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ARTICLE

Professionalisation of Teaching in Universities: Implications from a Training Perspective

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Abstract

While the professionalisation of teaching is not a new topic of pedagogical study, its consideration in today's training context is relevant from a three-fold perspective: 1) Integrating formal, non-formal and informal learning systems; 2) Lifelong learning; and 3) Competency-based training, where importance is placed on initial training and continuing education, and on professional development.

After a review of these three aspects, the article provides a brief characterisation of the professionalisation of teaching and the professional development of teachers. Finally, a number of implications regarding trainer training in higher education are analysed.

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Resumen

Aunque el tema de la profesionalización docente no es nuevo como campo de estudio de la pedagogía, sí que resulta relevante su consideración en el contexto formativo de hoy en día, y lo es desde diferentes prismas: 1) desde la triple perspectiva de la integración de los sistemas de aprendizaje formal, no formal e informal; 2) desde la consideración del aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida; 3) desde la lógica de la formación basada en competencias, en la que se le da importancia a la formación inicial y continua, y que tiene un enfoque de desarrollo socioprofesional.

En este artículo, tras esta triple consideración, pretendemos caracterizar mínimamente cómo es hoy en día la profesionalización docente y el desarrollo profesional, para centrar la atención en el profesor desde una perspectiva profesional. Finalmente, se analizan algunas implicaciones de dicho planteamiento sobre la formación de los formadores en la educación superior.

Palabras clave

profesionalización, desarrollo profesional, aprendizaje permanente, formación por competencias, formación de formadores, educación superior

1. Introduction

Changes in the working environment, triggered mainly by globalisation and the introduction of information and communication technologies (ICTs), have created new training needs. The training institution and classroom have often proved incapable of satisfying them. Besides the number and inadequacy of reforms carried out, owing mainly to the constant development of employment demands in the light of such fast-moving, progressive change, we find that labour institutions or firms are themselves becoming training institutions and producers of immediate, specific qualifications and competencies. They stand as extraordinary systems that are capable of consolidating professional development and professionalisation strategies.

The demand for professional development training leads us to acknowledge that other potential training scenarios do indeed exist beyond formal settings and universities themselves. In this respect, it is necessary to talk of training in, or training provided by business organisations, associations, corporate universities, etc., such as those that are subsequently able to offer students employment, and also of other non-specialised pedagogical agents that are capable of complementing the training given by traditional teaching staff (practicum tutors, adjunct lecturers, guest lecturers, etc.).

Therefore we depart from the assumption that there are diffuse boundaries between the various systems for training and acquiring professional competencies, since the permeability/flexibility between systems is now their most obvious characteristic. To some extent, lifelong learning is being taken as the approach that can assume and perfectly integrate everything connected with formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts as a whole.

With these general observations about professionals' training, our intention is to illustrate just how complex it is to talk of professionalisation in general and of the professionalisation of teachers in particular. Therefore, we depart from the assumption that initial training, if there is any, is insufficient for the professionalisation of university lecturers. We also assume that such training needs to be understood from the logic of lifelong learning and the interconnection of scenarios – for training and work – to make it possible (Tejada, 2007, 2012).

Consequently, we feel compelled to focus on their points of reference to ensure that the issues raised by the study of the professionalisation of university lecturers are properly addressed. Finally, a number of implications regarding trainer training in higher education have to be mentioned.

2. Teachers as professionals, and their professionalisation

Today, the fact that teaching is regarded as a profession and teachers as professionals is nothing new. However, a very different matter is theoretically agreeing on the professionalisation of teaching and related concepts in this semantic field (teaching performance, professional status, professional identity construction, teaching career, promotion, remuneration, social recognition, working conditions, professional self-esteem, and occupational health).

Given the constraints on this study, we shall not go into this debate. However, it is worth noting just a few things, since such considerations are fundamental to addressing the issue of university lecturer training.

Le Boterf (1999) says that a *professional* is someone capable of managing a complex working situation. So, he opts for a definition that associates professionalism with competence. His proposal gives an explicit breakdown of the various components that characterise a professional:

- He/She is able to proceed properly, above and beyond his/her duties, in a specific context or situation.
- He/She is able to combine personal and environmental resources, which, in specific contexts, he/she is able to mobilise properly.
- He/She is able to transfer personal resources to situations that are required by the context.
- He/She is able to learn from experience, and learn to learn.
- He/She is able to commit to his/her work and to professional relationships with others.

By including teaching and the analysis of relationships between training and professionalism, which is of interest here, we could characterise the teaching profession under the following criteria (Shulman, 1998, in Fernández Cruz, 2006):

- A duty of service to others with a certain 'vocation'.
- An understanding of a corpus of theories or established knowledge.
- A qualified mastery of practical actions: skills and strategies that underpin professional practice.
- Exercising judgment under circumstances of inevitable uncertainty: not directly applying knowledge or skills, but exercising practical judgment under uncertain circumstances.
- A need to learn from experience, construed as the interaction between theory and practice.
- A professional community that develops quality and increases knowledge: being a professional means being a member of a profession that has certain public responsibilities in relation to individual practices.

The importance of this point of view is that it connects perfectly with the image that makes teachers identify with their work: the social function of teaching; a balance between theoretical and practical knowledge; the artistic nature visible in the complexity and singularity of the work; and the existence of a professional community that increases knowledge (Marcelo, 2009).

On the other hand, we depart from the assumption that *professionalisation* is a process that is articulated around the construction of a professional identity, professional competencies, access requirements, the associated training, the development of a professional career, and the processes of evaluation of professional performance (Tejada, 2009, 2011). Professionalisation as a process does not constitute the final state that occupations lead towards, but rather a continuous process that pursues their useful and responsible practice (Darling-Hammond, 2005). As such, it is a demand that stems from social, economic and labour development, and a desirable one at that, since it ensures better quality in professional performance (Murillo, 2007).

Likewise, it is possible to talk of *professional development* understood as a process through which trained teachers achieve high levels of professional competence and "expand their understanding of self, role, context, and career" (Duke & Stiggins, 1997). More specifically, it could be considered as the process of teachers' learning throughout their professional lives, which includes initial training, the time when they join the profession, in-service training (understood as formal, directed programmes), constant striving at local level (among peers, in teaching teams) and teachers' self-directed learning. This whole process ensures the development and strengthening of social, ethical and technical competencies within the framework of a profession under constant construction (Robalino, 2007).

In short, we understand the professional development of teachers as a gradual evolution in the performance of the educational function towards modes and situations of greater professionalism, which are characterised by the depth of critical judgment and its application to the overall analysis of the processes involved in teaching so as to act intelligently. It is an evolution constructed on the growth of the teacher as a person in every aspect, which is anchored firstly in the integration of basic structures of practical knowledge acquired through experience in the world of teaching and professional practice, and secondly in assistance with professional growth and improvement that teachers receive in the form of training. Adult development, the accumulation of experience, and training therefore appear to be at the root of the professional development of teachers (Villegas-Remser, 2003; Fernández Cruz, 2006, Nemiña et al., 2009, Marcelo, 2011).

Into the mix described above, it is necessary to add new working scenarios that are characterised by internationalisation, regional development, cooperation with work-based organisations, education reforms, the implications of social development, technological development, new pedagogies, institutional restructuring, new groups of students, etc., which in turn create new training needs. With their emergence, a variety of issues will need to be taken into account, such as the type of qualifications that university lecturers should have, the transformation that their role in the knowledge society should undergo, the conditions that need to be created to practise the profession in this new scenario, or the role that initial training and continuing education play in shaping professional qualification and professional development from a perspective of lifelong learning (Tejada, 2009; Tejada & Fernández Cruz, 2009).

In a context of independent lifelong learning, the *professional development* of teachers implies that they should (Mas & Tejada, 2012):

- Continue systematically to reflect on professional practice.
- Do research in the classroom.
- Incorporate, into their teaching, the results of research in the classroom and of academic research.
- Assess the effectiveness of their teaching strategies and change them accordingly.
- Assess their own learning needs.
- Collaborate with other professionals in an interdisciplinary manner (training-work).
- Incorporate ICTs and learning and communication technologies (LCTs) into their professional practice.

With these brief observations, which serve to bring the terms 'professional', 'professionalisation' and 'professional development' to the fore, we can consider that the main actors are the professionals. In this way, we are able to verify that the functions performed are specific, concrete and, to some extent, delimited (Navío, 2007; Fernández Enguita, 2009). We are referring to planning/programming, teaching, evaluation, tutoring, guidance, research, innovation and network facilitation, to name a few.

However, many teachers embark on their professional lives with obvious shortcomings in the mastery of professional teaching competencies. Sometimes, even the knowledge that they possess is too fragmented and decontextualised – even though it might be presented in the form of 'recipes' or ostensible skills – to intervene in instructional situations. This phenomenon gives rise to precarious employment and professional imposture. We would like to say that the lack of a specific training profile and of access requirements to the profession, very often means that the recruitment and selection processes do not yield the expected results and cannot provide any assurance of quality in professional practice (Mas & Tejada, 2012).

Finally, this characterisation of teaching profession, which also implies that an ethical code has to be available, throws up several problems. Even though much thought has been given to the issue (Hortal, 2002; Mauri, 2003; Martínez Navarro, 2010; Vázquez & Escámez, 2010), it is not possible to talk of a clear code of ethics that is shared by professionals of higher education. Something similar happens with the professional identity dimension. This is where a particular problem arises: university

lecturers very often identify themselves with the specialty and not with teaching, the latter of which becomes a somewhat secondary aspect of their professional practice. It is possible to corroborate that there is greater concern for updating and developing competencies that are more specific to the specialty than to teaching (e.g., psychopedagogical competencies) (Herranz, 2001; Beyjaard et al., 2004; Villa, 2008; Bain, 2008; Rial, 2008; Zabalza, 2009).

However, in the past few years, concerns about improving this professional profile have been growing, since there is an awareness of its importance to the quality of education; indeed, it becomes a determining factor of such quality. This is clearly exemplified by the way in which this profession is considered in Europe today. In a comparative and official manner, the characteristics of the teaching profession are included in the document *Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications* (European Commission, 2005). While it refers to professionals in the non-university education system, in our opinion it is transferrable to university lecturers. According to the above-mentioned document, the principles of the profession are that it should be well-qualified, placed within the context of lifelong learning, mobile, and based on partnerships.

- A **well-qualified** profession. All teachers are required to be graduates from higher education institutions; all teachers are required to have extensive subject knowledge, a good knowledge of pedagogy, the skills and competencies required to guide and support learners, and an understanding of the social and cultural dimension of education.
- A profession placed within the context of **lifelong learning**. Teachers should be supported in order to continue their professional development throughout their careers; they and their education authorities and/or employers should recognise the importance of acquiring new knowledge, and teachers should be able to innovate and use evidence to inform their work.
- A **mobile** profession. Mobility should be a central component of initial and continuing teacher education programmes. Teachers should be encouraged to spend time working or studying in other European countries for professional development purposes.
- And lastly, a profession based on **partnerships**. Institutions providing teacher education should organise their work collaboratively in partnership with schools, education programmes and services, and with local working environments, work-based training providers and other stakeholders.

Regarding higher education lecturers, the same document considers the following to be important:

- Teacher education programmes should be delivered in masters and doctorate cycles to ensure their place in higher education.
- Partnerships between teachers in employment and work-based organisations and other stakeholders should be strengthened.
- Those responsible for training teachers and teacher trainers should have experience of classroom teaching practice and have reached a high level in the teaching competencies required of teachers.

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Three levels of competencies have been considered of relevance to trainers, (European Commission, 2008):

a) *Vocational competencies* that enable the trainer to train work-practice related, basic vocational and technical skills.

a) *Pedagogical and social competencies* to facilitate didactic processes and the work with young people and colleagues, in particular fostering the integration function of training, mentoring, corporate learning elements and the effective transfer of knowledge.

c) *Management competencies* to support so-called secondary training-related processes, including quality monitoring and assurance.

Vocational competencies are considered a prerequisite for becoming a trainer. However, most trainers lack pedagogical, social and management competencies, which have therefore become a priority for continuing education actions.

3. Implications for lecturer training

Having taken this open approach to the professionalisation of teachers, it is now necessary to make some observations about the implications for their training. We should depart from the fact that, within the higher education environment, university lecturer training does not enjoy a good bill of health. Serious efforts have been made, of course, in universities as a whole, driven by the dynamics of the process of building the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The consequent reforms to curricula and the shift in the teaching-learning paradigm have given rise to a diversity of lecturer training programmes and also to the creation of a number of training support units. However, the various forums and studies on this issue continue to stress shortcomings in teaching competencies, as well as the difficulties that lecturers have in keeping their skills up to date. These shortcomings refer mainly to a lack of competencies in relation to new educational challenges (including individualised learning, preparing students to learn independently, mixed-ability classes, preparing students to make the most of ICTs, etc.) (Mas & Tejada, 2012).

In addition, these processes are not usually connected with either educational innovations or educational research. The incentives for lecturers to continue updating their teaching competencies through their professional careers are scarce.

In order to overcome this state of affairs, the basic implications could be:

1. To consider the professional profile and professionalisation as a framework of reference for training design: while there is no single understanding of 'professional profile' in the literature (and now is not the time to focus on the issues surrounding a single profile), it is indeed necessary to establish the different levels of qualification in accordance with the different scenarios of professional action and the demands thereof (tenured lecturer, adjunct lecturers, temporary lecturers, tutors, etc.). This consideration needs to be taken into account in the initial training and continuing education of our

professionals, in terms of shaping professional qualification and professional development from a perspective of lifelong learning.

From the professional development angle, it is also expedient to reflect on lecturer professionalisation. Regarding any professional profile, whatever the level of qualification, we are of the opinion that it is crucial to consider the process of professional development, taking account of employment trajectory and professional performance. In this respect, it is necessary to consider the different professional categories in accordance with the professional competencies assigned to them, and even in relation to a professional career as a whole (new, junior, senior and expert lecturer, training coordinator, manager, etc.) (Tejada & Fernández Cruz, 2009). Here, we shall avoid going into any further detail about the articulation of such a system (number of years spent at each stage or level, professional practices to be implemented, level of responsibility and institutional commitment, etc.). What is clear is that moving up through these stages is, at one and the same time, a professionalisation system.

In addition, emphasis should be placed on the conditions of professional practice, from the entry requirements to the evaluation of professional performance, both of which have an impact on a professional career.

2. Professional practice and action as points of reference and training strategies. Undeniably, the current professional action culture (albeit evolving) is totally out of date. The new demands for more collaborative approaches (Montero, 2011, González Sanmamed & Fuentes, 2011) to cope with professional requirements and challenges place us firmly on the path of the logic of teamwork, which may even be interdisciplinary in nature. This indicates that existing fragmentary approaches – departments, knowledge areas and the like – will need to be overcome. The new logic of curricular articulation (ensuing from the competency-based approach) and its development (involving the integration of theory and practice) (Korthagen, 2010) is destined towards a culture of teaching teams, inasmuch as its affects the design, development and evaluation of training, or subjects even, on which several lecturers may work in partnership. We also need to include three additional aspects, which are key in this scenario: reflection on and for the action, the ethical dimension, and the logic of continuing education.

In short, the logic of competency-based training implies a more integral kind of training aimed at professional problem-solving, which entails the reconstruction of content from the perspective of a productive logic, in close connection with the worlds of education and employment.

We believe that is important to underscore that training plays a key role in professionalisation; it is closely related to practice and, indeed, *centred on practice*. This has repercussions for initial training and continuing education, and it is a direct consequence of a competency-based training approach. As far as initial training is concerned, this would entail supporting approaches such as the *dual education system* and *work-linked training*, where vocational training and work are coherently integrated, especially in the final periods of initial training (Tejada, 2012). We should not forget that these work-related practicum periods have a socialisation and professional inclusion value that is by no means negligible. Regarding continuing education, nobody disputes its practical orientation and close links to the real needs of training in the workplace. We are referring to *tailored in-service programmes*, using

strategies such as *mentoring, coaching*, etc., because of their impact on professional development (Tejada, 2006, 2007, 2012). Continuing education should be very flexible in terms of its articulation and the paths that lecturers can follow. The role that ICTs play in this setting is important, given their potential to articulate and serve as the vehicle for such education.

This point about new methodological strategies is nothing more than a consequence of the logic of competency-based training and the principles that govern it (De Miguel, 2006; Tejada, 2007). We are basically referring to social constructivism; from this perspective, we can activate basic and strategic learning modalities that are based on problems, case studies and professional action, which, in different social forms (groups, teams, partnerships) will allow us to implement other methodological strategies whose effectiveness has been more than proven in professional competency training and development. We are referring to research/action, self-directed learning, training workshops, quality circles, learning communities, etc.

3. The time for training: the roles of initial training and continuing education. In their contributions to this topic, various authors have underscored the lack of consistency between teachers' – or, in this instance, lecturers' – initial training and continuing education.

Initial training cannot provide lecturers with knowledge and skills that they need to develop throughout their professional careers (Montero, 2002). As we have maintained throughout this article, a lecturer's training and professional development should be considered a lifelong task, which should consequently be structured and funded. Training and professional development will be more effective if it is coherently coordinated on a national scale and properly funded. The ideal approach would be to establish an uninterrupted continuum of training and education that spans all the stages from initial teacher training to joining the profession, and then to continuing professional development throughout the whole career, which includes formal, informal and non-formal opportunities. This would mean that all lecturers would (a) take part in an effective induction programme in the first three years of service; (b) have access to structured guidance and be mentored by experienced lecturers or other relevant professionals throughout their careers; (c) take part in regular debates about training and development needs, in the context of a general development plan for the institutions where they work.

In addition, continuing education would benefit all lecturers if:

- They were encouraged and supported throughout their careers to expand and develop their competencies by formal, informal and non-formal methods, and could get their efforts recognised.
- They had access to other continuing professional development opportunities such as exchanges and secondments (irrespective of whether or not they are funded by official lifelong learning programmes).
- They had the opportunity to study (and the time required to do so) to obtain additional qualifications and to take part in higher education research and studies.
- More were done to foster creative partnerships between the institutions where lecturers work and work-based organisations, higher education and research centres, and other stakeholders

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in order to support high-quality training and effective practices, and also to develop innovative local and regional networks.

4. One of the most important dimensions in our field of analysis is the content of trainer training. Professional competencies would be the guiding principles of the curriculum to be articulated. Content modules should be closely linked to competency units (Tejada, 2002; Mas & Tejada, 2012).

Nowadays, it should be borne in mind that the content to be selected/integrated into the training and education curriculum (initial and continuing) should be considered from the perspective of new reference parameters: modernisation; technological bases; digital and language literacy; the shaping of social, technological and economic networks and exchanges; the promotion of intra- and inter-institutional exchanges; discipline integration; and new fields of training.

Under these parameters, let's now consider the old and new content: tutorials, discipline didactics, student assessment, learning, motivation, new technologies, methodological strategies, practices, lecturer self-evaluation, subject coordination, planning, materials production, etc. (Mas & Tejada, 2012).

Likewise, taking content into account, training moment needs to be considered. It seems more relevant for initial training to address familiarisation with courses and programmes and the possibility of being able to intervene through expert support, and to develop the ability to reflect on practice, strengthening basic didactic training, etc. Thus, content associated with the technological evolution of the world of employment, trainer professionalisation, occupational health, ergonomics, preventing occupational burnout, etc. would be set aside for continuing education.

5. Creation of trainer networks: the creation of trainer networks undeniably plays a more important role in the global scenario, and will continue do so. At this moment in time, the importance of some of them is already becoming clear, both inside training organisations and institutions (trainer intranets) and outside (extranets). We are also destined to support and include other professionals within the network: tutors, trainers and advisors. By doing so, we furthermore manage to transform the training network into an advice and support network.

From this perspective, we value advice because it enables us to share knowledge and information, it helps us identify professional problems and to seek alternatives, and also to motivate lecturers and directors to become involved in processes of change and improvement, both professional and organisational. Moreover, advice can be a good support for innovation and research as a professionalisation strategy. In this respect, it is possible to propose lines of actions, to coordinate innovation initiatives, to disseminate results, to provide resources, etc.

6. It would also be necessary to embrace the internationalisation of trainer training and education, both initial and continuing, thus broadening the socio-geographic horizons of such training. In turn, this would dovetail with one of the principles of Europe 2010: mobility. On this issue, there are examples of training and education programmes (initial and continuing) for inter-university and international trainers. Among its set of actions, the 2007/2013 Lifelong Learning Programme contemplates this consideration by highlighting training exchanges and the mobility of training professionals (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, etc.).

7. Recognition, accreditation and certification of competencies: there should be opportunities for professionals to update their competencies. This entails the need to clarify qualifications, as we have already mentioned, and their equivalence according to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF, European Commission, 2008b). At one and the same time, it makes it crucial to have valid, transparent systems for the assessment, recognition and accreditation of formal, non-formal and informal learning of trainers.

8. Management of professional competencies. In recent years, competencies have become elements that facilitate training activities, and they are also playing a more important role in human resources management within institutions. The number of organisations that have adopted competency-based human resources practices and systems is by no means negligible. The move in this direction has been brought about by the need to seek and find solutions to management problems in new working environments (Fernández Cruz, 2008).

In this respect, new approaches are emerging, such as *professional competency-based management*, to open up new prospects for functional mobility, work motivation, and professional and personal progress. At one and the same time, they promote a new way of thinking, of 'learning to learn' in order to incorporate new knowledge to develop professional competencies to the full, or to generate new personal abilities and skills, all within an approach – as mentioned throughout this article – of lifelong learning.

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