

Key Findings

Learning the job of being a teacher

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The reform of teacher training, begun in France in 2008 and applicable as of autumn 2010, is intended to answer questions relating to how this training is organized, in particular the articulation between didactics and pedagogy or professional practice and theoretical contributions. The production of models for masters' degrees in teacher training has raised the question of how to organize the alternation between hands-on training and formal training, and of the roles and impacts of the teachers in the field and academics in this training.

1. Training methods and the shift towards universities

An international overview of teacher training systems shows that training may be granted recognition by a special diploma; it may be recognised by obtaining, in parallel, a diploma in education and a diploma in a specific discipline (Hungary, Australia, Canada, the USA); and finally, it may be organized in two phases, obtaining these two diplomas consecutively (France, the United Kingdom, Oceania, North America, Singapore, South Africa). Several systems may coexist in the same country (O'Donnell *et al.*, 2009).

In **France**, the organization of training in IUFMs has led to criticism from certain student teachers for whom the training was too theoretical, too removed from their daily concerns or who doubted the legitimacy and the effectiveness of the trainers and who were also asking for more teaching practice. Several investigations give an account of the judgments of trainee teachers or beginners (Larivain, 2006; Lochmann, 2007; Fabre, 2009).

In **Belgium**, teacher training tends to favour the educational relationship to the detriment of the relationship with knowledge; relations between university and schools involved in the training are said to be badly defined, which is thought to accentuate the failure of hands-on practice and the attempt at theoretical academic formalization to coincide (Pollet & Rosier, 2009).

In the **United States**, where the process of shifting towards universities is older, the integration of *Teacher Teaching College* and *Normal Schools* in university education is poor, due to "endemic uncertainty" of the knowledge elaborated and passed on.

In answer to these uncertainties, a process of standardization of contents and courses was set up in several countries, in a more or less restrictive way and using the most various resources and partnerships. In **Ireland**, the Teaching Council produced, in 2007, professional codes of conduct, offering basic standards for the teacher's educational skills, know-how and competency (De Paor, 2009). In **England**, teacher training is guided by standards, the application of which is controlled by an agency in charge of evaluating the quality of teaching (*Ofsted*) and by the *Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA)*. Grouped together by qualification levels, these standards are related to the concept of excellence and promote the spirit of collegial structure and the culture of the educational establishment (Malet, 2009). **Scotland** offers a special system. The independent organisation, in charge of registering all teachers, which accompanies both future and beginner teachers (on probation), has published several recommendations acting as sup-

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ports for the training programmes, in partnership with the minister of education. In **Germany**, academic training (a discipline, education, psychology and philosophy) is followed by a probationary phase lasting from 18 to 24 months, including training courses and seminars for analysing practices. The standards of training are recommended by the permanent Conference of the ministers of culture of the Länder (Delpy, [2009](#)).

However, whether in the United States, in England or in Scotland, researchers denounce the setting-up of standards that are sometimes too formal or technical for training in a profession where the affective and the cultural are very important (Malet, [2009](#); McNally & Gray, [2006](#)).

For P. Perrenoud, training programmes must devote more time to the sciences of action - if they are explanatory and non-prescriptive - and to all the social sciences, which may come within the sphere of didactics and teaching, but also of psychology, ergonomics or theories of work (Perrenoud, [2004](#)).

2. Learning to teach without any theoretical instructions?

Several investigations carried out by researchers or other structures stress the importance of the role of research in the questionings of future teachers or beginner teachers. The results of surveys carried out in France, during the *États généraux de la formation des enseignants* ([2009](#)), at Sherbrooke university (Hensler *et al.*, [2008](#)) or in several Danish universities (Laursen, [2007](#)) show the tension between the expression of a need for theoretical knowledge and great expectations for an approach related to experimental knowledge and professional practice. Analysis of the discourse of future teachers leads us to suppose that they are more concerned with the acquisition of relational or personal competencies or with the ability to teach a discipline, than with educational and practical knowledge.

So the rationalisation of the use of theoretical knowledge which is taken for granted in the professionalisation of the technical professions is badly perceived, or even rejected, in the professionalisation of the "human" professions; reflexive practices, which are also taken for granted in the first case, are translated, in the second, by an approach related to personal, and not necessarily professional, competencies (Perrenoud, [2004](#)).

In **North America**, it is difficult to translate into parts of a university curriculum the incentive given to future teachers to analyze what they do and transform this analysis into professional knowledge. In Quebec, not only is it difficult to achieve the articulation between experimental knowledge and theoretical knowledge, but students have a hard time adopting the expected reflexive attitude, given concerns encountered elsewhere: too limited professional experience, classroom management problems at the forefront, practical knowledge, fear of evaluation, insufficient analytical abilities, lack of confidence (Hensler *et al.*, [2008](#)).

In **France**, researchers and future teachers agree on the principle of training in the teaching profession, articulating theoretical knowledge, academic knowledge of the disciplines and knowledge of exercising the profession. Theoretical knowledge must always be related to practice, adapting to the circumstances and levels of teaching, providing benchmarks for thinking about what one is doing, changing it and developing ones competencies. M. Altet distinguishes four types of knowledge: "knowledge to be taught", "knowledge to teach" (didactic, educational), "knowledge about teaching" (formalizing practice, that can be passed on between peers) and "knowledge of the practice" (knowledge from experience, which may be theorized or remain implicit) (Altet, [2009](#)).

The approach of research for praxis is both to put into words and problematise professional situations, to try to find answers from a theoretical knowledge base and to set up "a space for intercommunication" (Altet, [2009](#)). How can these analyses be put to good use, particularly during initial training? The question which is asked with regard to convincing results from any piece of research is the following: "It works, but is it reproducible?". Can contextualized research "produce generic conclusions on educational practice in general"? (Vinatier & Altet, [2008](#)). For P. Rayou and L. Ria, "while research cannot contribute directly to modifying the conditions in which the profession is exercised [...], it may take part in the design of approaches for initial or in-service training" (Rayou & Ria, [2009](#)). The alternating move from knowledge of practice to knowledge for practice, from practitioner to researcher and vice versa, cannot happen without the interface of the trainer, both practitioner and researcher, both involved in research and having an opinion about research (Altet, [2009](#)). As things stand, in the majority of the countries examined,

trainers are either academics, or teachers who have moved up through teaching and are working full time or half-time in a training centre; in schools they are backed up by supervisors or tutors. For G. Sensevy, the shift towards universities has caused a social division of work between the teacher trainer and the academic. He sees in this an organisation into a hierarchy and a conceptual opposition between assistance with the professional act and the logic of didactic content, preventing any cross-fertilisation (Sensevy, 2009). G. Baillat puts forward the hypothesis that educational engineering work may be carried out between IUFM teachers, teacher trainers, supervisors, head teachers, inspectors, etc. (Baillat, 2009). IUFM trainers, whose legitimacy is sometimes called into question, must be both "at the heart of the realities of teaching because they must give recipes" and "give thought to the practical aspects while dealing with the theoretical ones". (Kaspi, 1993). In contrast to the opinions about trainers in training centres, the trainees say that they appreciate the supervisors (or tutors) for their mastery of their disciplines, for their educational competencies and because they help them to solve any difficulties encountered. In addition to the comfort of a model to be followed, tutoring allows one to get some distance on one's first professional experience and gives a collective and collaborative dimension to the practice (Moussay *et al.*, 2009).

To go beyond mentoring, supervisors may be asked to take part in "professional research" networks, as is the case in Ireland, where each school may follow research and innovation programmes which meet with situations that are peculiar to it (De Paor, 2009).

3. Training courses for learning the job and giving thought to how it is carried out

In a recent article on the role of "related teaching staff" in teacher training, J.-F. Desbiens, C. Borges and C. Spallanzani point out the importance of supervised teaching practice in the development of teaching skills. Based on the situation in **Quebec**, they show that courses make it possible to place disciplinary, educational and didactic knowledge at the service of professional practice (Desbiens *et al.*, 2009). From the trainee teachers' standpoint, it may be said that courses in which the trainee teacher has full responsibility or those in which he/she is accompanied by a supervisor contribute to the development of professional competencies, in particular those related to classroom management, the regulation of learning or self-assessment and reflexive analysis (Brau-Antony & Jourdain, 2008).

In the training course, two resources have been set up to help make the link between practice acquired during teacher training and the theories drawn out from the situations encountered, whether in classroom management, the approach to the disciplines, or other aspects. These are the professional report and, more recently, the portfolio. The latter which helps to put into perspective the trainee's everyday actions in a professional situation, is also used to help build a knowledge base. This methodological instrument is based on an alternation between professional situations and thinking about teaching methods (Ria *et al.*, 2006). However, the return on investment from the theoretical input in training is not necessarily brought to light by the research work that has examined this professional document (Mansvelder-Longayroux, 2007). S. M. Putman shows, from a survey on future American teachers, that the great concerns related to classroom management - brought up by all researchers working on the content of teacher training - must find an answer in the way that the alternation between immersion in the professional environment and *a priori* and *a posteriori* thinking is organised. He suggests giving a theoretical minimum, using research on teaching practices, at the beginning of the semester, so as to make this thinking possible as of the first period in full responsibility (Putman, 2009). While it is not always easy to strike the right balance between theory and practice, this alternation, recommended in all the research work, may take four forms: alternation-fusion (in a single school); alternation-juxtaposition (in two distinct unrelated places, with two different logics); complementary alternation (jobs divided up between the two places) and alternation-articulation or dual education (in two places which together contribute to the acquisition of competencies) (Delvaux & Tilman, 2000; Pasche Gossin, 2006). In **Switzerland**, the High teaching school Bejune has set up this integrative alternation, within a teaching approach based on "thinking about professional practices". This supposes recourse to practices as a way of gaining experience, creating a bridge between knowledge acquired in the field and that acquired in the training centre, as well as helping students to become more autonomous in the way they integrate

knowledge (Pasche Gossin, [2006](#)). This practice gets all the trainees' votes because the topics proposed make it possible to attain the training objectives; formal training appears useful, and makes it possible to highlight the competencies developed in the field or to put these competencies into words (Périsset-Bagnoud *et al.*, [2006](#)). To perfect this approach, it would be advisable to add an ethical dimension to the organization of integrative alternation, whether this be cultural, institutional or organisational, which would lead to greater involvement from the trainee and a relationship involving much educational scaffolding (Jorro, [2007](#)). On reading the surveys, institutional comments and research work published over the last 5 years (for information prior to this period, refer to the December [2005](#) VST newsletter), it is well understood that to be a teacher, it is not enough to acquire disciplinary skills, nor to consider that the teacher's job can be learnt just by doing it, with assistance, if necessary, from experienced colleagues. Being a teacher means passing on knowledge and undoubtedly demonstrating the ten, fifteen or twenty competencies mentioned in the Quebec, English, French or Belgian official texts.

But it also means being able to think about what one does, being able to call oneself into question, questioning one's know-how, disciplinary knowledge and cultural convictions. This approach is in no way intuitive and it is undoubtedly by impregnation from past experience, topped off by theoretical thinking or passed on orally by trainers in the field, that it is possible to build up teaching as a profession. And yet, it is not a question of reproducing standardized skills, or applying models which may work here, but perhaps not there. Alternation between courses in which the trainee teacher has full responsibility and phases of didactic and educational learning in training establishments (whatever structure is adopted), between input from university lecturers and trainers "from the chalk face" remains one of the most favourable conditions for learning the teacher's job (Gelin *et al.*, [2007](#)).

It is a question of learning a trade and therefore of acquiring technical, theoretical and practical skills to identify what is at stake in the act of teaching, to exercise an expert profession, "able to articulate details, models, decisions and issues, but also to take part in the institution while carrying out its missions of a "citizen professional" (Meirieu, [2006](#)).

To quote this Dossier:

- FEYFANT Annie (2010). « L'apprentissage du métier d'enseignant ». *Dossier d'actualité de la VST*, n° 50, January.
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