

Teacher Expertise in Initial Education. The Perspective of Teacher Educators

Los saberes docentes en la formación inicial. La perspectiva de los formadores

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Abstract

This article presents some of the results of a larger-scope research project entitled, «Dimensions of professional expertise. Study and contributions to training,» based out of the Research Institute for Education Sciences at the University of Buenos Aires. The current difficulties facing education in schools spark reflection about the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes involved in teacher training and subsequently in teaching performance. In this framework, this paper reviews the knowledge and professional skills that teacher educators intend to transmit and build during initial training, as well as the knowledge they consider most relevant to pass on. The work was conducted with qualitative methods and analytical tools to understand the discursive perspective of a small group of teacher educators in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. One key result points to some matches between teachers' fields of knowledge identified in the literature and an emphasis on practical expertise derived from experience.

Keywords: teaching education, teacher expertise, teacher educators, experience

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Resumen

El artículo presenta una parte de los resultados de un proyecto de investigación de mayor alcance, «Dimensiones del saber profesional. Su estudio y aportes a la formación», con sede en el Instituto de Investigaciones en Ciencias de la Educación de la Universidad de Buenos Aires. Las dificultades que atraviesa hoy la enseñanza en las escuelas conducen a interrogarnos acerca de los saberes, capacidades, habilidades y actitudes puestas en juego durante la preparación de los profesores y, luego, en su desempeño docente. En este marco, el trabajo revisa cuáles son los conocimientos y las aptitudes profesionales que los formadores se proponen transmitir y construir en la formación inicial y qué saber consideran relevante para poder efectuar dicha transmisión. El trabajo se llevó a cabo con métodos cualitativos y herramientas analíticas que recuperan la perspectiva que discursivamente sostiene un pequeño grupo de formadores de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires. Entre los resultados obtenidos se destacan algunas coincidencias en torno a los campos de saber docente ya señalados por la bibliografía especializada y un énfasis en el saber práctico, construido en el transcurso de la experiencia.

Palabras clave: formación inicial, saberes docentes, formadores, experiencia

Pedagogical expertise and teacher knowledge

While literature and research have made great strides in establishing what knowledge is, skills or competencies result in a good teacher, there are still controversies surrounding the issue, both during initial training as well as on the job training or professional development. One of the difficulties in precisely identifying the issue lies in the characteristics of a teacher's work and school environment: its complexity, multidimensionality, unpredictability, diversity, uniqueness, immediacy and uncertainty. As established in the pioneering work of Jackson, «Life in the classroom,» there needs to be a resistance to following overly rational plans; much of the teachers' knowledge and effective performance is based on their specific idiosyncratic, casuistic and specific information built during the course of experience. Furthermore, even if there is agreement on what a teacher's knowledge and skills should be, the problem of how to achieve learning and development in the areas of initial and ongoing training still remains. In this sense, major limitations can be observed in institutions, as well as in the devices and training practices to achieve the desired teacher profile. As António Nóvoa (2009) argues, there is a widespread diagnostic warning about the lack of quality and relevance of initial training and the need to bring it closer to the real demands of the profession, based on more situational approaches. These approaches should be focused on reflective practice and training from within the profession.

The issue of expertise in teaching is relevant for several reasons. First, because knowledge is a key element of both educational action and teachers' tasks, as it is the raw material with which they work: «Teaching makes expertise and cultural transmission its substantive content» (Terigi, 2012, p. 14). Students acquire expertise that society has selected, prioritized, put in order and systematized. This knowledge is crucial to exercising citizenship and social insertion. Secondly, when interacting with students, teachers must develop and put in play strategies and resources based on knowledge of pedagogy, teaching techniques, curriculum and communication. «Schoolwork includes the relatively safe handling of a body of knowledge, including the ability to interact, communicate and develop that knowledge» (Ávalos, 2009, p. 67). Third, teaching expertise today is more important due to rapid social and technological changes. The changes in production methods place knowledge —and especially the ability to access, search and generate new teaching expertise— in a privileged place when it comes to exercising citizenship and rights.

Contexts, institutions and teaching subjects have transmuted significantly, while training seems to do so slowly. Training (initial or continuing) always seems to be inadequate, outdated, weak and unable to produce the desired teacher profile (Vaillant, 2005). Consequently, it is necessary to renew the debate about what a teacher has to know, understand and be able to do and how teacher training manages to convey that knowledge using devices that are practical as well as consistent with the teaching model and teaching concept established for our schools.

Due to the increasing difficulties and uncertainties that teachers face in schools, the issue of knowledge and professional competence has taken a new turn and has become the subject of concern and debate in

various regional forums and specialized circles (Eurydice, 2013; Paquay, Altet, Charlier, & Perrenoud, 2005; Terigi, 2012; Vélaz Medrano, & Vaillant, 2009). Moreover, the prevalence of technical movements has undermined the idea of the teacher as a producer of pedagogical expertise, although it is precisely this quality that gives meaning to the task of teaching and is the foundational core of the job: «Teaching responds to the demand for the construction of teaching expertise, and particularly the demand for pedagogical expertise, which is the natural product of the collective critical reflection made by teachers, expressed in writing» (Tezanos, 2007b, p. 11). Practical knowledge grows rooted in the experience as a result of a systematic reflection on practice; therefore we think it is crucial to ask teacher educators about the teaching expertise they build that is essential to carrying out their task and introduces others to the world of teaching.

The discussion around the notion of teacher expertise, practical expertise, expertise gained from experience —sometimes associated with, subsumed or restricted in the definition of professional competencies (Perrenoud, 2004) or performance and training standards (Meckes, 2014)— has been addressed by research and underlies the discussion on the profiles and professional identities we intend to form (Martínez Bonafé, 2004; Tardif & Gauthier, 2005). The central question is what kind of teacher are we seeking: what should they know and be able to do to meet the current demands of their work, society and education systems?

It is in the context of these concerns that we investigated, in an exploratory manner, the perspective of teacher educators, rooted in their experience and background, regarding the key knowledge that need to be conveyed to students/future teachers from different subject areas. Then we analyzed the knowledge valued by these teacher educators to effectively achieve the formation and transmission of the teaching profession.

The category of teaching expertise has been widely explored from different theoretical, epistemological and philosophical angles (Charlot, 2010). Altet's work (2005) distinguishes between *expertise*, *knowledge* and *information*: the first sits between the other two and at the interface or juncture that the subjects produce from information (external to the subject and social order) and knowledge (internal and of a personal order). Teaching expertise gathers formalized aspects as well as aspects of a practical and procedural nature. Both are the result of an interaction with the environment. They are results of the construction and reflection that teachers do on their work when they recover what they acquired during their initial and continued training to interpret the challenges and create solutions to the teaching problems they face. *Practical expertise* is the result of everyday experiences in the profession and is contextualized and acquired in work situations. Teachers build pedagogical expertise by systematically reflecting on their practice of teaching and their dialogue with peers, by producing and writing practice texts (Tezanos, 2007b). This opens the path to professionalism, the path to professional development and teaching transformation/innovation based on communities of practice, peer learning circles and the systematization and exchange of educational experience.

In the expert discourse on teacher training, one can observe how the *central cores* and *large domains or knowledge areas* that for decades structured curricula still remain (the scientific content of the teaching disciplines, educational foundations and knowledge about how students learn). But recent additions that penetrate the curricula and programs of initial teacher training, defining new domains and skills, are also identified. Perrenoud's work (2004), for example, adds the following skills to the old professional expertise¹: developing and evolving differentiation devices; teamwork; participation in school management; informing and involving parents; using new technologies; and organizing its own ongoing training. Meanwhile, in the list created by Martínez Bonafé (2004, p 129-130) the following new competencies are identified: «Collaborating with other professionals in the vocational and educational guidance of students. Facilitating the connection between school reality and social reality. Enhancing the reflective and investigative attitude about actions».

¹ The distinction we make between new and old skills or teacher expertise is relative. A more paused and rigorous work that chronicles the question should shed further details on the subject. However, the review of the teacher training field shows that for two decades there has been emphasis on competencies and domains that did not used to be mentioned before, such as those related to the teacher inquisitive attitude, attention to diversity, democratic pedagogical work, inclusivity, etc., which we place among new knowledge, skills and expertise.

The work on the subject during the eighties (Bromme, 1988; Calderhead, 1988; Elbasz, 1983; Schulman, 1987) shows, under different names and in spite of the theoretical and methodological approaches from which each researcher has worked², the presence of *four groups of knowledge* that constitute the *classical expertise of teachers*:

1. Content to be taught, disciplinary expertise;
2. Knowledge of student characteristics, cultural aspects and cognitive development of students;
3. Curriculum, educational purposes, programs and materials;
4. Pedagogy and didactic content, how to plan, teach, assess, organize and manage a class.

Subsequently, the following were added to the aforementioned list:

5. Knowledge and pedagogical use of new information and communication technologies;
6. Strategies to teach in diversity, adapt teaching to the unique contexts and students respecting their rhythms and learning styles, by ensuring everyone's right to education; and
7. Collaborative attitudes and teamwork skills; the ability to reflect on practice and the development of pedagogical judgment as the basis for training and continuing professional development.

«All this, in turn, requires a *working knowledge* [italics added], which means knowing how to do things right in concrete, daily practice. It is this last empirical, experiential, practical expertise which connects the meaning of things with the actions taken» (Martinez Bonafé, 2004, p. 129). In the same vein, the current models advocate a situational and practical approach to training, an in-situ know-how that allows teachers to develop their practical judgment and adapt their teaching to specific contexts and specific groups of students. This would lead to what is known as *trade knowledge*; a particular form of practical knowledge, morally appropriate, built by teachers in the course of their experience (Ángulo, 1999). This trade knowledge includes the ability to conceptualize and reason about practical problems. It is applied/used/activated (in a timely and pertinent manner) in solving such problems in specific situations. It relies on intuition, on the meaning and sense ascribed to teaching and to the teacher task. Trade knowledge is a synthesis that includes and combines five categories: (a) knowledge and representations on the subject taught; (b) knowledge about the teaching process; (c) elaboration on the interaction between disciplinary knowledge and practical action; (d) evaluative knowledge; (e) professional understanding and performance plans, metacognitive processes of reflection on action. Thus, it is a kind of interface: it is not free of the context in which it was produced, it is not general, and not entirely subjective or individual, because it is a public personal knowledge.

Ávalos (2009) warns about the recent emphasis on practical knowledge in teaching, stating that it should not be to the detriment of theoretical training. While the change produced has the advantage of tilting the balance after decades of academic and deductive or consecutive curricula, where practice only constituted a field for the application of theory; after decades of being misunderstood and poorly implemented, there is a danger that it can become casuistic knowledge that does not provide sufficient factual basis for decision-making and the necessary analysis of educational situations that teachers face.

Finally, another group of teaching expertise related to professional development and lifelong learning has been highlighted in the conceptualizations of recent decades: the ability to *reflect on practice*, the attitudes of inquiry and questioning that allows the continuous improvement of teaching. For this reason teamwork, collaboration, and participation in institutional projects are proposed. These attitudes, forming part of the teacher professional dimension, originate from the initial training. That is why institutions are expected to lay the foundation for future development, making sure they communicate the tentativeness of knowledge and how imperative it is to continually make updates. This is observed in the professional skills and standards that feed into the documents proposed to regulate the quality of initial training, which reserve a place for teachers to organize their own continuing education, the establishment of a development plan and reflection on their practice.³

² Research on teacher knowledge has been performed from various theoretical and methodological traditions. These include teacher thinking and decision theory, both approaches derived from cognitive psychology; ethnographic studies based on symbolic interactionism and phenomenology; research conducted with biographical methods and narrative case studies; action theories and situated learning that recognize various theoretical contributions.

³ In this regard, the Pedagogical Standards for elementary education in Chile can be consulted (the teacher «learns continuously and reflects on his/her practice as well as his/her insertion in the educational system»), the Framework For Good Teaching Performance from Peru («reflects on his/her practical and institutional experience and develops processes for continuous learning...») and the Standards of Professional Teaching Performance of Ecuador («the teacher stays up to date regarding developments and research in his/her area of expertise»), to mention a few examples from the region.

Methodology and profile of stakeholders consulted

The results presented are part of a larger project aimed at researching the teaching expertise from the perspective of practicing teachers and teacher educators, while also confronting it, in turn, with expert knowledge (Alliaud, 2013; Alliaud & Vezub, 2015). This time we will analyze data from supplementary and exploratory fieldwork that was proposed to include the voices of teacher educators. Semi-structured interviews with open questions were performed with teacher educators and teachers of teacher training institutes (IFD) from the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires.

Since 2007, with the creation of the National Teacher Training Institute, Argentina began a process of change in the initial training policies that covered various lines and dimensions: institutional strengthening, research, student policies, training for institute directors, training paths for teachers of different levels, a program to accompany novice teachers, extension of curricula, etc. New curricula for teaching careers were developed based on national common guidelines. As part of the curricular and policy changes, the central question we began to explore was how teachers at teaching training institutes visualize and prioritize the knowledge they consider relevant for teacher performance today, and what teaching expertise they value for their task, considering their experience as teacher educators.

The data was collected at the end of 2013 using qualitative methods, through semi-structured interviews with open questions to eight teacher educators from institutes in Buenos Aires. The sample was intentional and was constructed from the following criteria: We only contacted teacher educators in charge of curricula workshop spaces of practical teaching and specific didactics, with at least eight years of experience in teacher education. It was considered that this group of teachers, who work in the areas of student teaching and discipline teaching, know the curriculum changes and have acquired a strategic and panoramic view on the articulation of initial training curriculum training fields as well as the diverse knowledge and teaching skills needed.

Interviews were categorized using the Atlas-Ti software for qualitative data in social sciences. An analysis strategy was used that, according to the authors and epistemological traditions, is defined as *eclectic* (Buenfrik, 2013); pertaining to «*do-it-yourself*» (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) or *quill maker* (Kinchloe & McLaren, 2012). In other words, we used various tools to highlight, on one hand, the unique construction of the problem and the unique construction of categories from data (not established a priori) and, on the other, the relationship between the researcher's points of view and his/her historical, social and political positioning. We tried to merge different points of attention and views in order to put the focus on what the interviewees had to say as well as on the political-educational dimension of the meaning built around the expertise of teaching and training. Responses were compared, searching for common ground and shared meanings about the topics being investigated. Simultaneously, each interviewee's personal and singular ideas were included. The hierarchy given to each category and group of teaching expertise and know-how was rebuilt, considering recurrences in the responses.

The perspective of research and the results presented have not been guided by the logic of good practice. It has made no efforts to establish whether the subjects of the study have the traits and teaching expertise that constitute a good teacher or teacher educator, which have already been established in specialized literature or defined in documents about standards, skills and good performance frameworks. On the contrary, the concern was to rescue the voices and experience of teacher educators who have many times been protagonists, key subjects or even silenced voices regarding pedagogical knowledge.

The average age of interviewees is 49. They range between 41 and 58 and are a group of teacher educators with extensive professional experience who together average 25 years of service. In previous studies it was established that, in the educational system of Argentina, IFD teachers are the oldest (Tenti, 2009; Terigi, 2007). Nationally, one-third of teacher educators are between 40 and 49 years old (Aguerrondo, Vezub, & Clucellas, 2008). Teacher's seniority also corroborates the greater experience of those who have been in the system longer: the interviewees have spent between 17 and 32 years in the system, although their experience at the top level of teacher training is less, between 11 and 20 years⁴ approximately. This data is

⁴ The sample study coordinated by Tenti (2009) in five regions in the county with a total of 744 respondents shows similar levels of seniority: on average teacher educators have accumulated a total of 20 years teaching and 13 years in teacher training. However, the gap between the total time spent teaching and time spent as a teacher educator tends to be reduced in the case of the younger age groups, up to 34 years old (Acosta, 2009).

consistent with other studies (Acosta, 2009; Aguerro & Vezub, 2011) and it shows that most of those who work in teacher training institutions began as teachers at other level.

Out of the eight teachers interviewed, seven began their careers at other levels. Half of them began at a primary level and the other half in secondary. Three of them are currently in management positions in the IFD: two are deans/rectors and the third one is the teaching practice coordinator. These three teacher educators spend their teaching hours exclusively at the IFD, while the rest also work at other levels (university, secondary and primary), either as teachers or in management positions at their respective institutions (two cases). Finally, it is noted that the interviewees have high academic qualifications: all of them have more than one degree, most took one or more university specialisms (in educational technology, didactics, educational research, constructivism and education, etc.) and five interviewees hold master degrees.

What teacher expertise should be transferred and taught?

The responses of teacher educators regarding what knowledge is essential for teaching today were categorized into four core groups: (a) new digital technologies, (b) knowledge of the diverse contexts in which teaching occurs, (c) professional attitudes and (d) teacher classical expertise.

First, interviewees argued that future teachers must *be aware of new technologies* and the *diverse contexts* in order to teach different students. Both aspects are in line with the new expertise proposed by experts. The mastery of new technologies is also referred to teacher educator discourse to the *knowledge of subjects/students*, because current generations are part of the so-called *digital natives*. The relationship with technology is a given, forming part of the students with whom future teachers will work, and new generations have an empathy or familiarity with technologies which sometimes leave adults and teachers feeling misplaced. «This creates a tension between learners and teachers, between the classical forms of knowledge and current ways of interacting; between what is expected by some and what has been achieved by others» (Levy, 2013, p.124). Therefore, the knowledge of technologies is a new demand and an essential knowledge to connect with students. In addition, for teacher educators this teaching expertise has been given a place of privilege by new educational policies⁵ and changes in teacher education plans:

One issue that is been argued a lot and did not used to before, and luckily is now incorporated into the teachers' curriculum, is the use of new technologies [...] it has had a strong impact because kids now have laptops at school, and the truth is that teachers aren't always able to take advantage of these tools at some institutions because teachers don't know how to use that tool [...] a knowledge of these new technologies is essential (Teacher Educator 2).

Students and children incorporate new knowledge, which we now call ICT in the classroom, where what is already familiar to the children in recreational contexts is transformed into a teaching objective (Teacher educator 7).

The second issue that teacher educators believe teachers must master is the *knowledge of context*. In referring to context, one refers to the teacher training: flexible, open to changes, able to adapt, to confront problems, to handle unforeseen situations, to address emergencies and teach culturally and socially diverse students in varied, complex and difficult institutions.

[Teaching to] address the multiplicity of issues that are present in school and that make it contextual, right? A lot of violence, interventions that have to take place with parents and their children in very adverse contexts. There is a lot of welfarism in schools and sometimes there are few tools to work with the difficulties that arise and are getting bigger (Teacher educator 2).

I want a graduate who is concerned with diversity and, in turn, builds a democratizing classroom, that democratizes teaching expertise and achieves the inclusion of all (Teacher educator 7).

Another meaning that teacher educators attribute to teaching expertise is the link that students/future teachers establish with knowledge. The relationship with knowledge these days seems to be more important than the possession of information. The interviewees mentioned what teachers should know, but they also referred to the professional attitudes that they are trying to instill that result in a certain profile

⁵ In this regard, see Connect Equality Program of the Ministry of Education in Argentina (Ministerial Res. 123 and Decree No. 459/10), which has distributed laptops to students and teachers in public schools, under the model one to one.

and identity: flexibility, complexity, openness, comprehensive character, dynamism, and tentativeness of knowledge. «A didactic expertise that is often complex, which must be flexible in order to adapt to new theoretical developments and be open for those changes to be incorporated» (Teacher educator 5). «The challenge of saying 'I always have things to learn,' because paradigms are changing and the contexts are diverse» (Teacher educator 7).

Among these professional attitudes, teacher educators stress the importance of the ability to *link theory with practice*. The training should be structured to produce that intersection, or network interplay between formal, abstract and generalizable knowledge and, on the other hand, that which is concrete and immediate —the usefulness of knowledge in a particular situation that students face in training or as novice teachers. What is studied must be acted on. An teacher states: if you work, at a theoretical level, on the concept of an inclusive school and on the idea that all students have rights, the problem is then to see how those ideas are put into practice, strategies and ways to teach and connect with students: «The issue is how they act». As Tezanos (2007a) argues, coinciding with interviewees, in student teaching, the task of teaching acquires meaning. This is where the possible procedures materialize and are articulated with the contents; it is the place of production and appropriation of pedagogical knowledge.

One of the good things about the plan is that at the beginning of the process there is contact with things related to practice. Whether it's watching, doing an internship, you have to enter the classroom to understand what happens there. And before you do that, like all practical knowledge, before you practice, before you're stuck in there, it doesn't exist. Then, well, you're building, through those instances, what I think is one of the pillars, the core of formation (Teacher educator 5).

Not only discipline is important, but so is the didactic approach; for me they are the basics. The didactic expertise on how to read a particular class, watch kids, how knowledge circulates in the classroom: this expertise is very important. [...] There are other areas of training that have to do with general education like Pedagogy, History of Education, Didactics [...] you have to see at which point the student links this in the field, and this has to be facilitating (Teacher educator 13).

The skills to reflect in the midst of action and on the action itself, that is, learning from the professional practice, is a specific and unique area of expertise for teacher educators. It is the knowledge of professional practice that arises from being in a situation in which what matters most is to restore, systematize and share one's teaching experience:

Coming out of the thought process that having a sequence of activities is being able to teach. The [...] ability to be conscious of this and in a situation of giving a class as well, of being able to think of all decisions that surround the moment of starting to work on a topic with the students (Teacher educator 11).

Teaching expertise that isn't so much to do with academic training [...] this knowledge that we put on a lower pedestal, which is not theoretical and not didactic either, which has to do with taking advantage of experience, with personal expertise that the teacher him/herself creates through the teaching practice, which has to do with the job. I say to my students a lot: «Write, write down your practical experience, because it is a form of knowledge that you are building day by day» (Teacher educator 5).

Table 1
Synthesis of categories: teaching knowledge

Context and student knowledge	Professional attitudes and links to knowledge	Formal academic knowledge	Interaction skills Communication
Ability to work with diverse students	Flexibility	Pedagogical and didactic knowledge	Knowing how to include and build a democratic classroom
Adapt teaching to contexts	Openness	Disciplinary content	
ICT management	Relationship between theory and practice	Specific didactic content	
	Knowing how to intervene in a situation and handle unforeseen situations	Planning, evaluating and managing resources and strategies	
	Learning from experience		
	Reflection		

Finally, teacher educators assign great importance to the classical knowledge historically associated with teaching: disciplinary knowledge, knowledge of the subjects to be taught; how to engage and communicate with students; didactic and pedagogical planning and resource management tools; all of which are teaching strategies specific to the task of teaching. «Although knowing how to discipline might sound redundant, there are many teachers and many places where there is no training in discipline [...] It's like basic knowledge» (Teacher educator 3). «The rudiments of what didactic expertise is, but basically teaching each discipline [...] the didactic expertise that accompanies how each subject is taught» (Teacher educator 5).

What teaching expertise is essential to the task of teacher educators?

The answers and reflections on the characteristics required by teacher educators were grouped into four categories: (a) accompanying, communication and relationship with students, (b) experience and previous teaching practice, (c) personal and professional dispositions and (d) formal and academic knowledge.

Table 2
Category synthesis: Teacher educators' expertise

Supporting, communication with students	Teaching experience in the system	Personal and professional dispositions	Formal academic knowledge
Knowing how to listen	Having practiced teaching	Values and ethics	Disciplinary
Knowing how to talk to students	Having experience in different schools	Respect for the profession	Of specific didactics
Understanding their needs	Having experienced teaching with students from the level that the teacher trained for	Continuing education	Of Pedagogy
Supporting students through their difficulties		Desire to teach	Being good generalists
Dissenting, arguing and debating		Participating in cultural and political activities	Theoretical training
		Having aflexible thought	Current field debates
		Openness to change	

Even though it is not possible to establish a hierarchy of types of knowledge that teacher educators value for performance due to the small number of cases, the order they are presented corresponds to the emphasis given by interviewees to each item and the sequence in which it was usually mentioned in their answers. The importance of interacting with others/new students, along with the knowledge derived from experience and teaching practice, are listed first.

Knowing how to support, communicate and connect with students

Teacher educators assign increasing importance to expertise regarding supporting, as well as the communication and generation of an educational connection with their students/future teachers. The recognition of this training expertise is due to two issues. On the one hand, the change in the current social scenario and its impact on students/aspiring teachers (lower social economic level of new students, low cultural consumption, deterioration or lack of prior knowledge that should have included from secondary school). On the other hand, emphasizing the connection and accompanying students is an effect of the current educational and teacher training policies that sought to extend rights and include new student sectors, previously excluded from higher education. As a strategy to achieve this, education management gave teachers a new task: to support students' career and ensure their academic success through actions of support, improvement, recovery and monitoring.

The new National Curriculum Guidelines for Initial Teacher Training (2007) increased the hours of practice (at the institute and at schools) and established their simultaneity (starting the first year) to other fields and training curriculum areas. Interviewees stated that this has created some tension because many students work and can not comply with all the periods and established practices or intensively scheduled. This change has come about due to the high content load of the new plans and because the year is now

divided into four terms⁶. Students attend teaching practice workshops from the first year. The aim is to improve the relationship between theory and practice and provide students with a gradual approach to the work of teaching. In the context of assessments performed on the new curricula (Arial, Borioli and Rodriguez, 2015), some of the country's IFD directors incorporated new roles in their institutions to support the design development stage and particularly to provide tutors who give student support.

Facing with these political and curricular changes, the ability to listen and capture student needs becomes more important, in order to produce a pedagogical framework that accompanies and secures their academic trajectories. For those interviewees, training should start with recognizing the other person, their autonomy, creativity and circumstances.

Taking into account the subjectivity of students and the point of the process they're in —in other words, what school they're in, what level, grade or group they've been assigned - and paying attention to what the stories of their students are, as well as the stories of the student teachers, and trying to expand horizons and enrich them with new resources on this basis, but fundamentally making it possible for the design of the projects [planning] to be expressed by the author, so that the authors of the projects are the students themselves (Teacher educator 1).

Teacher educators value the teaching expertise that allows to build a pedagogical connection based on accompanying the student. In a practical sense, they visualize themselves in the task where «teaching to teach» involves supporting the other, developing a personal work that recognizes the subjectivities and otherness at play: «There is a sustained accompaniment [...] there is something that has to do with the opportunity to accompany, to be a reference, and the way of viewing students [...] knowing students ...» (Teacher educator 11).

Within the answers lies a situated, contextual-based learning approach. In this regard, studies conducted by Chaiklin and Lave (2001) recognize four premises on situated learning perspectives: (a) knowledge is always constructed and transformed when it is used, (b) learning is an integral part of the activity in and with the world, (c) what is learned is always problematic and (d) the acquisition of knowledge goes beyond simple «absorption», as it involves understanding and this is always a partial and open-ended process. Respondents valued teaching expertise that generates contextual, situated learning.

We try to teach from a place of listening and we try to generate in the other a space for autonomy. We also try to have a serious outlook towards diversity. So, this is a fundamental premise [...] teaching based on respect for others, teaching based on diversity, teaching letting the other be creative, autonomous (Teacher educator 2).

One interviewee stated that it is necessary to accept and «work with the student that arrives, the student we get»; and this involves repositioning the traditional role of the IFD teacher. To recognize the other, the actual student with all of his/her traits, means that teacher educators should make an effort to «working from the possibility and not from the difficulty, because it often happens that teachers emphasize what the student can not do instead of considering what he/she can do» (Teacher educator 13).

At this point it is of interest to recover Sennett's ideas (2009) when analyzing the work of the craftsman and the role of repairs. For the author, making and repairing form an indivisible whole, and those who manage to do both things, have the ability to see beyond technology, giving purpose and coherence to their task: «It is often repairing things that allows us to understand how they work» (Sennett, 2009, p. 246). It is in the process of making repairs that tools are tested; we understand and develop our skills and imaginative abilities. When applied to teacher education, a double bet is placed by trying to develop the capabilities of students/future teachers or current teachers, and also those of school groups where practices are implemented.

The teacher educator is focused on *holding the other up* [...] There is also a good practice supervisor comin in, a good-do or a good expertise of a practice supervisor, he/she is there with you for the next time. He/she tells them what has been improved and what has not [...] «Notice that with class management this isn't going well, you're with the group of ten and the others are

⁶ One of the statutes of the National Curriculum Guidelines (Res. CFE 24/2007) was that provinces' curricular design could adopt the annual or quarterly periodization. This addressed the need to abandon the simultaneous completion of all the year's subjects in order to diversify formats, making considerations for curricular units of various types and logic (courses, seminars, workshops, field work, teaching practices). In this way, each subject could have specific times and durations. Previously, teacher-training institutes were ruled to annual courses. This approach was often implemented with difficulty, without abandoning encyclopedic curriculum, and new subjects were added to the existing ones to cover new fields and curricular requirements.

not following[...]» A good practice supervisor does all that. There is a previous instance, which is planning and anticipating problems, but then you have to go with them into the classroom and *support them if there are obstacles* (Teacher educator 7).

Working with the difficulty of another person —particularly in the field of practice, but also in other fields of training— places teacher educators at the limits of their own work and profession. Their strategies and educational tools are challenged when they have to correct or repair their student's planning or help them to be consistent with their pedagogical theory in the classroom, and to hold true to this theory with their class-group, or *in spite of it*. It is at that moment that teacher educators are placed, like Sennet's craftsman, within the limits of their craft: they have to explore the tools that are available to them, face obstacles, imagine new uses for the available resources, change the function of a tool, create new techniques and use them in «sublime» ways to resolve the difficulty. When the teacher educator faces with these obstacles, he/she commits and exceeds them:

Another characteristic that I think is fundamental is the *commitment to the task*, having a real commitment, a commitment that has to do with preparing lessons, with staying up to date, with accompanying the other person, with generating the necessary structure that the other person needs...commitment to me seems to be an indispensable ingredient (Teacher educator 2).

Teacher educators' previous experience as teachers

Secondly, teacher educators value the previous experience they have acquired as teachers at other levels of the system. All interviewees mentioned the importance of classroom experience. They say it is necessary to «have gotten dirty with chalk [...] have written on many blackboards» in order to be good at the task of training teachers. Most believe this is a selective requirement, while very few restrict it to those teachers responsible for teaching practice spaces and disciplinary didactics.

For me a good teacher educator *has to be a teacher*. What I'm saying sounds silly, but sometimes it is not that common that, through *all stages of teacher training*, many people have been teachers. There are great, very good specialists and authorities in natural sciences that actually know very little about the classroom [...] So *if you did not live it, if you did not experience it, if you did not practice it, you can't know it* [...] there are things that could never be explained theoretically [...] You may know a lot, you may have received a lot of training, seen classes, I don't know [...] but if you never taught a class [...] (Teacher educator 5).

I think that he/she has to have been in the classroom and have had the task of teaching, having been a teacher at some point. That seems essential (Teacher educator 11).

While teacher educators are required to have a lot of experience in direct teaching (at levels of the system for which they are training others), the answers do not deep into the quality or the relevant content of that experience. What should they have learned from that experience? It is assumed that standing in front of a group of children or adolescents is in itself formative and transcendental. There seems to be an overvaluation of classroom practice *per se*, which raises the question as to the kind of experiences referred to and if all would be equally valuable and relevant for teacher training. Years of experience and/or professional practice should not be mechanically accepted as expertise, because, in the absence of reflective practice, the teacher hardly learns from the experience. In addition, if we take into account the profound changes in the contexts of schooling and subjects of learning it is likely that having been an educator or a teacher 15 or 20 years ago is an insufficient, dislocated or atemporal experience for understanding what is happening today in schools.

We are not devaluing or taking relevance away from practical expertise; on the contrary, we investigated it and strongly encourage its systematization and transmission in the areas of teacher training. Other references in addition to expert and academic knowledge are needed in teacher education (Alliaud & Vezub, 2015). However, personal practical experience cannot be a selective criterion when considering the training task from a collective perspective. For example, a good expert in his/her discipline has something valuable to give teaching expertise of their subject that may be relevant or useful in training. The theoretical knowledge of a field is insufficient, but if training relies on teams of teacher educators, the integration and dialogue of varied perspectives and backgrounds is possible in the pursuit of thinking about the objectives of teaching as well as other problems inherent to teaching. Although the experience of a theoretical expert is insufficient, we will have to see how much she/he is able to reflect on his/her knowledge and experience to make it something of value for teacher training and teaching at other levels.

Personal and professional dispositions

Personal and professional dispositions form the third group of traits and skills that interviewees mentioned. This category includes: respect for the profession; ethical and value conditions; commitment to the task and a desire to teach; permanently growing and studying; flexible thinking; intellectual and cultural interests; and open attitude towards change.

These ethical and moral traits combine the given approach to training (able to problematize, to sow doubts) and the type of teacher and professional identity one seeks to create (a democratic teacher that teaches in diversity and builds an inclusive school).

Being someone who has received an education, who has specialized in both their discipline as well as pedagogy and, eventually, training, someone who has done research related to education, someone who is culturally active, who reads, goes to the theater, listens to concerts, participates in social and cultural movements (Teacher educator 1).

So, training a good teacher is a job that takes place side by side. A teacher who is committed to a policy, who argues for the relationship between theory and practice a lot [...] and it implies being a teacher who is able to democratize a classroom because he has gone through it in his own training, he has had many spaces of democratic discussion (Teacher educator 7).

Theoretical, academic and formal knowledge

Finally, classical and traditional expertise, as already mentioned for teachers, are also essential for teacher educators: theoretical, academic and formal knowledge acquired as a result of formal studies, degrees obtained and permanent education. For those interviewees, teacher educators should have academic, educational and theoretical knowledge that is relevant to their discipline. «We also need theoretical training, enrichment regarding some current debates» (Teacher educator 11). «There must be an appropriate integration and management of teaching pedagogical knowledge; I think it's essential» (Teacher educator 3). «Having a wide theoretical training» (Teacher educator 4). This kind of knowledge, generally indicated at the end, is almost considered obvious, a longstanding and undisputed requirement.

Discussion and final considerations

Given the limited fieldwork, the methodology undertaken and the particularities of this group of teacher educators, the findings presented are limited in scope and could only be attributed to a sector of this professional group. In no way they represent the whole. However, the conducted research opens up new questions for the continued research into the position of teacher educators in the context of changes that teacher education is going through in the country, which we will try to precise below.

The opinions collected from teacher educators have several matches to the categories that, most recently, have been established in specialized literature for teaching practice. These include: knowledge of the context and students, mastery of new technologies, skills to work in institutions and culturally diverse and heterogeneous classrooms, and reflection and articulation between theory and practice; all of which can be found in both discursive universes. Experience and practice itself, is a fundamental area of expertise valued by the teacher educators, both in their task of training and the performance of teachers in general. While this knowledge is also present in the teaching expert and theoretical knowledge, it does not seem to carry the same weight. Within the knowledge of practice that this group emphasizes, we find two areas of knowledge analyzed: those which comes from personal experience as teachers at other levels of the system and procedures and attitudes that enable them to establish connections and work with those students who have chosen to be teachers today.

Faced with the changes in institutions and educational subjects, it is necessary to consolidate pedagogical expertise that is rooted in the experience, in the practice of teaching as well as in the reflection of teachers. It must be a professional knowledge that is able to respond to the new challenges of schooling, engages the student interests in school programs and transmits relevant social content, building pedagogical authority while addressing the growing cultural diversity.

Interviewees show a significant level of reflection and commitment to their task which manifests itself in an updated discourse about their conceptions of training, which are in line with those identified in the literature and some international documents. One of them says that teacher educators must have «experience, training and commitment.» From their perspective, in the teacher initial training there needs to be a body of knowledge and provisions which combine and articulate formal knowledge, academic and theoretical disciplines and pedagogy, with accumulated experience, practical knowledge, the inherent casuistry of having been a teacher in the educational system and the know-how acquired over the course of experience and a teaching career.

As a hypothesis, which should be examined in further studies, we argue that changes in educational, teaching and initial teaching curriculum policies in Argentina (which include the expansion of higher education as well as the inclusion of young people from social sectors that had been previously excluded) seem to be producing some shifts in the teacher educator's foundational magisterial and/or academic identity, moving them towards more inclusive and social pedagogies. Thus, it is necessary to investigate which arte the «changes in the relationship between teaching expertise and the culture of the student and teacher population, as well as the relationship between massification and teacher prestige, which has been properly addressed in research yet» (Birgin & Charovsky, 2013, p. 34).

Regarding the configuration of teacher educator professional identity and their place in regards to the task, the results show that they value personal, professional and moral provisions that give a political and pedagogical meaning to their job. Training a teacher implies a triple commitment, in the words of one interviewee: «personal, professional and social». It is, therefore, worth recalling that commitment to the profession and to doing the best job possible is a trait that distinguishes and makes proud good craftsmen (Sennett, 2009) and is therefore the basis for improvement and professional development of teacher educators.

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