



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Infant, primary and secondary teachers' conceptions of learning and teaching and their relation to educational variables

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### Abstract

It has been established that teachers' conceptions of learning and teaching influence their instructional practices. Several authors maintain that these conceptions are based on certain implicit assumptions that give rise to different theories. Our view is that people have multiple alternative theories which they use depending on the context and the demands of the task. The main purpose of this study was to find out whether such representational plurality exists in teachers' conceptions and, if it does, whether this plurality can lead to the identification of different representational profiles. We were also interested in studying some of the teaching practice variables that might influence the nature of the representational profiles. Our results, obtained by means of a dilemma questionnaire answered by 1074 teachers from different educational levels and knowledge domains and with different ranges of experience, are consistent with the assumption of representational plurality, as they show that the same teacher may hold different conceptions that set up a conceptions profile. Moreover, the combination of the responses in each profile is not random. Teachers at the more advanced levels and with more teaching experience manifested more traditional conceptions. Furthermore, some knowledge domains were associated with certain conception profiles.

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**PALABRAS CLAVE**

Concepciones de aprendizaje;  
 Concepciones de enseñanza;  
 Perfiles de concepciones;  
 Teorías implícitas;  
 Educación primaria;  
 Educación secundaria

## Concepciones de enseñanza y aprendizaje de profesores de infantil, primaria y secundaria y la relación con las variables educativas

**Resumen**

Se ha comprobado que las concepciones de aprendizaje y enseñanza de los profesores influyen en su práctica docente. Varios autores sostienen que estas concepciones se basan en ciertos supuestos implícitos que dan lugar a distintas teorías. Nuestra visión es que la gente dispone de multitud de teorías alternativas que pueden utilizar en función del contexto y las exigencias de la tarea. El objetivo principal del presente estudio es averiguar si esta pluralidad representativa existe en las concepciones de los profesores y, de ser así, si puede conducir a la identificación de distintos perfiles representacionales. Nos interesamos, asimismo, por el estudio de algunas de las variables de la práctica docente que pudieran influir en la naturaleza de dichos perfiles. Nuestros resultados – obtenidos mediante un cuestionario de dilemas realizado por 1074 profesores de distintos niveles educativos, ámbitos de conocimiento y experiencia– coinciden con la suposición de la pluralidad representativa, pues revelan que el mismo profesor podría forjar concepciones distintas que conforman un perfil de concepciones. Además, la combinación de respuestas en cada perfil no es aleatoria. Los profesores de niveles más altos y los más experimentados manifestaron unas concepciones más tradicionales. Igualmente, algunos campos de conocimiento se asociaron a perfiles de concepciones concretos.

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The educational research accumulated in the past few decades has convincingly shown that if we want students to achieve better learning, teaching practices must adopt more complex formats in which teaching is not confined to the more or less elaborate transmission of established knowledge, but takes the students' knowledge and capabilities into account in order to modify them, foster cooperation through more dialogical learning spaces and promote metacognition and self-regulation by students of their own learning. With their manifold variants and theoretical interpretations, these fundamental assumptions of the so-called constructivist approach have most undoubtedly had a notable influence on the educational policies implemented in different countries in order to bring about the changes our societies need.

However, the studies conducted on the educational practices and the teaching and learning methods continue to show a more or less general predominance of more traditional teaching practices, based essentially on the transmission of knowledge to pupils by the teacher. Thus, following an examination of teaching practices in 23 countries, the Teaching and Learning International Survey (OECD, 2009, p. 88) noted that "in the classroom, teachers in all countries put greater emphasis on ensuring that learning is well structured than on student-oriented activities which give them more autonomy. Both of these teaching practices are emphasized over enhanced learning activities such as project work. This pattern is true in every country". Similar results have been found by research looking more carefully at the teaching and learning practices in very different domains, such as mathematics (e.g., Bar Tikva, 2010), science (García & Mateos, 2013; Porlán & Martín del Pozo, 2004), reading and writing (Mateos, Villalón, De Dios, & Martín, 2007; Mateos, Solé, Martín, Cuevas, Miras, & Castells, 2014) and even music learning and teaching (López-Íñiguez, Pozo, & De Dios, 2014; Marín, Scheuer, & Pérez Echeverría, 2013).

Even though there are certainly many other causes that help explain the gap between the theoretical models upheld in educational research and the actual teaching and learning practices in the classroom, one of the most important factors hindering the passage from theory to practice is that those constructivist assumptions briefly sketched above often come into conflict with the teachers' own beliefs and assumptions about what their job should be, and which is the best way to foster learning in their students. As a consequence, teachers have deeply rooted –often more implicit than explicit conceptions– from their own experiences, first as students and then as teachers, rather than their theoretical training, about what society expects from them and the best way to achieve these goals. Several studies have shown the influence of teachers' conceptions on their instructional practices (e.g., Fernández, Tuset, Pérez, & García, 2013; Olafson & Schraw, 2006; Trumbull, Scarano, & Bonney, 2006) and the relationships between these same conceptions and students' learning beliefs and practices (Bar Tikva, 2010; López-Íñiguez & Pozo, 2014; Mateos & Solé, 2012) but also the differences between teachers' and students' beliefs (Könings, Seidel, Brand-Gruwel, & van Merriënboer, 2014). Different studies have shown also that teachers' conceptions are very often not only far from the constructivism which dominates teaching and learning theory (e.g., Bautista, Pérez Echeverría, & Pozo, 2010; Rivero, Azcárate, Porlán, Martín del Pozo, & Harres, 2011), but are even incompatible with some of its assumptions (Case, 1996; López-Íñiguez, et al., 2014; Pozo, Scheuer, Mateos, Pérez Echeverría, Martín del Pozo, Mateos, Martín & De la Cruz, 2006).

Thus, we assume that in order to change educational practices it is necessary to change teachers' conceptions and beliefs about how to foster learning, which means we need to investigate in detail what these conceptions are, how they are organized and what variables affect them. Concretely, in

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