– that foster a continuous process of construction of their professional identity. With all their empirical knowledge (Tardif, 2004) future professors develop their own professional identity, which will undergo a lifelong process of reshaping (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). However, at this time they are in the stage of becoming teachers, in a process that starts by picturing themselves as teachers (Young & Erikson, 2011).

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