

IN SERVICE TEACHERS TRAINING

By

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1. Introduction

Since the 80s, the importance of the in-service training in the professional development, and especially in education (Blackburn & Moisan, 1987) is accepted by all. In service training is not seen as a remedy for deficiencies in initial training, but as a long-term process and a part of continuing education that makes possible the acquired knowledge in the initial training and that can be defined as “a variety of activities and practices in which teachers become involved in order to broaden their knowledge, improve their skills and assess and develop their professional approach” (Perron, 1991). The in-service training is understood as a tool to professionalise teaching, improve quality and efficiency of the new educational systems and promote the scientific and technological advances and innovations. If we also keep in mind the characteristics of present day society, with present transition, with continuous changes and adaptation to new technological, social, cultural changes... in-service training turns to be the only tool to face this changes, as well as to democratise people’s access to culture, to information and work (Murillo, 1999). However, although in-service training is thus considered, it doesn’t seem to be enough guarantee to produce changes. The link between in-service training and innovations in educational practice is not clear and it would be necessary to turn to it in a deeper way, since there isn’t enough research that shows the short and long term effects of in-service training in innovation projects or changes in educational practice (Blackburn & Moisan, 1987; Hernandez, 1996).

1.1. Structural and organisational aspects of in-service training

This lack of relation between in service training and its effects in the educational practice is problem shared by all systems of education that envisage the in service training as a key aspect to improve educational practice. This is why the European Commission funded a research to know and compare in service training in the different countries of the Community. In this research the following aspects are analysed:

- a) Legislation and aims
- b) Authorities involved in provision
- c) Right to in-service training
- d) Qualifying training and evaluation,
- e) Form and content
- f) Statistics that include teachers’ participation and budget and numbers of teachers that are benefited by it.

General results indicate that the concern about education improvement is shared by the Member States, and each one faces budgetary difficulties and is seeking the means of reaching a maximum number of teachers to participate. The main issue stressed in this report is that although in-service training is thought as legally compulsory, in practice, it has direct effects to career advancement (Spain, Portugal) while in others is a free and professional option. This difference in training organisation sets homogeneity problems at an European

level and if we are convinced of the importance of training for the development of Europe and its citizens, this need is more vital in the structure of educational systems that integrate it.

That report mentions aspects to be considered structural or adjustable, that is to say, aspects such as legislation, responsible institutions, types of courses, budget, etc... These aspects ought to be analysed and studied, to develop a structure of in-service teacher training from the results that have been obtained. However, these aspects are not the only ones. There are other process aspects related to the way in which training is developed; here methodology, content, objectives, materials to be used are included, which also need to be analysed.

1.2. Process aspects in teacher training

This type of aspects more qualitative and directly related to the way in which training is set up, is directly linked to the underlying educational models in the training act; that is to say, from which perspective the teaching / learning process that takes place during training is understood.

In the last 50 years the conception of education has highly changed; from the Technological ? Positivist Approach, which considered education as transmission of knowledge with an empirical and unidirectional, towards a Constructivist Approach, which considers training as a personal constructive act where the subject not only receives but rather (s)he apprehends, restructures and completes, that is to say, a constructivist model of education. These two radically different models of education offer as a consequence two approaches or models of in-service training, from the transmissive model the in-service teacher training was understood as teachers' instruction in certain areas or subjects. The results that have been found in this instructive model have showed that after giving some teacher training courses, teachers scarcely used the contents in the daily practice (Hernandez, 1996). This was evident in the United States in the 60s when after large budgets invested in teacher training ? with the aim of implementing innovation in the science area ?, the evaluation showed that teachers didn't follow the guidelines that had been presented, selecting individually bits of content that finally were used, modified or changed in their daily practice.

Checking this reality has led us to plan two lines to base teacher training on: on the one hand, a new approach on teachers' conceptions or previous ideas; on the other hand, an approach is focused on studying educational practice in order to explore relation with teachers' conceptions. From both approaches the constructivist one was assumed; that is to say, the teacher does not learn from a blank mind but (s)he possesses his / her own patterns and previous ideas about how to teach and how the pupils learn. It is understood that teachers build, elaborate and test their personal theory of the world; training is based on reflection, teacher comes to be a reflective subject.

Presently a third approach has started, more focused on teachers' learning devices, considering them as adults who face new learning challenges. From this perspective, the teacher is a learner who faces new skills to be acquired and consequently teacher training can be considered as one more process of teaching / learning and thus to use the knowledge

We understand the teaching / learning process from a constructivist approach, that is to say, it is an act of individual construction; we assume it from the vygotskian, characterized by the importance of social interaction for the development and learning to take place (Bruner, 1986; Bruner, 1997; Wertsch, 1985). It is in these interactions where the people who learn make sense of that they are learning; the situation is functional and pragmatic; these characteristics are a key to learn (Donaldson, 1979). The relevance of having models or guides for the development is fundamental. These provide information, help and finally the necessary scaffolding for finally the subject to make his/hers the skills that (s)he is trying to develop (Bruner, 1988). Taking this perspective to the teacher training means assuming how

the other people learn and consequently a kind of training that respects this approach of taking into consideration social interaction, having sense and guiding or helping implement the new knowledge is necessary.

The 90s and coherently with the former approach, the model of *Professional Development Based on the School* started to be used. This model assumes that training takes place at school, with a group of teachers who act to learn, who, at the same time, have an external guidance, an expert, someone who helps, scaffolds and facilitates the learning process. This model has the following characteristics:

The importance of team work: when the unit of intervention is the school, there must be at least a group of teachers, otherwise their training is senseless since we depart from the needs and problems of each school, and everybody tries to get a shared aim.

From the point of view of the teacher as a professional, with experience and previous conceptions, it is necessary to rely on them to explicit their needs and worries, setting up a shared project, acting as active members in it; although it may have the support and supervision of external agents.

The role of the external advisors is one of facilitators of the process of change. For that they must be flexible, adapt themselves to the needs of the school and the teachers, their interests, previous conceptions, experiences, etc.

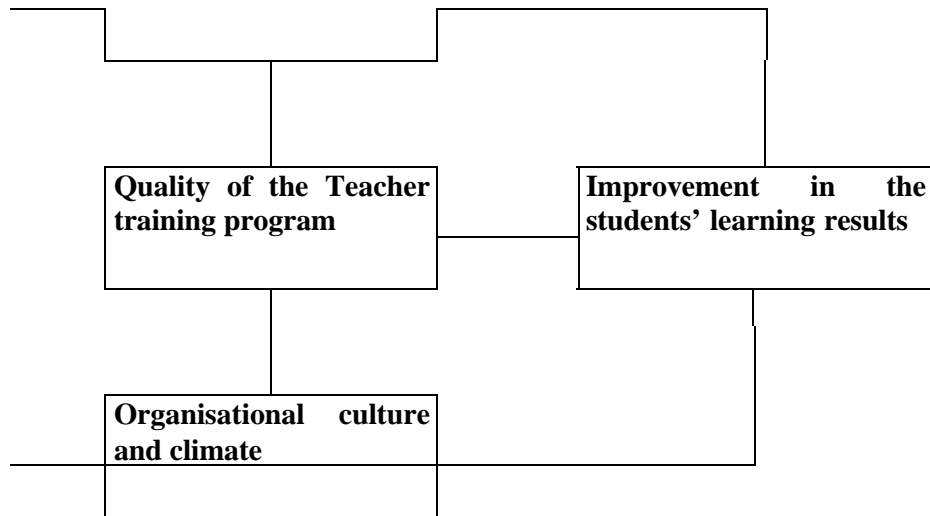
To implement this model it is necessary to assume that teacher training is like the development of a project in the school with a group of teachers. This project, although it can be guided initially (this will depend on the characteristics of the group), has to be assumed as own by teachers, the facilitator or outside agent being of paramount importance for this, sometimes will have to create interest and design adequate actions to them assume it as their own. Training in research skills such as revision of surveys, data analysis, adopting a long-term perspective for the school (considering the possibility of making cross curricular analysis), interviews to pupils, their analysis, lesson plans to intervene in the classroom, evaluation tools, are important. Also summarising and synthesising information in such a way that at no moment teachers feel lost or overwhelmed and we mustn't forget that they are in a training process which needs and ought to be scaffolded to get the necessary skills; that is to say, we would be working in the area of a near development and as such an expert's acting is necessary to take part of a real development.

1.3. General orientations and strategies

The in school training or Professional Development Based on the School implies a number of factors, which we are going to consider in our model of teacher training (Guskey & Sparks, 1991):

- a) The climate and organisational culture of the institution
- b) The quality of the program and content.
- c) The effects of these factors in student' performance and behaviour

This model is the one we are going to use for the structure of this report. Let's define now what they are all about.



Factors to be taken into consideration in a teacher-training model (Guskey and Sparks, 1991)

Organisational culture and climate

The influence of the contextual factors in the development of any educational program or practice is beyond any doubt and consequently so it in teacher training. The atmosphere of the school, of the teachers and their implication in innovation programs will influence the final effects in the teaching practice. Here we have included some criteria that favour that culture and facilitate intervention:

- a) Help and readiness of the managing team.
- b) School participation in other innovation programs
- c) Organisation of the working sessions in the school timetable.
- d) Participation of the co-ordinator or responsible who acts providing a follow up of the project from the school.

Quality and content of the training program

Literature points out that teachers are functional and pragmatics and need to know that the new knowledge that they are acquiring is being useful for something. Due to their own initial training, teachers separate and don't find any relation among the psycho educational theory and the practice they are carrying out in class and show a tendency to generalise and use the same strategy in different subjects (Hernandez, 1996) and, if the proposals that have been presented are very clear and well structured, they be put into practice (Cuban, 1992). On these bases we suggest the following indicators or criteria to value the content of the program:

- a) Connexion of the program content with the needs that are felt at the school.
- b) Relation of the new content with their previous knowledge
- c) Relevance of the new content for the teacher
- d) Fundaments and data from research on the new content
- e) Practical and easily applicable content
- f) Clear explanation of the theory and practice relation

Improvement in the students' results

If the change in educational practice is the first indicator of the effect of training, undoubtedly pupils' behaviour is another important indicator. Educational innovations have the pupils as their ultimate target for change; they are introduced because it is necessary the pupils to change, to evolve in some aspects. From this perspective, we think that pupils ought to be assessed from three points of view: Changes at a cognitive, social and personal level

Within the cognitive aspects we include the acquisition of new concepts, the development of skills for the analysis of the reality and restructuring of patterns for the phenomena understanding. In the social aspects, relations with other people ought to be observed, their behaviour in help or aggressions to other pupils, the resolution of conflicts. And in personal aspects we can observe if there has been a change in their moral scale and his / her own perception and the one of the reality.

These aspects can be observed directly, analysed in surveys, and with interviews with teachers and pupils... or by means of indirect indicators such as the number of incidences or accidents in class, spontaneous behaviour of the pupils, etc.

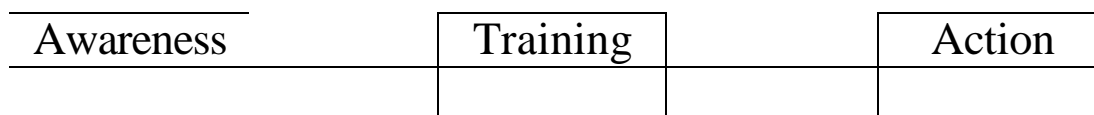
2. Objectives

The most important objective in teacher training is starting changes in the school dynamics and in the educational practice so that pupils improve their results and behaviour. Being this the main aim of the intervention with teachers we have set up three objectives which are coherent with the model we have been proposing:

- 1.-Make the teacher aware about the importance of personal relations in class, their consequences in the school adjustment and in the pupils' development.
- 2.- Training in the scope of school violence and interpersonal knowledge in relationships.
- 3.- Facilitate interventions with pupils.

3. Methodology

The model of intervention is based on three stages, AWARENESS – TRAINING – ACTION. This model teaching, in the first place prepares for the Learning, by “fertilizing the field”, that is to say, creating doubts, questions, questioning subjects that, although well known, had not been so far questioned. This allows making sense of the new concepts that are going to be explained, and, at least, guarantee the interest and motivation to learn them. This stage is what we call awareness or sensibility. It is followed by training, which is more related with instruction; in this one clear and structured concepts are taught and information about the questioning that has been created in the former stage are presented. The last stage of the process is action that consists of implementing the practice of the acquired knowledge. Initially the stages are supervised and directed, that is to say, scaffolded. These three stages, although they are experienced at an individual level, have been developed in group, always favouring the exchange of ideas, search of materials and providing the sense of giving it the status of “centre” of activity.



Here is the definition of the three stages:

The AWARENESS / SENSIBILITY is the first stage in every awareness process that involves wakening curiosity and questioning aspects so far unnoticed. This stage implies creating the need of knowing more, of finding answers to so far non-existent questions. It is implemented in group work about materials that allow place ourselves in other people's points of view and see aspects of a phenomenon which normally are unnoticed. Videos and pictures are very useful.

TRAINING is supposed to answer the previously set questions, finding why and providing tools that allow the analysis of problems and situations. Training means providing information, that is to say, instructing and transmitting content. To get that, it is important to remember that the most outstanding contents must be transmitted using auditory and visual resources (transparencies, videos...) keeping in mind teachers' knowledge or previous ideas, being successful in the class intervention, providing a summary of the content before and after each session and ending with open questions which favour a la ter reflection.

The third stage of the educational process is ACTION, consisting in presenting possible intervention lines which have appeared throughout the process and which show that one is aware of any specific situation, that we know more about it and consequently we act on it. Initially this action can be scaffolded, that is to say, advised and supervised by an expert; it is a controlled activity. The action should be the direct intervention with pupils, which will have all necessary help to be implemented later in a more independent way; the person who is being initiated can also be an expert. Besides, for this action to make sense it should be done following the same model that has been developed in the stage of the teacher training: awareness ? training ? action. That is to say, secondary teachers must practice with the pupils the same or similar strategies, model of intervention and even activities that (s)he has experimented.

It's necessary to emphasize the importance of the awareness as a previous stage to training. The stage of awareness has the main objective to create needs of... When we get somebody interested in something, need to know something, the stage of training has a previously created context which facilitates it enormously since "ones learns knowing what for." Starting the sequences of activities in the training stage would be a terrible mistake sit it would influence so much in the third stage, the action, that it would probably be inadequate.

The action can be understood as a set of web planned activities that result as a consequence of the awareness (which has allowed the teacher to get involved personally in the situation), and the training (which has offered the necessary tools to understand it). The action is the symbol, the visible product of the educational process that has taken place; the action has a double aim: finishing the process of teaching – learning and being uses as an assessment of the educational process.

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