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The social and emotional competences in the earliest academic training of compulsory education teachers within multicultural contexts

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Abstract

In this article I argue about the necessity to give advantage to the social and emotional competences in the earliest academic training of teachers who work in the different grades of compulsory education, taking into account the requirements of the multicultural contexts currently existing in schools in Spain. In order to develop these ideas, attention will be paid here to the results obtained in our educational research with teachers of Social Sciences in different Secondary state schools in the province of Almería (Andalusia, Spain). With this research line, we are establishing a basic theoretical corpus for the teacher to be able to adjust his/her identities to the effects derived from the existence of a culturally diverse and complex society. We combined both quantitative and qualitative investigation and different methods (surveys, ethnography), as well as data collection techniques (sampling, questionnaire, observation, interview, discussion groups, documentary analysis, statistics analysis).

The knowledge provided by a number of research groups from different Spanish universities when applying the Multiple Intelligences theory says that the social and emotional competences development in teachers can solve some of the difficulties he/she can find in the classroom. We believe that Intercultural Education is an adequate educative paradigm to be used as both theoretical and practical tool in these new educative scenarios, and, at the same time, to assist the cultural and ethnic diversity within the formal educative system in the best possible way.

In my view, this adjustment will result on the welfare of the teacher and their daily practice in the classroom, achieving a more egalitarian socialization and greater well-being among students in the teaching and learning process of formal education.

Keywords: social and emotional competences; formal education; multicultural contexts.

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1. Introduction

Currently, the multicultural contexts that we can detect in different socialization spaces are a reality in Spain as well as in the European environment where we live. It is also an observable complex reality in the different autonomous communities of Spain, in coastal areas, in the small towns of rural areas and in large urban agglomerations. This cultural phenomenon has been notorious in the autonomous community of Andalusia and is outstanding in the province of Almería since the last decade of the 20th century due to economic, social, demographic, political and cultural reasons.

One may think that the different internal agents present in the formal educational socialization spaces have lived and still live such a transformation as a remarkable event. From the 1990s, different studies in our country showed how teachers and the educational system have been responding to multiculturalism, whose impact was caused by the phenomenon of extra and intra-European Community immigration in the late decades of the 20th and early 21st centuries. In a short space of time Spain ceased to be a place of emigration to be one of immigration.

In this context, we identified an educational issue of great interest for the community. The efforts in the field of teacher training have not been sufficient though, especially to provide teachers with social end emotional skills so that they can work with ease taking into account the arising dilemmas in the new multicultural contexts.

The knowledge provided by a number of research groups from different Spanish universities when applying the Multiple Intelligences theory says that the social and emotional competences development in teachers can solve some of the difficulties h/she can find in the classroom. Based on the results obtained in one of our research studies on teachers of social sciences, developed with qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches in different secondary state schools of the province of Almería we will establish a basic theoretical discussion taking into account the contributions of different authors who proved the benefits of these competences as used in the classroom so that the teacher can adjust his/her identity (identities) to the effects caused by cultural diversity. This adjustment will result, in our view, on the welfare of the teacher and in their daily practice in the classroom, achieving a more egalitarian socialization and greater well-being among students in the teaching and learning process of formal education.

In this article we will draw attention to the needs of promoting social and emotional competences in the initial training of teachers of the different stages of compulsory education, taking into account the demands generated by the current multicultural contexts in Spain.

2. Social and emotional competences in teacher training

It is well known that the number of variables and interests that occur in the educational arena is considerable. One of the causes that has prevented the recognition of the strength of affective and social and emotional competences in teacher training has been the demands of the rapid inclusion of teachers in the labour market. Bolívar (2000, p. 28) wrote about the above idea as follows: "Having reaffirmed the role of the teachers as key to the success of educational changes, however, new educational conditions (loss of power in the transmission of information, extension of the curriculum and educational content, work not limited to the classroom, intensification of work, more cooperative learning, among others) are leading to a transformation and redefinition of functions and conditions of the teaching practice."

It is interesting to note that the pervasive atmosphere of technicality and marketisation filtered within the different processes of educational reforms undertaken in Spain in the last quarter of the 20th century has in some way harmed the field of social and emotional competences mentioned above, as these were not incorporated on equal terms to the formative framework of the teaching profession. Both rationality and efficiency have prevailed in the initial stages of university education, thus being belittled or neglected by the teacher. Nevertheless the actual presence in our classrooms of a cultural and social diversity due to foreign immigration has made teachers and scholars pay attention and discover the possibilities of social and emotional skills since these had been frozen out to an inconspicuous area by educational research. But today circumstances are different from the ones explained above. As stated by Kira Mahamud (2012, p. 1): "The emotional dimension of the human being has become, in the last few decades, a common goal of analysis and examination of various sciences. Social Sciences in particular

have experienced a significant twist, a new look to the emotional dimension of the human being, its social function, treatment, growth and development. This trend is what, in sociologist Patricia Ticineto Clough´s view could be called affective turn, a new approach and direction of scientific research that actually begins in the 1990s of the last century, stepping on firm in the first decade of the 21st century."

Moreover, recent Neuroscience studies and their application to education show paths to be followed. Mora (2013, p.51) states that "The primary school teachers and secondary school teachers are the key of education, they always were, but they still are in this new educational stage that neuroeducation is. The summary of all this is that emotions, feelings, their brain function and their expression in conduct are the base, the core that we must know how to put up as a solid construction in teaching." This can also be observed in the conclusions of a study carried out by Castejón et al. (2008, p. 353-354) about university students in the area of Education as reference: "In the area of Education it is sometimes thought erroneously that the affective and emotional skills are not essential in the teaching staff."

However, emotional intelligence involves the development of a set of skills that all teachers should learn for two reasons: because the classrooms are the model of greater impact of emotional learning for students and because research is providing adequate levels of emotional intelligence to help tackle with greater success the everyday mishaps that teachers face".

On the other hand, the 2011 Social and Emotional Education report of the Botín Foundation, carried out in different countries (Finland, Canada, Australia, Singapore, Portugal), highlights an interesting question about the function that schools should assume in a characteristically uncertain world as ours is. In the introduction to the aforementioned report, coordinator Cristopher Clouder (2011, p. 27) argues: "The field of education has become a competitive sphere, especially among nations, something understandable in an environment characterized by economic turmoil and anxiety. In our view, this can be harmful if we are sure that we want to create a sustainable education mainly focused on the well-being of our future citizens." In this scenario we cannot ignore the contribution of investigations that have an impact on the positive contribution of social and emotional education in society, especially, in children. For example, Linda Lantieri (2013, p. 34) reminds us that: "More and more research suggests that helping children develop social and emotional skills from an early age affects their health and long-term well-being."

In Spain, and since the late 90's of the last century, different voices have argued that affective education has to be dealt with both in the family and at school. Similar discussions can be read in Voli (1998), Bisquerra (2003, 2004), Salmurri (2004), Palomera et al. (2008), Cabello, Ruíz and Fernández-Berrocal (2010), or Hué (2012). We are witnessing an expanded social recognition of the importance of these emotional and social skills, to the point that in different mass media, as for example several public and regional television channels, have paid attention to these issues for the general public (as it is the case with TVE 1 programme "Networks", or different TVE 2 "Debates"). Also, institutions such as Saint John of God Hospital in Barcelona or Botín Foundation have contributed with their studies and reports to the widespread dissemination of these plots of human knowledge. All this is posing a challenge to the teaching task, causing the need to revise the teaching profession, with the resulting crisis of professional identity.

This said, as researchers we can ask ourselves which are the reasons that have prevented these competences to have a more important role in the first stages of teacher training.

From my view, one of the reasons lies upon the demands on the access of teachers to the work market. This has provoked a distinction not quite successful within competences of first or second order in the process of university education. Armengol et al. (2011) observed that in the University context we can find two types of competences: some exclusive to the future profession, and others, known as transverse or generic where we include the social and emotional. Therefore this distinction between strictly professional competences and generic or transverse competences has led to a hierarchical negative feedback between competences within the process of university training of the future teacher of compulsory education. Moreover, as Castejón et al. (2008, p. 344) assert in the research mentioned above, different affective and social and emotional skills profiles were detected in undergraduates of different scientific fields of the University of Alicante, Spain: "The implementation of Bologna Declaration in 1999 on the establishment of the European Area of Higher Education has led to specific proposals for the design and development of educational programmes and competency-based University curricula", such as

those of the project "Tuning Educational Structures in Europe" shows. In this project, a series of generic skills were established, most of which coincide with the social and emotional competences studied under the names of emotional, social intelligence and practice.

What we would like to highlight here is the existence of an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, the importance of social and emotional competences included in general or cross-cutting competences recognized formally is admitted. On the other hand, in practice they are not widely exploited to benefit the teaching practice. Having said that, we could understand that these competences are already part of the teaching profession thus teachers would not be in need of a period of training to reach their acquisition.

However, these social and emotional skills should have been located in equal conditions to the rest of the skills acquired by teachers in their university education. Vilá (2005) understands this affective competence as a set of cognitive and emotional skills that enable behaviours appropriate to a sufficiently effective communication. Therefore, cognitive, affective and related to behavior areas must be present in the intercultural communicative competence. We also agree with Vaello (2011) when he grants the same recognition to characteristically technical skills as well as to social and emotional competences because, lest we forget, teaching is a social activity, that is to say, within its practice "(...) the social and emotional skills must occupy a key place in the exercise of the profession, despite not being often considered as a professional requirement but as a kind of complement to randomly decorate some teachers and others not, giving them a deterministic character where there is no further space for neither improvement nor systematic training. However, if we think about the matter, we can check that it is necessary to know and channel emotions to manage the common situations successfully." (Vaello, 2011, pp. 19-20).

Taking into account the contradictory scenario described above, and despite the competition exerted by other non-formal external agents of socialization, it is expedient that teachers be aware of their role as agents of social transformation in this complex framework. We are certain that the consolidation of social and emotional self-knowledge practices in teacher training would be positive in one of the basic issues of the current educational situations, which is being redefined in multicultural contexts.

But let us briefly describe the contributions that these competences can offer to teacher training to improve their professional practice and development. Having Gardner´s Multiple Intelligences theory (1995) as a basis for our discussion, we would like to emphasize that two intelligences from the emotional perspective: interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences. In the new multicultural educative scenario we have described above, we are not only considering the cognitive ability of teachers but the emotional ability underlying the double interaction that exists in all teaching and learning processes. This is explained, on the one hand, because an obvious external relationship between teachers and students exists, and on the other hand, because there is a more inner relationship, a dialogue of the individual with themselves as teachers. It is in this process of inner dialogue where the emotional competence makes sense to be seen in the social arena. So the ability to look over our emotions as teachers is an opportunity to face new situations in the educative framework. If as teachers we make use of the intrapersonal intelligence, we will become aware of the ability to notice and recognise the strengths, weaknesses, moods, feelings, impulses and their effects upon others as well as upon ourselves. We will also have the ability to regulate our own emotions, we will face the difficulties or find out solutions with optimism. If we take advantage of the interpersonal intelligence we can develop the following competences: putting ourselves in someone else´s position, understanding diversity as a treasure, improving our communicative influence on our students, leading up dispute resolutions and taking initiatives, and working cooperatively.

The following sections discuss how our research means to show that we cannot set this topic aside when speaking about the teacher training path.

3. The knowledge gained through our research

After having researched for a period of time between 2002 to 2005 about the teaching practice in Intercultural Education across the curriculum in primary and secondary schools in the province of Almería, we detected the existence of meaningful gaps in the teaching practice in terms of self-development of teachers´ social and emotional competence. One of our aims focused on investigating how the secondary school teacher of social

sciences, geography and history made use of the curriculum to cater for the presence of cultural diversity (López-Martínez, 2006). Our research dealt with deepening the knowledge of educational actions developed by these teachers in the classroom in a new multicultural context in the province of Almería. This new educational context was an opportunity since it was used as platform to verify and redefine the role of the teacher, the role of the public school in a politically democratic, pluralistic society from the cultural, economic and capitalist standpoint.

Our work was carried out taking into account other previous studies by the HUM-665 Research Group of the University of Almería coordinated by Professor Soriano (2012). Evidence showed that some teachers were highly concerned regarding how to deal with classrooms where the abundant presence of immigrant students was remarkable. Also, we had relevant information about a minority of teachers who were offering clear signs of interest for changing their teaching practice developing their affective and emotional skills, with greater awareness about the impact of the presence of foreign immigrant students.

Our research was presented as a descriptive and interpretative study of an educational reality. Our aim was to notice and recognise a series of didactic proposals from the daily practice performed by teachers of social sciences from the perspective of Intercultural Education. We believe that Intercultural Education is an adequate educative paradigm to be used as both theoretical and practical tool in the new educative scenarios, and, at the same time, to assist the cultural and ethnic diversity within the formal educative system in the best possible way. We combined both quantitative and qualitative investigation and different methods (surveys, ethnography), as well as data collection techniques (sampling, questionnaire, observation, interview, discussion groups, documentary analysis, statistics analysis).

One of the technical tools used consisted in the working out of a questionnaire for teachers. Priority was given to detailed information about the work of teachers regarding the practice of intercultural education in different schools in the secondary social sciences curriculum. This questionnaire was shaped after making an assessment carried out by nine judges from different scholarly areas. Three of these judges belonged to the Methods of Research and Diagnosis in Education Area in three different Spanish universities, other three belonged to the Didactics of the Social Sciences Area of the University of Almería; finally the other three researchers were full time teachers in public secondary schools. The sample consisted of a total of 41 secondary schools of the province of Almería. At the end of the research process, the number of participants was 171 teachers (92 women and 79 men) amongst a universe of 256 social sciences teachers in total. We chose the sampling by knowing beforehand the total number of teachers in all Geography and History departments in all secondary schools in the province of Almería. As we can see, the election of schools was deliberate. Thus the sampling methods were not probabilistic but intentional because we assumed that the teaching culture was reflected in all teachers taking part in the research. The statistical analysis of the data was made throughout SPSS 12 (Statistical Package for Social Science).

The questionnaire was structured in three dimensions with their corresponding sub-dimensions and items. It seemed appropriate to highlight the made up of emotional, moral, ethical and political dimensions of teachers. The questions posed to teachers in the above mentioned three dimensions were designed to allow teachers to let out their interests, beliefs, motivations, practices, reflections, attitudes, concepts, intentions, desires, behaviours, desires, frustrations... These were dimensions in relation to three aspects of whatever an educational action: the emotional, the epistemological and the didactic. These three dimensions were not conceived as isolated categories but different links were created between them.

Therefore our questionnaire was intended to go beyond the mere instrumental reason, mostly because we believed that the moral, ethical and anthropological aspects, and above all, the emotional and affective ones, had to be present in the knowledge of the new educational reality in Spain. In this respect, the discussion of Pérez Gómez (2000, p. 162) was useful regarding the teaching culture as an important part of the institutional culture. For this author, the teaching culture is of great complexity and three complementary levels are required to fully understand it: "A first transrational level where values are intended as metaphysical proposals, based on beliefs, codes of ethics and moral intuitions; a second rational level where values are based on the rules and expectations of the social context and depend on social justification; and a third level, subrational, where values are experienced as feelings and personal preferences, are pervaded with emotional influences and can be considered basically amoral or asocial."

Therefore, in the referred emotional dimension of our questionnaire we found it necessary to gather valuable

information about how teachers expressed their emotions and feelings in the presence of multiculturalism in the formal education arena.

4. What statistical data say

Based on the knowledge provided by our research work, we interpreted these data in the following way: the notion that teachers have as referred to teaching and education did not experience major changes despite the new circumstances that Almería´s municipalities are living. But it is also true that a minority of teachers (1/3 approximately) was carrying out more innovative educational interventions. Alternatives and innovations developed by these teachers who were predisposed to change were of special relevance for us: a) on the one hand, to increase the degree of communication with students from the point of view of quality and quantity; b) on the other hand, to build up a classroom environment of trust, appropriate to strengthen communication. We could see two fundamental efforts made up by motivated and sensitized teachers: trust and communication. Accordingly, these were considered two priority conditions to develop the relevant educational purposes for the new scenarios characterized by plurality and cultural diversity. In short, these were two basic conditions for the development of the practice of Intercultural Education making use of emotional intelligence. We will now offer some consistent aspects of our interpretation of the data obtained.

-Presence of children of immigrant families in the classroom was referred to by the greater part of the teaching staff as a relevant event. The teaching experience regarding the cultural and ethnic diversity exceeded more than three academic years in the 60% of the teachers who took part in the questionnaire.

-In addition, and taking into account the scenario where we conducted the questionnaire, the immigration phenomenon was widely perceived by teachers in their classrooms: 19.3% felt the same as they used to feel before this demographic change was a reality in the province of Almería; 15.2 stated that nothing had changed in their notion about teaching and education; 46.8% felt that it had changed little. By contrast, we found 32.2% of teachers who felt that they had changed a lot and 4.1% stated that this change was highly noticeable.

-Regarding the early stages of University training, for 63.7% of teachers this scenario was not enough to confront heterogeneous classrooms. When asked how they felt about a possible increase in heterogeneity in the classroom, 45% of teachers said to be motivated and 43.3% said they felt alone. A percentage of 29.2% felt unable to carry out their work with security in this new socio-educational scenario. In addition, 44.4% spoke of having suffered anguish or grief in several occasions, while 52.6% had not experienced such feelings.

-Teachers were touched by the cultural and ethnic diversity (55%) from the professional and personal point of view, the feelings of concern (79.5%) and curiosity (63.7%) being highlighted.

-Signs of anxiety were checked in 14% of teachers, but we also verified discomfort in 9.4% and well-being by 11% of teachers. However, when asked if at some point they had been blocked when developing their daily work within this diversity, 25% of teachers stated that they had.

-The new educational reality forced approximately one third of the respondent teachers (30.4%) to make changes in their conception of teaching and education, a challenge to improve their teaching practice.

-Also, an outstanding ambivalence in the responses given by the teachers was observed, as 64.9% of teachers were in favour of the inclusion of specialist professionals for teaching both the immigrant populations children and the sons and daughters of the gypsy minority communities, whereas almost 30% stated their refusal of this idea.

-Schools Guidance Departments were used to help in situations as those listed above. Accordingly, the energy spent on teaching in culturally and ethnic heterogeneous classrooms could be recovered in two main ways: thinking more over the teaching process (58.5%) and forgetting about the subject (22.2%).

-Likewise, 62% of teachers believed that their personal behavior influenced the classroom when it comes to positively promoting the coexistence in the classroom. This was so because those teachers noticed that the climate experienced by students in their everyday environment did not coincide with that experienced in the school. Hence 69.6% of teachers valued that greater emotional investment was needed in the teaching practice, possibly greater than a big deal of theoretical and practical knowledge. The promotion of respect for the different attitudes played a more important role than scientific knowledge in their teaching practice. Finally, 84.2% of secondary school teachers of social sciences of the province of Almería let us know that the contents of their school subject carried

greater social responsibility if compared with other subjects of the curriculum. They understood that this subject has a socializing purpose to promote the social coexistence in multicultural contexts.

5. Conclusions

Based on the knowledge derived from our research we can affirm that we stand for the necessity of developing social and emotional competences of teachers who work in multicultural contexts because that way we are creating a framework to similarly consolidate an intercultural competence. We believe that there are obvious points of agreement, of connection, between affective skills and intercultural competences, mainly because the two pursue common objectives and purposes, i.e. encouraging communicative interaction to improve the professional development of teachers.

We therefore believe that the social and emotional and affective dimensions of future teachers of compulsory education should be at least taken into account in the early stages of their academic training, especially as we know about the demands that the new multicultural contexts request from teachers. We are referring to the abilities or competences developed by teachers to adjust their identity (identities) to the new circumstances brought by the existence of these new multicultural contexts. This adjustment must inevitably result in the everyday practice in Spain achieving one of the goals of education: the comprehensive development of the person from the individual and collective point of view.

The effort carried out by researchers and institutions in our country intended to recognize the need to develop social and emotional competences in the formal educational framework. Then again, this has been a formerly forgotten arena that has not been taken into account in the training of future teachers. Despite the existence of some different teachers training programmes for the development of the social and emotional competence (Bisquerra, Hué, Palomera *et al.*, Vaello), it seems reasonable to assert that the social and emotional component be an essential piece of educational practice in any context, more, if possible, in a multicultural setting where future teachers have not received adequate training despite the attempts of universities to cover this part of university education.

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