



## Placement in Teacher Training. An Experience of Connection between Secondary Schools and University

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### 1. Introduction

Spanish Ministry of Education approved in 2007 [5] new requirements for teacher training in secondary and vocational education, and language teaching. These new requirements are established in a Master degree following the European Space for Higher Education and the new regulations of our educational system [6]. All these adjustments have set up a radical and meaningful change in teacher training in secondary education [7].

There is no doubt that Secondary Education has become the most relevant stage in the Spanish educational system from previous regulations [8]. Big challenges for improvement are placed in this phase due to the following dilemmas: Diversity attention, students and teachers motivation, competences in a globalized world, ICT, innovation, etc.

We need a solid and well-structured programme based on knowledge of subjects and modules and their teaching strategies together with the knowledge of the educational institution and its management processes [9] y [10].

Secondary Education is, right now, in the social, political and pedagogical edge. As it is the key point in the PISA results more attention is claimed from teachers, relatives, social agents, companies, etc. It is crucial that teachers adapt to new circumstances and needs [11] y [12].

### 2. Problem and Objectives

One of all these elements is especially relevant: Master students' placement in Secondary Schools.

Following Zabalza's premises [1], we set these questions: Does the connection between Master contents and real practice exist? Are placements, as they are organized in this moment, the best answer to teaching needs or do they just reproduce old patterns that need to be replaced? At which point should the academic curriculum become a professionalizing curriculum? Who should decide real contents of placements? Universities? Secondary Schools? Public Administration? Students? Relatives? We think we need to find the necessary balance in order to become the best teacher training programme for the future. The last question is related to the connection university-secondary school. It is clear that such a connection must exist, but it should be bidirectional. That means that, evidently, universities have to know the real world in order to adapt their contents but, do secondary teachers know the possibilities that the master offers? Are all the tutors and all the schools valid for this role?

#### 2.1 Objective

What we need is, then, a real coordination, that students don't see university contents as something far from their reality and that placements do not transmit that there is "no hope". Thus, the goal of our project is to establish a first approach to real coordination not only as an administrative relationship, but also as a common strategy. We need to bring academic contents closer the real world of schools but this only be possible if both parts work together from the beginning. For this, our objective is to design a joint placement programme that includes its own assessment.

#### 2.2 Methodology

The methodology developed in this project follows action-research methodology (see Figure 1) as is based on a continuous assessment which used in a systematic way will serve for continuous improvement [3] y [4]

##### **First Stage: Planning phase. Design of the pilot programme (1 month)**

We organized eight meetings between university teachers and secondary school teachers and coordinators. Work was based on these steps:

Step 1: Contents of the master programme are explained to secondary teachers and coordinators.

Step 2: Secondary teachers and coordinators reflect about how students can observe, absorb and experience those contents when they are in the secondary schools.

Step 3: Debate and design of a pilot programme to be carried out during the placement.

##### **Second Stage: Acting phase. Programme in practice (2 months)**

It is carried out while the placement is taking place. The goal is to test the programme. Main steps were these:

Step 1: Secondary school coordinators had to observe the development of the programme and register all the incidences related to it. Some questions that had to be taken into account were about workload, teacher preparation of tutors, students' previous knowledge, usefulness of practice and usefulness of programme.

Step 2: Meetings in Secondary Schools. The Master's Academic Coordination Team attended all the secondary schools in order to interview master students and tutors in practice. Questions were addressed to the same points mentioned above. All the meetings were recorded.

##### **Third Stage: Assessing phase. Analysis of results (1 month)**

It is the moment of handling all the information. At this point we:

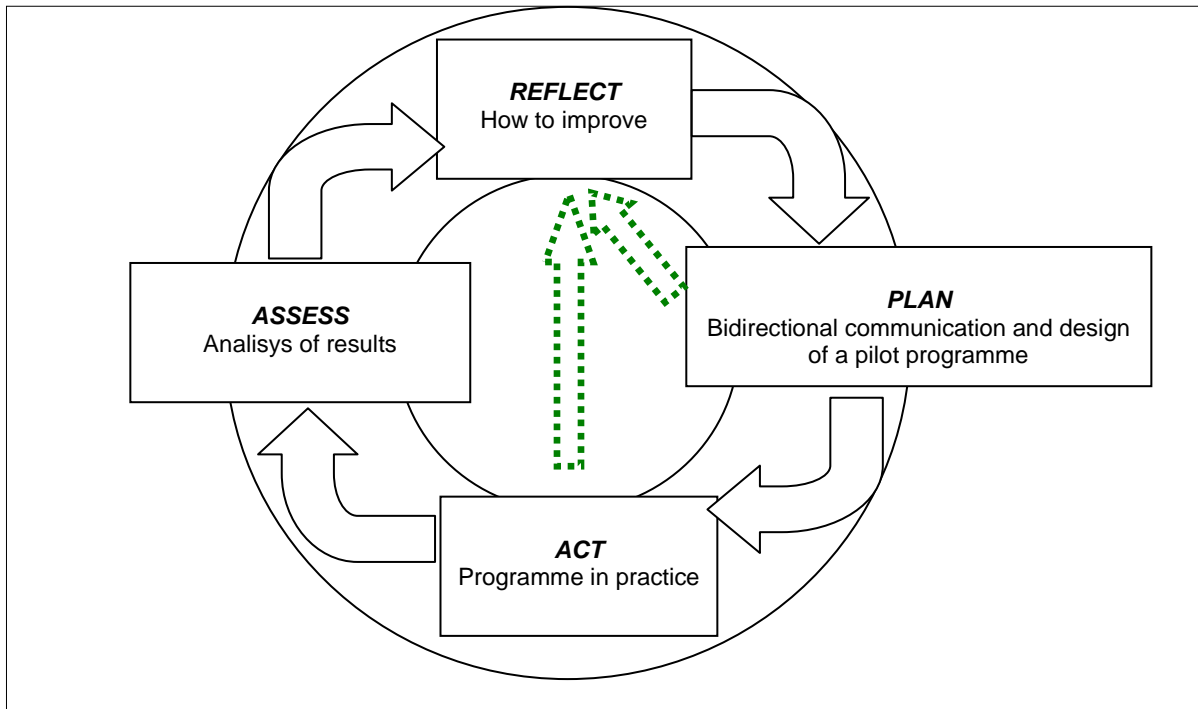
Step 1: Organized the information gathered in order to facilitate the exploration of results

Step 2: Joint meeting between university and secondary schools where results were analysed, discussed and debated.

**Fourth Stage: Reflecting phase. How to improve (1 meeting)**

After the analysis, main problems were detected and new lines of development for the following year established.

**Figure 1.** Phases of the project inside the action-research cycle



**3. Results**

As this project follows an action-research schema after each phase we obtained some results that were part of the reflection as Fig.1 shows (green arrows). Thus, each stage becomes an improvement process itself. This confirmed what Tejedor [13] said in that each phase is a research project in itself.

**Results of the planning phase**

The main result of this phase was the pilot programme containing two main sections:

Experience about School context. Students should demonstrate school experience/knowledge in:

- Documents and classrooms.
- Organizational/managing structure.
- Specific programmes for attention to diversity
- Different classrooms and educational levels.
- Daily life of a teacher in school (meetings, interviews, lessons, etc.)
- Other realities from other modules different than his/her specialization.

Experience about teaching profession performance. Student should demonstrate knowledge in:

- Lessons planning in different school levels.
- Application of Observation techniques in classroom.
- Documented and thoughtful reflection about improvement (reflection together with tutor).

**Results of the acting phase**

In this phase, after meetings, main results were related to elements that should be taken into account on programming the placement: As not all the academic events take place during school timetable as Assessment sessions or Management meetings. Students also remark some lack of knowledge related to adult education. Although the level is secondary education, many adults attend vocational education modules and their needs are different from teenagers.

**Results of the assessing phase**

Main results of this phase came from the analysis of the recorded meetings and observation, and had to do with (1) selection of tutors: Not all facilitate innovation and not all have the training needed; (2) Coordinators performance: they have to be the point of reference, so they have to be visible all the time; (3) The student assessment: it is needed to unify criteria establishing some kind of rubric; (4) Master Students behaviour: They have to know that they are performing as teachers not as students, so, their behaviour should be more mature in some aspects.



#### 4. Discussion: Results of the reflecting phase

After having a look to the global process, the two main results of this phase match with the discussion of this paper. Thus, we can say that, first of all, coordinators showed their satisfaction with the relationship established between university and secondary schools. Although at the beginning, secondary schools were afraid that these meetings could become some kind of indoctrination from higher education institutions, after the first meetings they realized that the intention was to establish a real collaboration.

The second main result was the need to maintain and enhance this connection and coordination between both contexts in order to start working in the changes as a result of this project. That is, we need to ensure the improvement of Zabalza's [1] curricular conditions. Thus, we have created a Permanent Seminar as a forum of debate, critical reflection, exchange of practices and training about competences and contents derived from this Master, and meet once a month to deal with a specific topic decided on the previous meeting.

Apart from these and taking into account preliminary results in WBLinHE new questions and debate arise in our context; they are related to the other key conditions named by Zabalza: Organizational and Personnel. And they have to do with the duration and location in the programme and the student selection system.

Related to organizational conditions: Are two months enough time for placement? Is the end of the programme the best timing for practicum? But the real important hidden question related to this is: Is one year course enough time for training teachers in secondary education? Why Primary teachers or even kindergarten are trained during four years and secondary just one?

Dealing with personnel conditions, as this Master is a requirement for being teacher: Who has to select students and tutors: University or Public Administration? And for students, when has this selection to take place: Before the master or before becoming teacher?

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