ASSESSMENT OF PLACEMENT CENTRES FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE STUDENTS OF THE DEGREE IN EDUCATION

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Abstract - The questionnaire "Practicum at school tutoring: assessment from the perspective of students in education" is designed so that students in the Degrees in Infant Education and Primary Education value the tutoring received at the placement centres during the training periods that are carried out in the schools. It has been applied to a sample of 379 students. The results show a high level of satisfaction from the students in all dimensions, which encourage us to continue strengthening the relationships between the university and the placement centre. It also indicates the need to consider, in the design and planning of the placement modules, the contributions of all the agents involved in this process, especially the students, as the main recipients in the development of a culture of evaluation.

Keywords - Evaluation, placement, degree in education, teachers-to-be, school, high education.

I. INTRODUCTION

The changes in the conception of university education involve the consolidation of the evaluation practices as a formative element that must be integrated in the learning process (Bryan and Clegg, 2006; Irons, 2008). In this regard, the evaluation is intended to encourage forms of assessment that assign the student a role in the generation of feedback (Nicol, 2010). However, when we refer to evaluation and the involvement of students in assessment processes, we do not mean exclusively a self-regulatory and training practice for students themselves—studied among others by Boekaerts, Pintrich and Zeidner (2000)—, but to make them aware of the their own level of competence, of how they solve the tasks and the about strengths that must be reinforced and the weaknesses that need to be corrected in order to face future learning situations.

The modalities of participatory evaluation must assign greater share of responsibility to the students. Therefore, the university student must also be able to evaluate their own learning processand to assess in a coherent, rigorous and responsible manner other educational agents that influence in his or her education. According to authors such as Segers and Dochy (2006), some of the competences that we have to develop in university education would be the achievement of reflective judgments and the development of critical thinking. From the perspective of teachers-to-be training, the participation of university students in evaluation processes will facilitate the acquisition and development of these competencies (Liu and Carless, 2006).

Studies such as those by Hevia Artime and González Riaño (2007) on the methodological approach to get to know the students' perception of the Practicum; those of Latorre (2007) on the the future teachers systems of beliefs and expectations about the university professionaland practical training, before and after their placement; or those of Molina et al. (2007) and González Riaño and Hevia Artime (2011) thatstablish as one of their main conclusions the need to consider, in the design and planning of the Practicum modules, the contributions of the agents involved in this process, especially the students, as main recipients.

For the students, the Practicum constitutes a unique and positively valued experience (García, 2007), due to both the opportunity of being able to witness the real work of the teachers in the classroom, with other teachers, with the families and the school board, as well as by the empathy that often is created with the classroom teacher and the children. But, despite the positive impact that the student has when in contact with the school setting, the Practicum must involve learning new skills and competences, and therefore requires careful planning and rigorous monitoring and evaluation.

For all this, the Practicum tutor from the schoolis a key element of pre-professional practice and training, providing a procedural and attitudinal scaffold as well as an experiential framework where students can place their own experiences, understand them and analyse them. Thus, the tutors work like guides that facilitate the entrance of the students in the profession. Despite this, there have been weaknesses in the information that is transmitted to the student about the progression in the acquisition of their teaching abilities and the low discrimination of the evaluation of the students. For this reason, we need to know, as a complement to the tutors' views, and from the perspective of the improvement of university quality and constructive criticism, the vision of the student about his or her expectations, perceptions and assessmentof the school placement, an approach already taken by López and Romero (2004) and Aparicio (2007).

The current increase in the evaluation actions in education implies that the culture of evaluation is gradually being installed (Murillo and Román, 2008).

In addition, according to authors such as Segers and Dochy (2001), some of the competences that we have to develop in university education would be the capacity for creative problem solving, the formulation of original questions, as well as being able to make reflective judgments, the development of critical thinking or the promotion of autonomous learning. Furthermore, it should be taken into account that Bologna placed the student at the centre of the educational system and this has to be translated into a real and effective presence of students in those forums where decisions that affect their educational process are taken (Pañellas, Alguacil, Boqué and Ávila, 2011 and Pañellas, Boqué, Alguacil and Ávila, 2012).

Under the previous considerations we understand, following GessaPerera (2011), that the evaluation of the learning process carried out by the students themselves is a particularly relevant variable, depending, of course, on the validity and reliability allowed by its recognition in the educational field.

Therefore, it is interesting to take advantage of the excellent opportunity given by the Practicum so that students value the tutorial action of the school, which will allow them to recognize what has affected them personally and what they have changed as a result of the placement period (Zabalza, 2011). And this assessment is important because it has to do with the organization and the work climate in the school, with the welcome to the school received by the student and with the guidance and follow-up of the learning process, all of them key elements to have into account in the relationship school-university and in the design of the educational plan of the modules of Practicum.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research focuses on knowing and analysing the level of student satisfaction of the degrees in education, with respect to the tutoring of the Practicum based on their placement at school.Methodologically, it is grounded on a quantitative, descriptive design, based on a questionnaire aimed at students of the Degrees in Early Childhood Education and in Primary Education, whose students are placed at schools during intensive periods of time.

Participants

The sample is made up of students of the Degrees in Early Childhood Education and in Primary Education from Ramon Llull University-FPCEE Blanquerna. The subjects of this sample respond to a questionnaire that has been administered online. Of the students enrolled in the Practicum, 379 students answered the questionnaire, which represent 56% of the population.

Instrument

The choices of responses to the survey are arranged according to the Likert Scale, from 1 to 4, with 1 being very little, 2 being a little, 3 being somewhat and 4 being a lot. There is also a section in which students can complement their quantitative answers with qualitative reflections regarding their assessment of internship training. Four variables were considered: v1, academic year (second or third); v2, degree program (Early Childhood Education or Primary Education); v3, type of school hosting the internship (private or state- subsidized school, public school or municipal school); and v4, location of the school (Barcelona city or other municipalities of the province of Barcelona). The instrument was designed for this research and validated by experts.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Regarding the student questionnaire, the results are displayed in table 1.

Table 1. Students' assessment on their school placement

Dimensions	Percentage				Mean	Standard deviation
	1	2	3	4		
1. Did the organization and working environment help you to successfully complete your internship?	1,8%	5,3%	32,7%	60,2%	3,51	0,684
2. Was the reception you were given satisfactory and did it help you settle into your school and your classroom?	1,3%	6,3%	21,6%	70,7%	3,62	0,666
3. Did the teacher in your classroom appropriately monitor your activities?	2,4%	7,4%	28,5%	61,7%	3,50	0,736
4. Did the teacher in your classroom satisfactorily guide and monitor your learning	2,4%	10,6%	28,8%	58,3%	3,43	0,775

process?						
5. Did the teacher in your classroom give you regular reports on your performance in the internship and provide guidance on areas with need for improvement?	7,9%	17,2%	31,1%	43,8%	3,11	0,958

We observe that the score that reaches a higher value in all the items is 4, exceeding 50% in the first four items, which indicates the high appraisal that students make of the organization of their school placement, reception at the centre and in the classroom, and follow-up, guidance and evaluation by the tutor. This statement is also supported by the values of the arithmetical mean, which in all cases is higher than 3. However, score 3 would collect about a quarter of the responses. This result indicates that, despite the level of satisfaction is high, about 25% of students considered that there are improvements to be done.

In order to analyse if the students have similar opinions regarding the different dimensions of the tutoring of their training period in the school, we have studied the correlations between the evaluated items that we present in the table 2.

Table 2. Correlations between the items in the students' questionnaire

Dimensions	1	2	3	4	5
1	---	0,623	0,540	0552	0,436
2	---	------	0,513	0,525	0,422
3	---	------	-----	0,808	0,648
4	---	-----	-----	-----	0,722
5	---	-----	-----	-----	------

All correlations are significant at 0.01 (bilateral)

Regarding the results of the correlations in table 2, we find that all are significant and indicate a fairly high correlation, since they approximate or exceed 0.5. We emphasize what is given among the students' assessment of the follow-up of the activities by the classroom tutor and the orientation and follow-up of the learning process for this tutor, which reaches a value of 0.808.

On the other hand, the organization and the work environment or the welcome in the centre show a lower correlation with regard to the information that the tutor provides to the student about their development of the practices. This could be indicative of certain differences between the elements provided by the centre in the placement, in general, and those provided by the tutor, in particular.

Regarding variable 1, the academic year, we perceived significant differences for items 1, 3 and 5. Third-year students, who complete a longer internship period than those in their second year, give higher scores to the organization and work environment, the monitoring by the classroom teacher and the assessment and information on areas for need for improvement than do second year students.

With respect to variable 2, the degree program, we didn't perceive any significant differences between Early Childhood and Primary Education students in any of the items on the survey.

Nor does the type of educational centre influenced students' responses, with the exception of item 5, for which the results show that in the opinion of the students teachers from municipal schools did a better job of informing them as to their performance in the internship and the areas they needed to improve than did teachers in state-subsidized, private or public schools, as is apparent from the significant differences in the means. The analysis failed to show significant differences between state-subsidized or private schools and public centres.

The location of the school, in other words whether it is within the city of Barcelona or in another municipality in Barcelona province, didn't cause significant differences in students' scores for items 1, 3, and 4. For item 2, we can see that students who complete their internships outside the city of Barcelona give higher scores to the reception they received in the school then those who did their work.

Students mentioned both positive and negative assessments of the training they received in the space provided to them on the survey for their additional observations and suggestions. Among the positive comments:

- The teacher treated me more as a colleague tan as an intern in my class and others. They made me feel like a member of the family. They trusted me.
- I learned a lot about being a good educator. The teacher was a role model, and the experience was really enriching.
- Working at a school gives you a chance to learn about all aspects of the teaching profession.
- The teacher gave me help and advice at all times and supported me in my activities.

- At the school there is a good environment and it's well organized, from the administration to the services. There is an abundance of resources and materials.
- I've experienced an active methodology that corresponds to the model we study at the university.
- Some negative comments stated the following:
- Lack of guidance and dialogue with the teacher. Not enough involvement in monitoring the activities conducted by myself.
- Behaviourist, authoritarian and/or traditional methodology.
- Lack of variety in the classroom dynamic.
- As is evident from the comments above, despite the existence of some problems students rate their placements very highly and report that the experience changes their ideas about teaching because schools allow them to view their future profession as teachers more realistically.
- Conclusions
- In the study we have been able to verify that the evaluations of the school tutors are quite positive, since the averages in all the dimensions studied are superior to 3, in a scale from 1 to 4.
- Taking into account what we have deduced from the results, we suggest the reinforcement in some questions:
- Clarification of expectations and professional profile. Students must know their responsibilities as practitioners and have information about the context, the operation of the centre, the school principles and foundations, the curricular and the methodological approach. In this way, students and tutors can share essential elements for the evaluation regarding the expectations of both practitioners and the centre.
- Promotion and evaluation of four areas of practice tutoring, objectivable with various indicators and strengthen these relationships. These areas are: welcome and involvement of the student in the placementcentre; guidance and supervision of the educational interventions of the student with the children, by the tutor assigned by the school; student participation in tutorial and management functions; transparency and scope of evaluation.

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