

EFL INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION FOR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN SPAIN

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“Student-teachers need feedback, but feedback which they can take on board and which does not damage their self-esteem and confidence. For this reason it is often a sensitive and difficult role, one for which well-developed people skills are needed”.

[Lortie, 1975, p. 18]

ABSTRACT

The current article intends to reconsider the state of the art of ITE programmes for EFL primary school teachers at Spanish university. Under the scope and coverage of critical applied linguistics, we summarise our own personal experience as former EFL student teachers and come to terms with a crucial point at EFL education: the divergence between those who adhere to an *apprenticeship* model of learning to teach (most of our mentors at university), based on an understanding of teaching as a technical process of delivery of given values and a predefined curriculum, and those who look towards a *professional artistry* school (a minority of them).

RESUMEN

En este trabajo tratamos de reconsiderar el estado de la cuestión en los planes de formación inicial del profesorado del área de Lenguas Extranjeras en

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Both of them have written this paper for the first time a few years ago when it was published in Vez&Montero (1997), *Current changes and challenges in European teacher education: Galicia*. The work they present here is an adaptation, respectively, of those former papers.

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la Educación Primaria en las universidades españolas. Desde la perspectiva y bajo el enfoque de la lingüística aplicada crítica, damos cuenta, de manera muy escueta, de nuestra propia experiencia personal como antiguas alumnas de nuestros respectivos programas de preparación para la docencia, y, al tiempo, esbozamos las líneas centrales del aspecto crucial en la formación del profesorado de Inglés como lengua extranjera: la divergencia entre quienes se adhieren a un modelo de *racionalidad técnica* del aprender a enseñar (la mayoría de nuestro profesorado universitario), que toma como referente exclusivo las ideas de la docencia como un proceso técnico de impartición de unos valores asumidos y de un curriculum predefinido, y aquellos otros que extienden su mirada hacia una concepción escolar más centrada en la *profesionalización* y en la *racionalidad práctica* (una minoría de estos profesores universitarios).

RÉSUMÉ

Dans ce travail nous remettons en question l'état des choses dans les études de formation initiale des enseignants de langues étrangères en Primaire, dont s'occupent les institutions universitaires espagnoles. À ce propos, situées dans le cadre de l'approche de la linguistique appliquée critique et à partir de notre propre expérience personnelle, nous voulons rendre compte, de façon stricte, des programmes de préparation à l'exercice de la profession d'enseignant avec lesquels nous sommes été formées. En même temps, nous esquissons les lignes essentielles d'un aspect clé qui caractérise la formation des enseignants de l'anglais langue étrangère: la divergence entre les formateurs partisans d'un modèle de *rationalité technique* pour apprendre à enseigner (la plupart de nos professeurs d'université) dont le seul référent est la conception de l'enseignement comme un processus technique de transmission de quelques valeurs assumées et un curriculum prédéterminé, et ceux qui tournent leur regard vers une conception scolaire plutôt centrée sur la *professionnalisation* et la *rationalité pratique* (une minorité de ces professeurs d'université).

INTRODUCTION

No one doubts that we all have personal theories about the characteristics of teachers, classrooms and schools. Initially, these are built from incidents we experience during the thousands of hours we have spent in classrooms along our school period. In fact, we come to initial teacher education (from now, ITE) with a lot of personal theories built from those images from our school teachers. Most of the times, or always, these images represent an unreflective nature of prior socialisation and so they act as an *obstacle* to our initial education. This suggests that, as student-teachers, we need to recall and explore our personal

and tacit images of teaching in order to raise our awareness of the power of our own experiences as school EFL learners. This awareness is therefore one form of *reflective* ITE activity (by such means as biographical writing, group discussion, case studies, etc.), an essential process to escape from potentially limiting images of EFL teaching. But, is this the case in EFL initial education for primary and secondary school teachers in the Spanish context?

We believe it is *not*. By exploring the official curricular content of foreign language specialisation, the deficits in ITE appear to include the most traditional aspects of technical stuff which assume the idea that student teachers are expecting to be taught how to teach a foreign language, to be given the one way that works in foreign language learning, and to be *shown* one teacher they can model themselves on. At the same time, we speculate that discipline-specific deficits may be related to foreign language itself, in such areas as: their performance levels in the oral dimension of English use, as matched against the level required for accreditation; analytical knowledge of the English linguistic system; theoretical knowledge of English and American literature; and assumptions about the nature of language and about English as a foreign language at infant, primary and secondary schools.

It is clear that one of the basic problems confronting the initial education of EFL primary and secondary teachers in Spain is that of judging to what extent university programmes should be trying to improve the student teachers' own performance in English, and to what extent they should be trying to improve their skills in teaching the foreign language to their prospective school pupils. The problem is not new. It has been there along decades, as in most European countries, without a coherent response on the side of experts, university teacher educators or administrators. And the only response we have at hand seems to have been the simple and traditional view that academic programmes should concentrate on improving student teachers' command of the language (via descriptive approach) and their knowledge of its culture and literature, and then, in some mysterious and undefined way, assume that they will become competent teachers of the language at primary and secondary school level.

This is, presumably, partly an idea that survives from the time when the study of even living languages was an academic discipline practised in universities, and during which very little interest in using language as a tool for social communication was shown. This idea, which receives no support from any of the foundations governing EFL teacher educa-

tion, has a distressingly *self-regenerative power* about it, and until now it seems to have been largely kept alive in this country by a feeling that the study of foreign language teaching is not academically respectable in the same way that studying a language or its culture or literature is. Thus, in Spanish university initial education institutions, the preparation of EFL primary and secondary school teachers has concentrated on the learning of grammar or linguistics, phonetics, culture and literature, and at the end, in a sort of Cinderella position, something called "*didactics*".

A) BECOMING A PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

There are several reasons for someone to undergo a Primary School Teacher Education Programme. Unfortunately, vocation is not the most common one at present times. It sounds bizarre, though, because a great deal of the situations you are supposed to cope with require a high dose of it. In some ways it is the society itself which is steering the students towards this career. Nowadays a university degree is the bottom line to enjoy a respectable position; apart from that, the increasing unemployment rate and the convenience of living at your parents' expense (and sometimes that of the government) is leading to a desperate hunt for a place at University.

So student teachers find themselves among a crowd of unmotivated students, especially due to the so-considered second-class status of the university degrees in Teacher education. That makes everyday life in the classroom harder not only for the students but also for the lecturers who see how, day after day, all their efforts turn out to be water off a duck's back.

1. *About misconceptions and inconsistencies in the education of EFL primary teachers*

The world changes as people change. EFL education changes as the school culture changes. Our professional understanding changes and improves, but it will never be complete or final. As teachers we have to operate with uncertainty, because that is the human condition, and it is no service to education (particularly to EFL initial teacher education) to create security by means of fictions. And, from our experience and the experience of other former student teachers in different uni-

versities, the developments of EFL educational programmes in practice are anything else than fictions. And the inconsistency of this fiction game is its incapacity to arise a confidence, informed and as rigorous as possible, which helps us to work well in a world that will necessarily change, where the provision of false hopes of success and the recommendation of a cynical, passive desire to merely survive (in educational terms) are useless and anti-ethic.

But this is not the only inconsistency. We have learnt, after three years of ITE, that official university programmes offer a conventional fractured curriculum, based on a two-part structure: relatively abstract classes in the university institution and short blocks of teaching practice in primary schools. No one doubts that this structure contributes to a serious lack of integration between abstract and practical course components and, at the same time, empowers the classical and persistent division between theory and practice.

All that is linked to the misconception that, since someone has been a student, he or she can easily become a teacher –it is as pretentious as saying that since someone has been a patient he or she can easily be a doctor–. Perhaps this is so because the idea of teaching –the idea of passing on knowledge– seems to be such a natural one. Everyone has answered another person's question or demonstrated an idea or technique. Therefore everyone, in a sense, is a teacher.

There was a time when you only needed know how to read and write (plus a positive accreditation from your parish priest) to become a primary school teacher. For many years education has been synonymous with textbooks, lectures, blackboard and chalk. It was a teaching process in which the teacher knew how things should be done. While the job of the tutor was to present a set of facts, methods, ideas, in a given *best* order, the job of the student was to become proficient by means of repetition and memorising. But now a number of factors have combined to change the face of education and training and open the way to new ideas and techniques. It has become a learning process where it is accepted that students are not *soft clay* and are in fact responsible for their own education. So teaching is not providing a set of facts anymore, it implies dealing with attitudes, styles of learning, etc. This new approach demands professionalism, a deep understanding of the reality in the classroom, and that has been reflected in the *new* study plans for initial teacher-education for the primary school level.

2. *Dilemmas and perspectives in new study plans for initial education at primary school level*

But somehow the view of the primary school teacher as a technician has not changed very much: "*Blind faith in the textbook! You don't need anything else!*" –a lot of my classmates used to claim when I (Fátima) was a student teacher in the Faculty of the Education at the University of Santiago–. It seems that even when the textbook is supposed to be a source for the teacher, the teacher himself/herself has become a source for the textbook.

One of the major dilemmas in teacher-education is either to get specialised in a particular subject or to become a *general* practitioner. The recent new study plans at the Spanish Universities are designed in order to qualify every single teacher for general subjects (Sciences, Maths, etc.) but it is up to the student teachers whether to specialise in foreign languages (that is my personal case), music, physical education (the three of them considered to require specific knowledge and skills which are not common to the other general ones) or none of them. This situation gives rise to two main group of students and university teachers emerging: those who think that the most important part in the development of teacher-education curricula is the block of subjects related to a particular professional specialisation (i.e. to teaching) and those who believe that this is simply one more block being as important as the rest of them.

From my point of view, it doesn't mean a serious problem for the teachers anyway. They do not have to face an exam or write never-ending essays. They are devoted, in some sense, to a single subject, whereas as a student you find yourself working on eight or nine essays at the same time, developing team projects with very close dead lines and facing seven or eight exams in the course of hardly two weeks. You have to establish your own priorities, and this is not easy at all. Most students who are undertaking a specialisation hate Maths or Sciences and repeatedly ask: what is the point of studying these subjects if we just intend to become Music teachers or Foreign language teachers? But whether you like it or not, the truth is that if you don't pass them, you will never be able to get your university degree.

In some way both points of view are right but you have to draw the line somewhere. It is a question of compromising yourself. I think our education laws and the experts we have on education policy in our country are now advocates of the *integral education*; that means

that all members of the staff must work together not only at the decision making level but also in everyday life at classroom level, so that there will be coherence between lessons in different areas. Without a basic knowledge on each other's subject and a feeling of integrating different curricular areas, things cannot work very properly in school practice.

The issue boils down to a question of awareness. Student teachers must be aware of the necessity of that basic knowledge, and university staff must also be aware of what their real needs are going to be when serving schools.

Incidentally, we should not forget the fact that, once working at school, one is most likely to be required to teach other subjects besides those which fall into the area of his or her specialisation, and everybody knows how puzzled a teacher may be facing a nine-year-old pupil's *innocent* questions.

Nevertheless it would be worthwhile to eradicate from the school the idea of a teacher as something functioning like an encyclopaedia. Both children and grow-ups must admit that a teacher is a human being (and thus not infallible).

However, the cross-disciplinary nature of primary teacher-education rests on the wide range of social studies (let's say Pedagogy, Psychology, Sociology...) as well as different school subjects. That fact only makes the problem worse. How can you decide which one is going to have more teaching/studying hours? On the other hand they are so related to each other that it is easy to get lost in the ocean of information you are given. Again, there is no benefit from any side.

3. *Critical view on university teaching*

It seems to us that it is not sufficiently being taken into consideration what actually is being taught. Our university lecturers say that our job is not to pass on knowledge anymore but to provide children with a starting point and the appropriate tools so they can develop their own knowledge base. That means that our job now is to set the ball rolling.

Our question here is: Why do lecturers not do the same with their university student teachers? There is something called "*hidden curriculum*" which must be really well hidden because not even those who teach about it seem to see it. What is not acceptable is to go on *dictating* that a lesson must be active and participative... and telling students

about the different techniques to achieve this target... and at the same time acting didactically in ways fully contradicting what you are proposing.

There is no way student teachers can see the point in using those pieces of advice, if they have not experienced them, if they have not seen them really work in practice. We must follow the principle of: "*I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand*". It's high time that *learning by doing* reaches initial teacher education. When that fails, when primary school teachers do not come to understand the world of their own practice, and when they are not proficient and professional, then inevitably insecurity takes over.

This is more or less what happens at school nowadays. As long as teachers are not confronted with difficult and extraordinary matters, answers come by way of referring to the teacher's *bible*: the textbooks, authentic do-it-yourself kits, designed in a way to be used by anyone able to read and write (at least one no longer needs the parish priest's positive accreditation).

Should a problem arise, they seek for help desperately, lacking the theory and urging a solution, they just want a tool, a prescription: What to do and how to do it, but never why and when. In the best of the cases they ask for the *doctor's help*, they don't want to be as doctors themselves, and therefore will always depend on professional help from others. To avoid that, they tend to fall back on either their previous experience (that is, a former prescription) or their colleagues' experience, always running of course the risk of giving the wrong treatment to the problem. It is never too late to start learning theory, but the sooner you start the better results you will achieve and the better you will cope with the troubles that normally appear in a classroom.

I must admit that, as a student teacher, I felt that practice has the immediate use which theory lacks, and also that the former is much more enjoyable and gratifying than the latter, but I have to admit as well that most of the time practice was not presented to me as a result of any specific theory, and vice versa, and not always is the connection so obvious. Theory creates practice and that is a feed-back which re-creates it again; and, in my opinion, a dialectic relation between both of them is the best approach.

4. *Periods of Teaching Practice*

Perhaps one of the greatest advantages of a university diploma in Teacher-education is the possibility, actually the necessity, of a period

of classroom work under the supervision of in-service teachers. Before the reform of the present university study programmes in Spain this period was left to the last term of the career. The philosophy behind was that students, in doing so, could put into practice all they had learnt during their studies. This idea, as has been mentioned in different contributions to research work on teacher education (Vez and Montero, 1997), has been radically changed and teaching practice periods are scheduled to take place all through the three years of study. With minor differences from university to another in the Spanish context, the first period –in year one– is the shortest and it only takes twenty hours. It is supposed to be a first contact with the school reality from a brand new point of view –so the reality shock is produced just when you still have the time to change your mind–. The second and third periods have the same duration: one hundred and fifty hours, and they are meant to be a gradual approach to the teaching activity following a progression in three stages: observation, collaboration and finally teaching. It depends on each student and each school tutor how far you go through these steps (even if you go through all of them). That is because once at the school centre you are there on your own. You may be lucky and get your school tutor to comment on your lessons, give you advice, help you and, in general, monitor your performance and development. But you may also be very unlucky and then either your school tutor can take advantage of your presence through enjoying some free time in the staff room or you will spend six long weeks like one more piece of furniture in the classroom.

It is quite complicated to find a way out of this unpredictable situation. Everybody is doing his/her best, but due to the lack of schools accepting university students for practice and the lack of enthusiasm from the tutor to work in collaboration with them, the whole system is far from being ideal and efficient.

Teaching practice should be a very good opportunity to try to experiment and put into practice the full range of theories you have learnt. Instead, in most cases, it becomes an opportunity to use those *prescriptions* you have been accumulating and to get familiar with a textbook.

School tutors claim that there is no reward for their collaboration (either an extra amount of money or professional promotion or whatever) and for the time they *waste* in preparing, planning, commenting, analysing, etc. with student teachers in practice. This is also one of the reasons why you do not see many team-teaching experiences alongside these periods.

On the university side, things are not much better. University teachers have to go on with the rest of their daily lessons and research work so they cannot afford visiting their students in the schools (here and there) to provide some kind of monitoring.

Without any other way of assessing the performance of student teachers in practice, a final written report determines the marks which you are given and, as far as students are concerned, it does not matter very much what you think you have been doing or have learnt.

5. *Summing up*

Most of the things we learn along the three years of our initial teacher education programme at University are aimed at three basic targets (something which should be taken into account during the compulsory practice period): how to plan, how to improvise and how to work in a collaborative way. In the real world, each class (in fact each pupil) has different needs, different expectations, different learning rhythms... Textbooks are written for an average pupil so they cover in fact nobody's needs. Planning is what will set the teacher free from the textbook and what will ensure adequate lessons being delivered for the class. But despite the accuracy of the plan teaching is not a pure and exact science. We have to deal with human beings who react somehow when they learn. It is not like pressing a button... We must bear in mind that continuous readjustments will be needed and sometimes drastic changes. That is why the ability of improvising is not only useful but indeed essential. It is obvious at this point (as it was mentioned before) what the benefits of team working are.

But given the hypothetical fact that all is perfect in our initial teacher-education period, it becomes extremely difficult to believe that we can learn in three years everything we are expected to manage and understand at school level. But, of course, we might still improve... Most of the possibilities are in our hands. It is not only practice what makes things perfect; it is thinking and reflection-on-practice what makes the real difference.

I am one of the few members of the first promotion who finished studies under the new reformed study plans and considered myself equipped with the wide range of skills, tools and pedagogical knowledge which I need for becoming a primary school teacher. Sadly enough, social recognition of our vocation and professional role as teachers is still far away, as I imagine it is in other countries of Europe. Never-

theless, I am rather optimistic and still hope our professional future will be a very bright one. In fact, I became a primary school teacher with a civil servant status, a couple of years ago.

B) BECOMING A SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER

Introduction

Galician academic studies at University are going through a stage of change and reform. Despite this necessary new curricular organization there are still the remnants of old academic plans.

The following lines try to give an approximate idea of the structural organization of University study plans in the autonomous community of Galicia since the personal perspective of a former student of English Philology who wanted to become a secondary school teacher of English as a foreign language.

1. Getting a BA Degree in English Philology

After having passed entrance examinations for University, a few years ago, I decided to enrol for English Philology, knowing that its main concern is expressed in its focus on studying the development of English language from different views such as its history and evolution, phonetic aspects, grammar, etc. as well as on an accurate study of English and American literature.

The whole academic process to obtain a degree in English Philology takes five years. Throughout this long period, students are supposed to familiarise themselves with the necessary scientific contents on the side of language and literature for becoming a Secondary School teacher.

The general arrangement of subjects per academic year is established (before the current reform of the study plans) in the following way:

First year

Five common-core subjects:

- *Spanish Language I.*
- *Spanish Literature I.*
- *Latin I.*
- *Spanish History I.*
- *English Language I.*

The contents of these common-core subjects have to do with, in the case of *Spanish Language I*, an analysis of the main linguistic, grammatical, syntactical aspects of that language. The total number of hours in which this subject is taught, is three per week.

Spanish Literature I comprises the period of Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism, the Generation of 1927 and 1898 (famous literary movements). The contents of this subject are explained by the lecturer, presenting to the students a theoretical view and interpretation of writers and their plays. The relation theory-practice is not very balanced, due to an excessively broad and onerous academic programme and the necessity to finish it before the year ends. For this reason the time for practice is so reduced. Although this is a relevant problem, students have the chance to show the depth of their knowledge in commenting on texts taken from literary plays.

Latin I consists of translating the famous texts of this classical period into Spanish. At the same time a wide approach to the history of Rome is used. The total of hours per week is three. This subject is especially based on practical exercise.

Spanish History I provides a general view of our history throughout different stages up to nowadays. Students are obliged to memorise a lot of facts, dates, etc. in order to show what they have learnt in a final exam in June.

Finally, in this first academic year, it is very pleasing for students to attend the English Language class. The structure of this subject is quite different to the other ones. It is established that English Language I must be organised in two parts. On one hand, we have the part in which students are taught by a native or non-native lecturer the main grammatical aspects of the English language, receiving explanations and doing practical exercises. Students may participate in creating a good learning atmosphere.

On the other hand, in the second part of the subject being taught by another lecturer, this time a native speaker, the main aim is to practice the spoken language and to acquire a level of fluency both in writing and speaking.

Second year

Five common-core subjects:

- *Spanish Language II.*
- *Spanish Literature II.*

- *Latin II.*
- *History of Philosophy.*
- *English Language II.*

The layout of the second academic year is very similar to that of the first year. The distribution of hours is the same, the contents are arranged in the same way: a theoretical and a separate practical part.

English Language II deals with more complex grammatical aspects, combining theory with practice. Besides, there are two hours per week to get into contact with real and spoken English. Students may also feel encouraged to take the corresponding examination at the end of the year, if they so wish.

Third year

Five common-core subjects:

- *Spanish Literature III.*
- *Linguistics and Literary Criticism.*
- *English Phonetics (English Language IV).*
- *English Language III.*
- *English Literature I.*

As we can see, this third year represents a small change with regard to the first and second years. Subjects related to this foreign language take the lead and help to establish a more coherent framework. As a result, there is an increase of hours per week reserved for the learning of English. It is important to mention the opportunity of attending the language laboratory offered to students in order to improve their foreign language skills.

Fourth year

Four common-core subjects:

- *English Language V.*
- *English Literature II.*
- *American Literature I.*
- *History of the English Language (Old English).*

Optional subjects:

- *German, French, Danish and Analysis of Literary Texts* (students must choose one).

It is a noteworthy fact that the nearer we come to the end of studies, the more important subjects related to English language and literature become. Furthermore, the level of complexity tends to be higher.

This stage provides a thorough knowledge, although theory keeps on carrying a major emphasis. However, subjects like History of the English Language (Old English), English Language and all of the optional subjects have a more practical approach.

Fifth year

Four common-core subjects:

- *English Language VI.*
- *English Literature III.*
- *American Literature II.*
- *Middle English.*

Optional subjects:

- *German, French, Danish, Analysis of Old Literary Texts* (students must choose one of them).

In this last year, subjects are again exclusively about English language and literature.

2. Critical view

After having had a look at the curricular organisation of my University studies with the aim of obtaining a BA in English Philology at the University of Santiago de Compostela, it is time to analyse the positive and negative aspects, taking into account that the academic pattern described –as was already mentioned before– is already under revision in the recent process of reform that has taken place for these studies.

From a curricular point of view the improvement of the educational system implies offering a more coherent curricular framework that does not have such breaks between the different academic years. It would be advisable to set up a coherent structure in order to be able to achieve an overall improvement of the quality of the teaching.

First of all, University studies in Galicia –as is the currently preferred approach in the rest of the Spanish Universities– are mainly concerned with theoretical knowledge, and there is an extreme lack of practical experiences that would offer students a more specialised professional training and prepare them in a way that they may acquire intellectual

knowledge and skills helping them to face the reality of the contemporary world at school. Because of this, there is a great disconnection between what one learns or studies at University and what one needs to know for becoming a secondary teacher.

There is also a lot of subjects, mainly in the first two years, which have nothing to do with the studies one has chosen. What is more, they are compulsory during our secondary school education and we already have quite a substantial background in them.

Another question to be discussed would be the lack of professional, pedagogical training throughout the whole period. A prospective secondary school teacher needs to master different methodological strategies in order to adjust the acquired knowledge to the diversity of students in mixed-ability groups. Therefore the adoption of an open, flexible curriculum is essential for dealing with diversity.

3. *The Postgraduate "Pedagogical Aptitude Course" (CAP)*

Once the student has finished his/her academic studies, he/she must enrol for the CAP (*Curso de Aptitud Pedagógica*) if he/she wants to become a secondary school teacher.

The main objective of this course is to provide basic psycho-pedagogical and didactic information assumed to represent the substantial pedagogical knowledge for becoming a secondary school teacher. Besides, this course intends to provoke a reflection on the most important themes and problems of teaching.

The course consists of two phases. The first phase is structured in four seminars concerning social, psychological, curricular and didactic aspects. They are:

- *Theory and Sociology of Education*. The aims of this seminar are, among others, to analyse theoretically and comprehensively the institutional and social reality of the Galician educational system; to promote positive attitudes in order to make possible the development of the required competencies for becoming teachers. This seminar lasts twelve hours.
- *Psychological Bases of Educational Intervention*. The educational horizon in this seminar is to foster the autonomy of students not only with respect to cognitive and intellectual aspects, but also regarding their social and moral development. So, by learning about all these issues, we must bear in mind that the various as-

pects of the teaching and learning process intending to promote the psychological development of students must be in perfect harmony in order to foster and develop different abilities of students. The duration of this seminar is fourteen hours.

- *Curricular Design and Planning*. The purpose of this topic is to analyse the new curricular institution and the curricular elements in the different areas and subjects of Secondary Education. The Basic Curricular Design (DCB) expresses general educational aims, among them several lines of development expected to emerge in going through different stages and areas of learning reflecting the main purposes that the curriculum must meet. The duration of this seminar is twenty-four hours.
- *Analysis of Didactic Approaches*. This seminar is taught with a total of forty-two hours. Students learn to make decisions regarding the most suitable methodology to be chosen. It is a very interesting and important topic, since what we really need is to be able to adopt specific strategies in order to succeed in the teaching-learning process of a foreign language. It is important that learners be educated for understanding how they learn best, and what are the strategies that are most useful for them to learn. In that way, we carry out a lot of tasks regarding the four skills of language that enable us to become trained teachers adapted to the necessities of the education system.

Once these sessions have been finished, we pass on to the second phase of the course: *Practice in a Secondary or Vocational Training School*. This experience lasts one month. The main aim is to be exposed to real experience within the educational reality of our Secondary Schools. This is the most interesting part of the course, although we have to take into account that it is the first time that we, as student teachers, get into contact with a group of pupils, and it may turn out to be a somehow embarrassing experience. The development of these practice periods always takes place in collaboration with a tutor, the in-service teacher of English in that case.

First of all, the student teacher has to attend some lessons as observer in order to get an impression of the children's behaviour, the organization of the class, how the teacher develops the different activities, etc. After this, it is time for us to become *real teachers* for some days. We have to plan a didactic unit and then try to carry it out. During these days we keep in real contact with children and teachers as

well, and for the first time we see the situation inverted, that is acting now as teachers and not as students. Thus, we realise that this is not an easy task but at the same time it is worth living it. Once we have finished our practice periods at school, we have to present a report that includes a didactic unit to be related to the orientations and information received in the different seminars and a critical evaluation of the activities developed either as observer or as teacher.

4. *Concluding remarks*

To sum up, it would be reasonable to say that this pedagogical course is essential for the training of future teachers but at the same time it would be convenient to make future teachers become involved and interested in the teaching-learning process, in order to guarantee effective educational change.

On the one hand, reforming education always implies reforming the curricula, their educational aims and the conditions for their effectiveness. The most urgent and necessary change in Spanish initial teacher-education is to achieve a more balanced curriculum in which practice is emphasised the way it needs to be. It is an issue to worry about the fact that we as students finish our studies and still do not know how to face the real world, in the sense that we have abstract knowledge but not practice and experience related to the real demands of life at school.

On the other hand, the point is that it is essential to prepare teachers through pre-service education or support them through in-service training in a way that will equip them with the resources with which to face current and future educational demands.

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