

Construction and development of the professional competences of teachers

MANUELA ESTEVES

mesteves@fpce.ul.pt

Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Lisbon

ABSTRACT:

The concept of competence is defined and interpreted in multiple ways, both among different scientific fields and even within a single one. This article defends the need to work towards a specialised acceptance of “competence” in education and teacher education, around which researchers may converge and contribute to more consistent interventions on the part of professionals. The construction and development of teacher competences within the context of current Portuguese training programs have been discussed, as has the idea been defended that above the structure of these programs, it is more important to focus attention on the model or models behind them and the strategies that are put into action.

KEYWORDS:

Competence, Professional competence, Professional knowledge, Teacher Education.

As is the case with almost all concepts in education, the concept of “competence” is also susceptible to multiple definitions and interpretations, whether we take a synchronous stance and consider its use at a single point in time, but in different spaces, or we observe the historical evolution of the dominant meanings it has acquired.

It is from this perspective that the concept epithets “nomad”, “volatile” “bastard” with which it has been qualified, may be understood, as Jonnaert (2002, p. 26) points out. Thus, it is defended by some that a term causing such confusion in the area of Education should simply be abandoned. Obviously, we have not adopted such a position, hence the article, with which we aim (immodestly) to contribute to the critical analysis and discussion of the professional competence concept. Furthermore, we intend to put forward the results of some recent Portuguese research studies that focus on this issue.

Whether used by psychology, linguistics, work sciences or by educational sciences and training, the notion of competence changes meaning according to the field in which it is being used. Although, here, we intend to focus on the concept of competence when used in relation to the teaching profession and teacher education, we are bound to refer to other fields of scientific knowledge and action where it is also used so as to make a distinction between its usage in our field.

COMPETENCE(S) AND EDUCATION

The concept of competence re-emerged in the field of education with a vengeance in the 1990s related to student learning, teacher education and general professional training. It took on a variety of concepts and meanings in these different areas and, thus, contributed to serious dissonances even among researchers in the afore-mentioned fields, not to mention a discrepancy of meaning in the speeches of teachers and trainers.

How are competences constructed? What about professional competences? How are they developed? Which are the most important in teacher performance? Can competences be assessed? If so, how? Indeed, what are we talking about when we mention competences? These are some of the issues at the heart of many discussions nowadays on the professional action of teachers in relation to their students, teacher education and teacher career management.

It is worth picking up on a previously discussed theme, namely the difference between the concept in the singular (competence) and its use in the plural (competences). In the former, the concept *competence* refers to the quality separating competent professionals from incompetent or mediocre ones. From this perspective, competence is taken as a global trait inherent to the action of a person or professional group which is subject to third party judgement.

The terms “a competence” or “competences” refer to a number of traits that can be pinpointed

through action and observed and described without necessarily being attributed any value. In examples such as “questions the students”, “diversifies material”, “uses technological resources”, we are dealing with traits for which we can merely vouch presence and respective frequency or absence without qualifying them. The sum of such competences, taken in an analytical sense, is not enough to lead to a conclusion as to the overall competence of a professional.

Therefore, speaking of *competence*, in a global sense or *a competence*, in an analytical or particular sense makes all the difference in conceptual terms.

P/CBTE (PERFORMANCE / COMPETENCY BASED TEACHER EDUCATION) PROGRAMS

It is generally believed by specialists that competence-based training/education first emerged in the 1960s in the USA, in the field of teacher education. This movement went on to spread to other professional training fields (Burke *et al.*, 1975; Elam, 1971; Houston, 1980). Although cases of competence-based training dating back to the 1920s may be found in the alliance between industrial development and professional training, there seems to be no doubt that it was under the influence of the dominant behaviourist psychology of the 50s that school curriculum reforms were successively introduced. The latter shifted their focus to the behavioural aims of learning (constituting what became known as objective pedagogy) and teacher-training program reforms became based on the acquisition of competences taken as observable behaviour bearing a positive correlation with an increase or improvement in student results.

The theme of discussion at that time (and the theme of discussion nowadays, in other terms) was whether a competence was the same thing as performance, however, the main interpretation of competence up to the 80s (directly observable behaviour) incorporated both these aspects. So, the programs that set out under the titles CBTE, or PBTE, quickly became known by the simpler term P/CBTE (Performance/Competency Based Teacher Education), as if only related to a single entity.

The movement’s success, particularly remarkable in the USA and United Kingdom between the

60s and 80s, was primarily due to the support and praise it received from the political policies put into practice by the respective governments.

Swanckek and Campbell (1981) have summed up the characteristics of the P/CBTE programs in the following points:

- precise specification of the competences or behaviour being learned;
- teaching through modules;
- evaluation and feedback;
- personalisation;
- field experience.

The selection of competences to be acquired was taken from the types of teacher behaviour that were highlighted by experimental scientific research and which were positively correlated with student learning.

As far as the governmental authorities were concerned, training focusing on observable teacher behaviour was a guarantee of higher demands in terms of qualification and certification for entry into the profession, and so, in some cases, they imposed or strongly induced the universal development of such programs. This imposition gave rise to reactions from higher education institutions that did not identify with this training model. However, there were also problems among those who were eager to joining the movement.

Burke *et al.* (1975, p. i) noted that “one of the persisting problems faced by the institutions aiming to redefine their teacher education programs, so as to include activity-based competences, is the general lack of definition and criteria regarding exactly what a competence-based teacher education program entails”.

This same author, Burke, later on in 1989, went on to consider that the criteria developed by the National Consortium of Competency Based Education Centres in the 1970s were still valid to describe and evaluate competence-based programs.

The set of twenty four criteria, set out below, shed a very precise light on what the behaviourist inspired competence-based teacher education movement actually was (is?).

In spite of its length, the table on page 36 clarifies extraordinarily well the concept of competence

CRITERIA FOR DESCRIBING AND ASSESSING COMPETENCY BASED PROGRAMMES

COMPETENCY SPECIFICATIONS

1. Competences are based on an analysis of the professional role(s) and/or a theoretical formulation of professional responsibilities.
2. Competency statements describe outcomes expected from the performance of professionally related functions, or those knowledges, skills, and attitudes thought to be essential to the performance of those functions.
3. Competency statements facilitate criterion referenced assessment.
4. Competences are treated as tentative predictors of professional effectiveness, and are subjected to continual validation procedures.
5. Competences are specified and made public prior to instruction.
6. Learners completing the CBE programme demonstrate a wide range of competency profiles.

INSTRUCTION

7. The instructional programme is derived from and linked to specified competences.
8. Instructional which supports competency development is organised into units of manageable size.
9. Instruction is organised and implemented so as to accommodate learner style, sequence preference, pacing and perceived needs.
10. Learner progress is determined by demonstrated competence.
11. The extent of learner's progress is made known to him/her throughout the program.
12. Instructional specifications are reviewed and revised based on feedback data.

ASSESSMENT

13. Competency measures are validly related to competency statements.
14. Competency measures are specific, realistic and sensitive to nuance.
15. Competency measures discriminate on the basis of standards set for competency demonstration.
16. Data provided by competency measures are manageable and useful in decision making.
17. Competency measures and standards are specified and made public prior to instruction.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

18. Policy statements are written to govern, in broad outline, the intended structure, content, operation and resource base of the programme.
19. Management functions, responsibilities, procedures and mechanisms are clearly defined and made explicit.

TOTAL PROGRAMME

20. Programme staff attempt to model the attitudes and behaviours desired of students in the programme.
 21. Provisions are made for staff orientation, assessment, improvement and reward.
 22. Research and dissemination activities are an integral part of the total instructional system.
 23. Institutional flexibility is sufficient for all aspects of the programme.
 24. The program is planned and operated as a totally unified, integrated system.
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Source: Burke, 1989, pp. 13-14 (from Burke *et al.*, 1975).

adopted, the roles attributed to learners, teachers and teaching institutions, as well as the place reserved for research.

The knowledge and attitudes of the learners, as referred to in point 2, seem to represent a concession to those who would think it excessive to regard competence as exclusively referring to performance. Elam (1971) had already been very clear on this point when stating that “the evaluation of a compe-

tence demands performance initially, but also takes knowledge into account” (p. 7).

Micro-education in its initial form (1960-70), simulation, particularly role-play, supervision created in a behaviourist environment all compete, as methodological options, for the accomplishment of programs in which the competences to be developed by teachers in training are almost entirely mingled in with the respective performance.

FROM MICRO-COMPETENCES TO GENERAL COMPETENCES

Over the years, there has been permanent criticism of the behaviourist competence concept and associated training programs, however, this became particularly vigorous from the 80s on.

The two most persistent arguments were: inadequacy of the analytical definition of competences to outline the profile of more successful professionals, which would not be limited to the mere sum of isolated competences; lack of scientific evidence to corroborate the superiority of the programs based on competences in relation to others.

In the meantime, studies carried out in continental Europe on various areas of professional training, other than just teacher education, began to highlight the fact that excellent professionals presented a set of far more important general or global competences against a large number of analytical competences resulting from an analysis of work functions, which explained their success.

This general competence approach focused mainly on the way professionals become competent and highlighted a set of important personal qualities in addition to the technical and scientific characteristics inherent to action.

Instead of hundreds or even thousands of competences associated with a given professional performance, much shorter lists of general competences (generally between eight and fifteen) were identified in this trend and were able to outline the profile of competent professionals.

One of these lists, put forward by Boyatzis (1982), was constructed on the basis of a sample study of more here, around 2000 managers working in 41 types of different jobs. The following twelve competences serve as an example:

- Concern with the impact
- Diagnostic use of concepts
- Guidance towards efficiency
- Pro-activity
- Conceptualisation
- Self-confidence
- Use of oral presentations
- Management of group processes
- Practice of a socialised power

- Perceptive objectivity
- Self-control
- Energy and adaptability

From this perspective of general competence adoption, the discussion focused more here than in the CBE movement, on whether these competences were innate, learned or both. This did not hamper the development of training programs geared expressly towards the construction and development of competences of this type, in relation to many professions. Let us take, for instance, the list of ten competences for teaching in basic education, around which the optimization program for teachers in Geneva was constructed and which Perrenoud (2000) sets out in detail:

- To organise and lead learning situations
- To manage learning progression
- To conceive and develop differentiation devices
- To involve students in the learning of their work
- To work in a team
- To participate in the running of the school
- To inform and involve parents
- To use new technologies
- To face up to the ethical duties and dilemmas of the profession
- To manage one's own continued training

QUALIFICATION, KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE: HOW ARE THEY CONNECTED?

Jonnaert (2002) defends the argument that the notion of professional development has developed over the last few decades, and has come close to the meaning of competence.

At the initial stage (1950s to 80s), qualification was defined as “a set of skills and socially defined knowledge required for the accomplishment of a particular task” (Jonnaert, 2002, p. 14). It was about taking qualification as a set of qualities displayed by the individual before performing a professional action — a conception which, according to Jonnaert, sustains an instrumentalist and prescriptive vision

of the profession (and, subsequently, of training for the profession).

At a second stage (1980s), qualification became preferentially defined as the individual ability to master a given work situation, whereby each professional stimulated his/her own potential. There is a clear approximation, here, to the notion of competence through the association of specific field work with evidence of the professional's qualification.

At a third stage (especially from the 90s on), qualification was defined as that which accompanied the structuring of the action. The aim and space of the professional's action, as well as his/her autonomy, became an integral part of the idea of qualification.

According to De Terssac (1996, quoted by Jonnaert, 2002, p. 15), competence would, nevertheless, go beyond this third interpretation of qualification, representing "everything that is at stake in an action and everything that makes it possible to understand the organisation of an action".

Thus, competences are defined by Jonnaert as the ways individuals manage their cognitive and social resources in action, in a given situation.

Whenever competences or competence-based training are mentioned, many people believe that knowledge is being underestimated and undervalued to make way for the mere learning and training of performances, with an immediate utilitarian slant.

Evolution of the above-mentioned concept of competence is based on this viewpoint. Such a position is unthinkable in light of the behaviourist conception of competences, not least in light of conceptions on constructivist inspiration competences. Both, at varying degrees, accept that knowledge and understanding, the development of cognitive dispositions of a higher order, based on analysis, synthesis, evaluation, criticism divergent thinking, that school curricula are supposed to stimulate and push forward. They are seen as fundamental pillars in the construction of competences, the more the greater the complexity of the problems to resolve and/or of the profession to be carried out.

What happens, and it is important to point out, is that in training courses geared towards competence development, the conceptualization of the latter, as well the selection of those to be developed in a given training context, subordinate the definition of the learning aims, the selection and organisation

of content and, particularly, the methodologies to be used. The knowledge provided by the curricula is of no value per se, but due to its potential help in developing the competences of each individual and thus, being invested by the latter in action.

Following the many authors who focused on the examination and analysis of the relationship between knowledge and competence, M. Éraut (1996) offers some interesting perspectives for the discussion of the concepts of knowledge and professional knowledge. The author realised that only a part of what a competent professional does derives from the training program geared towards the development of competences which he/she may have received. There are broad areas of know-how that are absent from training programs, and even when there are coincidences, the knowledge common to both contexts- training and professional action — is structured, named and perceived in many forms.

Professional practice will demand collaboration either in the form of fixed sequences, or through original combinations of action, so as to confront and resolve new or unexpected problems, the latter referring to situations where competence in making pertinent decisions is of great importance. The situation can, indeed, vary in complexity according to whether the problem to be resolved is well or badly defined.

To simply speak about "theory" and "practice" as was traditionally done and continues to be so nowadays, mainly due to ease and routine, in relation to educational discourse, is reductive of the complexity of the knowledge at stake in professional action.

The theories (and not the theory) that the professional uses, whether they are part of the theories of a universal value produced by science or theorisations constructed by the professional him/herself — generalisations covering implicit theories, beliefs, convictions, were brought to light by studies on teachers thoughts which have helped us to distinguish and analyse them.

Propositional knowledge (or declarative), propositional knowledge, procedural knowledge, practical knowledge and tacit knowledge are categories that enable us to realise the complexity of professional knowledge and lead us to better understand the difficulties, which are so frequently encountered, in doing research on practical action and teacher competences, on unveiling, both conceptually

and empirically, the types of knowledge and forms of cognition associated with performances. Even though aware of these difficulties, Éraut suggests that professional knowledge can only be characterised if we understand it and analyse it in the context of how it is learned and used in a work situation.

According to these reflections, we are of the belief that nowadays the situation is far different to what it was in the 1960s-80s (even though conceptions from this period have not completely disappeared), as it seems inevitable:

- To assume that there are no competences without knowledge or professional knowledge, even if part of it is tacit or implicit;
- To assume that professional knowledge is more complex than the traditional dichotomy theoretical knowledge-practical knowledge would lead one to believe;
- To assume that professional knowledge is or may be the basis and result of competence exercise, whether for those who are preparing themselves for the profession or those already qualified.

We are still at the stage of testing different hypotheses on what type of knowledge and professional knowledge best serve the purpose of contributing to the construction of teacher competences, often with some very surprising results in relation to what some of the persistently repeated ideas have led us to believe (Kennedy, 2008).

“COMPETENCE”: TO CREATE A SPECIFIC MEANING FOR EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES AND TRAINING

Making a distinction between simple and complex professions, Le Boterf (1995, 1997, 2001) becomes particularly interested, at a certain point, in the type of competences needed for the performance of complex professions. He defines the latter as those professions where professionals have to confront the unknown and permanent change (1997, p. 21). The increase in the complexity of the problems, the uncertain nature of the work context, the possibilities

offered by new technologies and new forms of work organisation, the evolution of individual systems of value and aspirations are factors presented to support the argument that the efficacy of the work does not allow the professional to merely limit him/herself to carrying out the instructions given to him/her (1997, p. 27). Although the author is not referring specifically to the teaching profession, but rather to a diversified range of professions, we believe that the former fulfils the afore-mentioned attributes, integrating the range of complex professions.

Following the line of thought of those who prefer to define competences as a short set of general characteristics, Le Boterf (1997, pp. 37-94) identifies six competences inherent to the professionals who know how to handle complexity:

- To be able to act relevantly;
- To be able to mobilise in a given context;
- To be able to combine;
- to be able to transpose;
- To be able to learn and to learn by learning;
- To be able to dedicate oneself.

Not only is it nothing like the list of analytical proposals within the scope of the P/CBTE movement, but also the competence definition explicitly associates knowledge, action and the context of action. As already mentioned, work contexts and situations are characterised by the undetermined, uncertainty, often urgency and always by the need to find answers that have some level of originality as regards what is already known and what has already been done. It is also worth underlining the nature of the last competence on the list — to be able to dedicate oneself — which refers to an essentially social or social-affective domain, where motivation, interest and professional desire are highlighted.

Along the same lines as Le Boterf, as regards education and training, Perrenoud (1997) suggests that we free ourselves from the meaning of the concept taken from linguistics (innate potentiality of the individual which is updated in performance) and move on to a specific re-appropriation of the concept when used within the scope of educational sciences. Going a little further, Jonnaert (2002, p. 31) suggests the following definition: “at the very least, a competence refers to a set of resources that

the individual can mobilise in order to deal with a situation successfully”.

On the basis of this conception, it is important to realise that:

- A competence does not refer exclusively to cognitive resources but also to a series of other resources of a varied nature;
- A competence is conjugated in a contextualised action — it is not a disposition of the individual prior to the action (which distinguishes it from the general know-how skill);
- There may be innate dispositions among the resources that the individual mobilises in the action;
- The mobilisation of resources by the individual is accomplished by means of operating networks and not by simple addition or linear sequence;
- A competence is not, therefore, the same as performance.

Part of the educational and training programs that are geared towards the development of student competences will only focus on the stimulation of virtual competences — dispositions that could come to be activated by the individual in the future, without really knowing where or when. Other programs deal with the promotion of effective competences — in other words, the educational situation incorporates real or simulated situations where the individual should confront and successfully resolve issues of contextualised action.

Knowledge, skills, know-how and motivations, although constructive aspects of effective competences, can not be confused with them, due to the lack of a contextualised situation where their mobilisation within a network is, in fact, accomplished.

A RESEARCH LINE ON TEACHER KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCES

Over recent years, an empirical line of research has been developed in the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of Lisbon focusing on professional knowledge and teacher competences. The

results of the work we will go on to mention help to further knowledge and systematise the concept of competence, while providing a vision on the ways competences are constructed and modified.

M. Fryxell, in a study concluded in 2003, focused on representations of teachers of foreign languages in secondary education and on their professional knowledge. Unsurprisingly, the surveyed teachers stress the primordial role of experience, contextualised action, as being the most important foundation for their construction of knowledge. Even though they recognised the importance of the scientific knowledge acquired prior to professional practice, they stressed the fundamental role of experience for the appropriation and consolidation of the competences they considered themselves to have already acquired at the point of the interview. Another aspect we feel to be important was the fact that in the interviews, these teachers often resorted to narratives of specific cases that had taken place at a point in their career, so as to better point out new competences they felt they had come to acquire. In our opinion, this fact reinforces the idea that work situations and contexts are indispensable for understanding the origin and nature of competences, thus, corroborating the above-mentioned opinions of Jonnaert, Le Boterf and Perrenoud or even M. Éraut when he states: “Professional knowledge cannot be characterized in a manner that is independent of how it is learned and how it is used” (1996, p. 19).

In another study, concluded in 2005, H. Bernardes obtained very similar results. By interviewing 1st cycle teachers to discover the sources of their professional knowledge and competences, he found that they gave particular value to the acquisition/construction of such knowledge in a pedagogical context and in peer interaction, while considering learning carried out in formal training environments, such as basic training courses, to be secondary. Indeed, accordingly, the most valued aspect of these courses was the pedagogical internship as an important source of competence training.

E. Mesquita (2005) focused on studying representations of students/future teachers during the final stage of their basic training, in terms of the most necessary competences for teaching and the most suitable way of constructing them. The interviewees characterised the carrying out of the

teaching profession as being based on specific and multidimensional knowledge. As far as teacher action is concerned, they referred mainly to relational aspects with students, families, colleagues and the community in general. Other competence domains that were also regarded as important were those related to managing one's own training, confronting duties and ethical issues, conceptualising pedagogical differentiation devices, managing student learning, involving them in the process and organising the learning situations. As far as their training was concerned, they underlined the supervised pedagogical training component as being the most important for competence construction.

Although working on the conceptions of teachers collaborating in 1st cycle schools, the findings of G. Barreira (2006) were the same as those of the afore-mentioned results of Mesquita.

L. Lousada (2006) set out to compare teacher competence conceptions regarding newly-qualified teachers and experienced teachers. He found that both stressed the primacy of ethical values in the exercise of the profession and attributed the goals of teaching and educating to the teacher's action. He registered differences in opinion on the part of the interviewees in relation to the competences they regarded as being more important: the newly qualified teachers tended to give greater value to maintaining discipline in the classroom and student motivation, and to scientific and technical competences; the experienced teachers tended to place stronger emphasis on personal and relational competences (safety, self-confidence, proximity to the students and their problems, tolerance). The role of experience for the development of competences was acknowledged by all.

A. Reis and C. Teixeira concluded studies in 2006 in which the interviewees were supervising teachers of teacher education candidates in the 1st and 2nd cycles of basic education.

Reis set out to clarify the reflective competence conceptions sustained by the interviewees. They stressed the fact that this competence was manifested through questioning, raising issues, the analysis of practices and their consequences, on the basis of which connections between theory and practice are found and the relativisation of knowledge is achieved. When speaking about how their students develop this competence, they mentioned how it is

a gradual construction that only begins at the basic training stage and is supported by student production of narratives.

Teixeira worked on the conceptions of supervising teachers with regard to the necessary competences for exercising their profession. The interviewees outlined the competences on two levels: scientific knowledge and personal qualities while regarding experience and self-training as the source of their own competences.

Other studies carried out within the framework of training for nurses and focusing on the competences of clinical practice supervisors attained converging results with those of the afore-mentioned class, as regards the professional competences of trainers.

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCES OF FUTURE TEACHERS

The above-mentioned brief digression through some of the crucial stages in the evolution of the concept of competence, up to the contemporary demand for a specific meaning for the field of educational sciences, allows us to examine some of the former problems we are recurrently confronted with in teacher education from a different perspective.

The professional training of teachers is, by definition, a composite training on which a number of components have an impact.

If we accept that a competence or competences may only be verified in contextualised professional action (the point of view we defend), then we must also admit that not all these training components are immediately geared towards the construction and development of teacher competences. This, of course, does not mean that strategies and conditions should not be discussed for a re-orientation of training programs so that all components may effectively contribute to the construction of the competences needed by teaching professionals.

In the case of Portugal, in 2007 the new legislation on teaching qualifications gave priority to six components of basic training. Their function was to focus on the solving of the problems we have referred to and which are duly identified.

The component “teacher education”, which covers the acquisition of knowledge in relation to content for future teaching, is independently organised (sometimes excessively, as may be seen in the cases of preparation for the 3rd cycle of basic and secondary education) in relation to the use this knowledge will take on for those training to be teachers. That which a number of research studies have shown in relation to the past will most probably continue to be repeated: serious gaps in the scientific preparation of newly-qualified teachers in terms of certain content in basic and secondary education programs; a relationship with knowledge along the lines of “consumer of knowledge” rather than “producer” (Estrela *et al.*, 2002, p. 24) type. The notion that Shulman (1986) refers to is also absent from the pedagogical content knowledge to mean the suitable combination between the knowledge of the topics being taught and the pedagogical way of getting the students to learn it. On the one hand, at this stage, we should also take into consideration a second component of training, namely “specific training”, where this stronger and well sustained alliance between teaching material (without forgetting its specific epistemological nature) should be sought, while on the other hand, relevant knowledge regarding the learning processes of children, young people and adults, different target audiences with whom teachers are frequently called to work should be taken into account.

Research carried out in Portugal in the 90s on basic teacher education pointed out, in some cases, significant flaws in the development of didactic competences in programs offered by higher education institutions, in relation to the subjects of Mathematics, Sciences, Foreign Languages, Information and Communication Technologies, Physics and Chemistry (Estrela *et al.*, 2002, pp. 32-34). Knowledge for “the love of knowledge” and total disregard for the use higher education students will make of it, the prevalence of a transmissive logic of a static body of knowledge and the consequent non-introduction of students to the epistemological issues of their area of knowledge or scientific research which characterise many degree courses, are serious limitations in the training of those who wish to become teachers. It is on the basis of situations like these that, later on, it

comes as no surprise when teachers are unable to carry out the experimental teaching of science with their students, or who have no idea of how their knowledge of humanity can be used to the service of projects promoting the effective competences of their students.

Other training components such as “general educational training” and “cultural social and ethical training”, formally closer to the specific performance of a teacher, may not lead to the development of effective professional competences if the above-mentioned logic prevails and affects part, if not a large part of higher education training.

Some research has pointed to gaps in the training of students in Educational Sciences; a lack of articulation among the several areas of knowledge provided by the latter, gradual phasing out between the moment this knowledge is acquired and the moment it should be applied to the service of professional practices and, consequently, a lack of meaning of such knowledge for the learners, since they do not see its relevance to the field of professional work.

By the same token, there have been few training programs that deliberately focus on the personal, social, ethical and deontological development of the learner. By rule, the pre-conceptions and prejudice, beliefs attitudes and values developed by the students long before their decision to become teachers are neither acknowledged nor taken into consideration in training contexts.

An overwhelming amount of intentions to train teachers to be reflective is barely conveyed in the strategies and methods used in training, leading one to assume that, at best, the so-called reflectivity will not go beyond the area of teacher competences, just like a technician who applies knowledge produced by others.

We are left with the components of “introduction to professional practice” and “training in educational research methodologies” as the final bases that can be legitimately expected to provide the development of the competences needed for the performance of a complex profession. So that this may happen, the often serious limitations presented by former training courses must be overcome: lack of articulation among institutions, higher education teachers and basic and secondary education; a pre-

dominantly technical vision of the teacher's action; lack of specialised training of many supervisors for the role they are performing.

The initiation of future teachers in educational research methodologies may, on the one hand, not have the expected importance for the development of their autonomy if training in this area presents itself as being detached from the aim of solving real professional practice problems which each learner encounters in a given school context.

To sum up: no matter how interesting it may be

(and it is) to observe teacher education components which, at a given historical moment, are considered necessary for the construction and development of competences, it is the conceptual model and the strategy adopted that clarify best the type of professionalism aimed towards, not in an abstract form, but in the field of training practices that are effectively triggered. *Mutatis mutandi*, the competences of training institutions and teachers will be constituted by a variety of resources that may be mobilised and, indeed are, by those who wish to deal with the teacher education

issue successfully, as competent professionals.

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