Comparative study of the evaluation of professional competencies by experienced and trainee Spanish primary teachers

A. De Juanas Oliva *, P. Fernández Lozano *, R. Martín del Pozo *, M. González Ballesteros *, E. Pesquero Franco *, E. Sánchez Martín *
* Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Madrid, Spain

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Taking as reference the proposals of the European Higher Education Area, the aim of this study is to identify the competencies which a wide sample of teachers in Spanish primary schools (6–12 age group) consider to be important for their professional performance and which they use in their everyday teaching, and to what extent their university training prepared them for their practising professional development. To do this, an ad hoc instrument was devised and applied to experienced practising teachers and to teacher trainees who were on teacher training placements during the last semester of their course. The results of the study show that initial teacher training should deal in depth with the competencies related to the organisation and management of teaching–learning, the use of new technologies in the primary classroom, the involvement of the families, education in values, social skills and skills for working in professional groups. Finally, proposals are made for training based on the articulation between theory and practice, to allow the professional competencies mentioned to be developed and used in practice, as well as encouraging close collaboration between teacher trainers and experienced practising teachers.

Keywords: competencies; teacher training; European higher education area

Introduction

The modern education system in developed societies is established within an environment where science and technology guide the course of human activity towards new forms of civilisation. A new type of education is required to encourage better aptitudes for thought, creativity and problem-solving, and to foster values which take the diversity of a globalised world into account (Tharp et al. 2002).

Current social demands have given rise to unending reforms which place special emphasis on the role of teachers, pedagogical leadership, school management and on building a new collaborative culture in schools (Fullan, 1992).

Parallel to this, the need to adapt the university to the challenges identified has led to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and to the drawing up of a series of proposals and directives intended to facilitate the development of general capabilities, personal and professional qualities. All this is to ensure that future graduates will engage in lifelong learning and will be able to apply, teach and communicate their knowledge in a responsible manner within a changing society (Bologna Declaration 1999, Graz Declaration 2003, Glasgow Declaration 2005, among others).

To summarise, the intention is to train competent professionals who are able to deal with social change and transformation. This requires planning the learning
processes and results, starting from a definition of the professional profiles of different qualifications, and in the case considered here, of the primary school teaching qualification (Grado de Maestro de Educación Primaria; www.boe.es/boe/dias/2007/12/29/pdfs/A53747-53750.pdf).

Theoretical framework
The use of the term ‘competency’ arose from the need to go beyond a purely transmissive education which had often become a mechanical and de-contextualised learning of a set of basically conceptual knowledge items which were difficult to transfer later to real life. This conceptualisation is, however, contested. Zabala and Arnau (2007) categorise the different definitions included in two different contexts:

- In a business context (McClelland 1973; OIT 2004; Le Boterf 2000):
  (a) Competencies are mainly aimed at efficient or excellent task completion.
  (b) Tasks are related to job specifications or clearly defined professional activity.
  (c) Competencies imply the putting into practice of a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

- In an educational context (Council of Europe 2001; Perrenoud 2001; OECD 2002; Unidad española de Eurydice-CIDE 2002; Monereo 2005, among others) the definitions include the main ideas formulated in the business world and attempt to analyse in depth the way the components of competency are actioned.

In this study we have taken as a starting point the concept of competency as the ‘capacity to mobilise various cognitive resources to face up to a type of situation’ (Perrenoud 2001, 11). This definition emphasises four aspects:

- Competencies are not in themselves knowledge, skills or attitudes, although they mobilise, integrate and orchestrate these resources.
- This mobilisation only becomes pertinent in a specific situation and each situation is unique, although it may be dealt with by analogy with others already known.
- Exercising the competency involves complex mental operations, sustained by thought patterns, which allow an action relatively adapted to any given situation to be determined (more or less consciously and quickly) and carried out (more or less efficiently).
- Professional competencies are created by training, but also in practice and are transferred from one working situation to another.

With reference to the different components included in the characterisation above, Koster et al. (2005) point out the difficulty of making these operational, mentioning some jobs which differentiate between: (a) tasks characteristic of the competency (knowledge and skills); and (b) personal characteristics of the competency (e.g., motives or attitudes), with these latter being more difficult to evaluate, as they are less tangible and often shown in specific skills.

On the other hand, the contextualising character of the competencies presents a problem which is difficult to fit into training courses currently offered by the university. Monereo (2005) points out the similarity between the concepts of competency
and strategy. Given that strategies also involve repertoires of actions which are learned, self-regulated and contextualised, a possible distinction between the two concepts would be that ‘strategy is a specific action to resolve a contextualised type of problem, while competency predominates in a wide range of strategies in a specific area or scenario of human activity’ (13).

From this point of view, the first general conclusion to be drawn as to the training of future primary school teachers is the need to train them in strategies or sub-competencies, which must then be restructured and integrated at a later date to be able to apply them in the relevant professional situation. This means that they must previously have been trained to attain the autonomy needed to be able to solve problems and take decisions in increasingly complex contexts.

Research design

Aims

The final aim of this research is to contribute to improving the initial training of primary teachers from an analysis of professional competencies, of their training needs and of the difficulties of using these competencies in practice. The aims of the research are:

- To describe and analyse the professional competencies which a sample of experienced and trainee primary teachers perceive as necessary for their profession.
- To compare the evaluation of the professional competencies made by experienced teachers and by trainee teachers.

Participants

The research was carried out with a sample of 397 subjects divided into two groups:

- The first group was made up of 343 experienced, practising Spanish primary teachers from a total of 250 primary schools in the Madrid area, mostly from the state sector (91.7%). The average age of the subjects in this group was over 45. Almost three-quarters of the group were women (72.4%). Almost all the subjects were professional state-maintained school teachers with more than 20 years service. They were mostly working as general class teachers (65.4%) and at the same time more than half were class group tutors (54.7%).
- The second group was made up of trainee primary teachers who were completing their initial training in the practice teaching placement at the end of their Magisterio training course in the schools mentioned above. The teaching practice lasted four months. Fifty-four subjects took part out of a total of 184 who were invited to cooperate in the research. The whole group was in the same age range, with average age around 21. All the subjects, except for one, were women.

Instrument

An ad hoc three-part questionnaire was drawn up:
Part 1 requested data corresponding to the identification variables.

Part 2 presented 28 items (Table 1) following a Likert type scale, with ratings between 0 and 3 (never, sometimes, often, always) and with a related three dimensional evaluation:

(a) Importance for the teaching profession.
(b) Use of competencies in everyday teaching.
(c) Evaluation of the university training received.

Part 3 included an open-ended question on other competencies considered important for primary school teachers.

Table 1. The 28 items used in the questionnaire.

1. I can detect the difficulties my students have in specific learning areas.
2. I adapt and rework my programme as a result of their learning difficulties.
3. I take the heterogeneity of my class group into account when I draw up the classroom programme.
4. I encourage cooperative learning with my students.
5. I encourage the self-learning of my students.
6. I design activities which arouse the interest and curiosity of the students and involve them in an active way.
7. I help my students to find their school learning meaningful.
8. I keep my students’ suggestions in mind when preparing activities to increase their learning motivation.
9. I have complete mastery of all the basic subject areas I have to teach.
10. I take my students’ ideas into account, even if they are wrong, and use them in their learning.
11. I use group work in my classroom practice.
12. I collaborate with support teams and other teachers who carry out activities with my students.
13. I participate actively with my colleagues in drawing up and carrying out educational and cultural projects.
14. I collaborate in the management and organisation of the material and human resources in my school.
15. I am interested in boosting the participation of other institutions and social agents in the life of the school.
16. I encourage students to take part in the different activities organised by the school.
17. I organise and run the general meetings with parents and/or tutors.
18. I adopt an interlocutor role in meetings with parents and/or tutors.
19. I transmit to parents that they need to be involved in their children’s learning.
20. I make use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to help to prepare my classes.
21. I use email to communicate with other teachers, students, parents or other educational agents.
22. I use ICT as one more tool for class work with students on specific aspects of the curriculum.
23. I get involved in foreseeing and dealing with situations of violence and discrimination in my school.
24. I analyse my behaviour and that of my students to establish, by negotiation, a favourable environment for formative coexistence.
25. I try to develop a sense of responsibility, solidarity and justice.
26. I take part in drawing up self-evaluation projects and plans for institutional improvements.
27. I think about my professional activity and make plans which let me explain and improve my own teaching in practice.
28. I take part in lifelong learning courses which help me to improve my teaching.
These items were devised taking as reference the 10 competency areas proposed by Perrenoud (2004, 10) for teacher training:

- Organise and enliven learning situations.
- Manage learning progression.
- Draw up and develop differentiation devices.
- Involve the students in their learning and work.
- Encourage group work.
- Take part in managing the school.
- Inform and involve the parents.
- Use new technologies.
- Face up to professional duties and ethical dilemmas.
- Organise their own continuing training.

The group of experienced teachers replied to the questionnaire sent by post during the 2005–2006 school year and the trainee teachers replied to the questionnaire online (www.ucm.es/info/grupocompetencias/) (Figure 1). The data for the second group were collected during the final month of the teaching practice placement in the 2006–2007 school year.

**Analysis**

The statistical analysis of the responses to the 28 items in Part 2 was carried out using the SPSS 15.0 statistics package.

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Figure 1. Web page where the trainee teachers could fill in the questionnaire.
The reliability coefficient for this part of the questionnaire, calculated with Cronbach’s Alpha, was 0.927.

The Kruskal-Wallis statistic was used to evaluate significant differences between the two teacher groups in the means corresponding to the responses to each item in the questionnaire. This test was applied as the samples did not meet normality and homoscedasticity criteria (Pardo and Ruiz 2002). The application of the SPSS 15.0 program for non-parametric tests and independent k samples was used to carry out the statistical analysis.

The open-ended question responses were submitted to a qualitative content analysis, with the analysis categories drawn up from these answers (Bardin 1986).

Results

(1) Evaluation of competencies

(a) Importance for being a teacher

Table 2 show the average scores for the experienced teachers and teacher trainees. Both groups consider it a priority to transmit to the parents that they need to be involved in their children’s learning process (Item 19) and to develop a sense of responsibility, solidarity and justice in the children (Item 25). Next in importance for the experienced teachers is the capacity to adopt an interlocutor role in meetings with parents (Item 18) and for the teacher trainees, preventing violent situations and discrimination in school (Item 23).

In other areas, the experienced teachers give less importance to information and communication technologies (ICT) as communication tools for teachers, students, parents and other agents (Items 20, 21 and 22). For the trainee teachers, participation in the school society (Item 15), and ICT related competencies, just as for the experienced teachers, are less important.

To sum up, the competencies which both groups consider most important for the primary teacher are those which can be used to establish a good relationship with the families and educate in values, and the least important are those related to technology. In both cases there are no important differences apparent between the experienced and the trainee teachers.

(b) Use in everyday teaching

Table 2 shows how experienced teachers and the trainees estimate that they use to a greater extent those competencies related to family relationship (Items 18 and 19). (This result coincides with surveys carried out in other countries which all agree on the need for closer school–family collaboration; see Pam, Hillman, and Mortimore 1998.)

Both groups affirm that the competency they use most in practice is the transmission and development of positive social values in the students (Item 25). This is followed, for the experienced teachers, by the value given to mastering the subject areas they teach (Item 9). On the other hand, the trainee teachers affirm that they will use more their capacity for designing activities to arouse the curiosity and interest of the students in the subject content and learning (Item 6).

The two groups also coincide in signalling the use of ICT as the group of competencies they use very seldom (Items 20, 21 and 22). The trainee teachers claim that
Table 2. Comparative results for working and trainee teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Importance of competencies</th>
<th>Use of competencies in practice</th>
<th>Training in competencies received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average experienced teachers</td>
<td>Average trainee teachers</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 1</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>.183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 2</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>.141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 3</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>.252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 4</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>.180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 5</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>.352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 6</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>.002*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 7</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>.166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 8</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>.271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 9</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>.626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 10</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>.004*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 11</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 12</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>.010*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 13</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>.198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 14</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>.326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 15</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>.210</td>
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<tr>
<td>Item 16</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>.616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 17</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.002*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 18</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>.001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 19</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>.036*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 20</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>.061*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 21</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 22</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>.001*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. (Continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Importance of competencies</th>
<th>Use of competencies in practice</th>
<th>Training in competencies received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average experienced teachers</td>
<td>Average trainee teachers</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 23</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 24</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>.005*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 25</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>.042*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 26</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>.014*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 27</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>.171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 28</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>.251</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *Statistically significant difference at 0.05 level (bilateral).
they make even less use of the capacity to promote participation by other institutions and social agents in the life of the school (Item 15), a competency which is also little used by the experienced teachers.

To sum up, although both groups consider that the most used competencies are those relevant to their relationship with families and teaching children values, the experienced teachers also mention here the use of the competencies in the mastery of subject matter, while the trainee teachers agree on the design of student activities. The competencies least used by both groups are those related with ICT and with promoting the participation of society in the school.

(c) Training received

Table 2 show that the experienced teachers claimed to have received more training in the subject content of the areas they teach (Item 9), in the use of group work in educational practice (Item 11), and in the design of activities which arouse the interest and curiosity of their students (Item 6). The trainee teachers also highlight the indicators included in Items 11 and 9 as those where they received most training and they also indicate training in the use of ICT (Items 20 and 22).

On the other hand, while the experienced teachers claim to have received less training in all aspects of ICT (Items 20, 21 and 22), the trainee teachers claim to have received less training in relation to family involvement (Items 17 and 18).

To sum up, both groups consider they are better trained in the mastery of subject content and in the use of group work and less trained in the use of ICT (experienced teachers) and in relation to the families (trainee teachers).

(2) Differences in evaluation between the experienced teachers and trainees

(a) Importance for being a teacher

Existing statistically significant differences were confirmed between the two groups in 13 of the 28 possible comparisons at 95% confidence level (Table 2). Here we find differences in the importance given to the following indicators:

- The teaching–learning process, particularly with reference to designing activities to interest students (Item 6), the use of the pupils’ already existing ideas in their learning (Item 10) and the use of group work (Item 11).
- The three items related to the capacity to involve families in the pupils’ learning (17, 18 and 19).
- All items related to ICT (20, 21 and 22).
- Education in values (Items 24 and 25).
- Collaboration with support staff and other teachers who work with the pupils (Item 12), as well as participation in the design of self-evaluation projects and institutional improvement plans (Item 26).

In all cases where significant differences were found between the two groups studied, the average for the trainee teachers was higher than for the experienced teachers.
(b) Use of competencies in everyday teaching
It was confirmed that for 0.05 alpha, there are differences in 25 of the 28 comparisons valued. The differences may be because the trainee teachers evaluated these with a certain idealism, while the experienced and currently practising teachers did so from their day-to-day experience. Similarly, when evaluating importance, we find that the trainee teacher averages are higher than those of the practising teachers.

There are no differences between the two groups in their evaluation of the competencies related to students’ self-learning (Item 5), the participation of the pupils in the various activities organised in the school (Item 16) and the involvement of the parents in their children’s learning (Item 19).

(c) Training received
Statistically significant differences were found in 12 of the 28 possible mean comparisons for both groups. Among the discrepancies found, it was noted that the experienced teachers consider themselves better trained than the trainee teachers in competencies for dealing with the families (Item 17 and 18). On the other hand, the trainee teachers consider themselves better trained in ICT related competencies (Items 20, 21 and 22). In this case the differences detected in relation to these competencies are probably due to the age of the experienced teacher sample, but we must remember that these competencies are not highly valued by the trainee teachers, even although they consider themselves to be better trained in these than in other competencies.

(3) Competencies proposed by the teachers
Fifty-nine per cent of the experienced teachers and 43% of the trainee teachers responded to the open-ended question which invited them to mention other basic competencies needed to be a primary school teacher. Four hundred and nineteen responses were obtained from the experienced teachers and 35 from the trainees.

To analyse the content of these responses, different competency classifications were taken into account e.g. those compiled by Cano (2005). In general terms, reference is made to know and know how to competencies (cultural, pedagogical and technological competencies), and to know how to handle themselves (personal qualities) and know how to handle others (interpersonal skills). Here, the analysis reveals three types of competencies related to the knowledge, personal qualities and social skills needed to be a primary school teacher (Table 3).

Competencies related to knowledge
Knowledge continues to be an essential component of the competencies proposed by the experienced teachers (35%), both general, psycho-socio-pedagogical knowledge, and also more specific knowledge areas related to the teaching–learning process and the curriculum. They also proposed other types of know-how such as first-aid techniques or stress management.

Firstly, in relation to general, psycho-socio-pedagogical type knowledge, we could mention the wide variety of knowledge areas mentioned, as in the following responses:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of competencies</th>
<th>General psycho-socio-pedagogical</th>
<th>% Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Competencies related to the knowledge needed to be a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>primary school teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching-learning process</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention to diversity and learning difficulties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes and values</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum areas</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other knowledge</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Competencies related to the personal characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>needed to be a primary school teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal qualities</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionally related</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Competencies related to the social skills needed to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be a primary school teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In specific contexts</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In relation to the families</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As class tutor</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generic</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not categorised</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Competencies proposed by the sample of experienced teachers (ET) and trainee teachers (TT).
Specific training in text book analysis.

Understanding the difficulties of education in the twenty-first century.

Secondly, we could mention the knowledge needed to confront the teaching–learning process, precisely that mentioned in most of the responses (57%) from the teachers. These fall into three categories:

- Attention to diversity and learning difficulties. Here what is emphasised is that the teacher needs specific knowledge to be able to deal with pupils with special educational needs, e.g., ‘To identify students with learning difficulties in time, set up detection and prevention programmes, stimulate oral language as a means of expression, as well as spontaneous writing’.
- Education in values, e.g., ‘The efficacy of the educational process is based on the teacher not merely transmitting content but also at the same time being able to transmit values and working habits to the group, always within a climate of optimal co-existence which allows the above to take place’. ‘Educate in freedom and ecological awareness. Educate in the critical sense, to create responsible citizens’.
- Motivating the students, e.g., ‘Create motivating, meaningful subject materials’.

In the curriculum subject areas, reference is made to both mastering the content as well as methodology for teaching general and specific areas, particularly reading and writing. Here are some of the responses in this context:

I think the basic thing is to understand and know the subjects to be taught widely enough to be able to go beyond what is in the textbooks.

They taught me a lot of maths, but what I needed to know was how to teach it to the children.

There should be more courses on teaching, how to organise the subject matter, more practical ideas on how to teach Spanish and basically on how to teach them to read and write in our own language.

Finally, it is interesting to note that only eight responses referred to a need for teacher training in the classroom use of ICT.

For most of the trainee teachers (57%) knowledge is an essential competency for the teacher. Curriculum-related areas are the largest group in this sample, e.g.:

Lots of strategies are needed, e.g., in maths or in reading and writing. Most of the courses are called didactic but in fact none of them really are. They should give us a close-up view of the classroom, rather than so much theory which is no use at all when you actually get into the school.

As far as knowledge related to the teaching–learning process is concerned, the trainee teachers only refer to how to deal with diversity and the need to know how to instil values:

It seems to me to be of vital importance how we deal with the immigrant children in the classroom since that is the future.
To spread the fundamental values of co-existence, solidarity and autonomy.

Some psycho-pedagogical subject areas are also mentioned, where the teachers consider a better understanding of these is essential, e.g., child psychology, pedagogy and the psycho-pedagogical basis for special education.

Finally, two things missing are noted. First that evaluation is only mentioned in one statement although this is a process which requires very complex competencies and usually worries teachers. Secondly, that there is no reference in any of the statements to the need to know how to explore, analyse and use the ideas, interests and experiences of the pupils in a classroom context, although this is fundamental for building a significant learning environment.

Competencies related to personal characteristics

The teacher’s personal characteristics represent 31% of the competencies put forward by the experienced teachers. Most important are patience and qualities related to their treatment of the pupils:

Patience in the learning situation, as many sessions may be needed for the pupil to reach the goals set; we have to be patient and not hurry the pupils, especially the slowest ones.

The experienced teachers emphasise the vocational nature of the profession and the competency needed for continuous improvement:

If I was born again I’d be a teacher again. I think it’s the most wonderful profession there is, the most enriching, the most necessary, the most important. But if I could start teaching again I’d try to be ‘a better teacher’.

On the other hand hardly any of the trainee teachers mention this kind of competencies (14%), but in their responses they do also refer to patience, vocation, motivation and professional commitment. However, they do not mention a professional attitude to lifelong training, as the experienced teachers do.

In this context, our results coincide with most other similar studies, which show that professional identity is a continuous, integrating process of the ‘personal’ and the ‘professional’, complementary facets of being a good teacher (Baijard, Meijer, and Verlop 2004).

Competencies related to social skills

The social skills in different school scenarios are the third group of competencies highlighted by the experienced teachers (24%), especially those needed in classroom management to resolve conflicts and motivate the group:

The primary teacher teaches, educates, accompanies, mediates in conflicts and should try to unite the groups encouraging a good working rhythm which in turn takes into account the differences existing between the students within the same classroom.

They also refer to the need to deploy social skills with the families and with other professionals:
A teacher must know how to involve the parents in the teaching–learning process and insist on their responsibility for the education of their children.

Team-working with other professionals to improve classroom performance and co-existence in the school.

Finally, the class tutor relationship is another scenario highlighted for developing this type of competencies.

On the other hand, a similar percentage of trainee teachers (23%) also mention social skills but they consider that these are basic, above all to be able to relate to the students: ‘The most important thing is knowing how to deal with the students and you pick this up with experience, since you’re not trained to do this in the training course’.

The importance of group work is one of the most important gaps in the responses of the trainee teachers.

Finally, we would point out that 10% of the responses given by the experienced teachers cannot be categorised as competencies, as they refer to two other interesting aspects: the low social esteem teaching is held in and the insistence on the practical nature of the initial training. In the case of the trainee teachers 6% of the responses which cannot be categorised are open criticisms of the initial training received.

**Conclusions and implications for initial training**

We agree with Perrenoud (2001) that proposals for innovations in teacher training should emerge from the description and analysis of the conditions and difficulties of the real work of teaching and from social demands. This study is our first attempt to do this.

(i) The family-related competencies are highly valued by both teacher trainees and experienced teachers. This result coincides with surveys carried out in other countries which all agree on the need for closer school-family collaboration (Pam, Hillman, and Mortimore 1998). This means that the families must share the task of education with the teachers and should be willing to collaborate in all functions which can be carried out jointly. As García Albadalejo (2006) suggests, only harmonic messages between school and family can reinforce a relationship of understanding between both sides, allowing educational and family problems to be solved satisfactorily. All of this warrants the inclusion in the training curriculum of a basic training module on society, family and the school, as detailed in the *Grado de Maestro de Educación Primaria* (2007):

To demonstrate social skills to be able to understand the families and be understood by them. To know and know how to exercise the functions of tutor and facilitator in relation to family education in the 6–12 age range. To relate education to its environment and cooperate with the families and the community. To analyse critically and include the most relevant questions in today’s society which affect the family and school-based education: the social and educational impact of audiovisual and screen languages, changes in gender and intergenerational relationships, multi- and inter-culturality, discrimination and social inclusion and sustainable development. To understand the historical evolution of the family, the different types of families, lifestyles and education within the context of the family.
(ii) The teachers also clearly consider educating the students in values to be a fundamental competency. As Pesquero et al. (2008) point out, teachers are aware of the cultural transmission function of the school but should also assume a value transmission function with ethical and social education. In this context, the values and personal commitment of the teacher are decisive if the student is to take these values on board. The future teacher should have a critical, reflective attitude to events and create learning situations which raise awareness of fundamental problems of our society, the building of values and the full development of a moral and civic identity. They must be able to convert the classroom and school into places where democratic behaviour is learned and the values of solidarity, responsibility, tolerance and justice are practised. Can we shape teachers who are patient, ready to dialogue, tolerant, close to their students, trained to educate in values and resolve conflicts and not just to teach, as the teachers are demanding?

This coincides with the conclusions of the Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación (ANECA 2004) which highlight the need for a solid personal formation, which as Perrenoud (2004) suggests, must be through the curriculum as a whole and through a practical and reflective consideration of values.

(iii) In this research, however, teachers showed a vocational attitude and commitment. The questions posed were: What idea of the profession is conveyed by the initial training? To what extent does the initial training consider society’s evaluation of the teaching profession? This vocation should be professionalised at university, including how to learn to organise lifelong training and take part in it both individually and collectively, because as Perrenoud points out (2004): ‘the professionalising of the teaching profession requires collaboration between those responsible for running schools, independent training centres and professional teaching associations’ (126). In fact, the personal development of those who want to be teachers is a challenge for their initial training where, at least in our case, we do not have consolidated training experience.

(iv) As other Spanish studies have also confirmed (Monereo 2005; Tejedor and García-Valcárcel 2006) the teachers give a low value to ICT in the school context. The possible reasons for this may include little or no initial training of experienced teachers, probably due to the age of the sample; the design of the ICT in-service training courses, which tend to be instrumental rather than didactic, which means they are not applied in the classroom; and that the technological facilities are often lacking in the schools. If we take into account, as García-Vera (2004) suggests, that one of the quality indicators for education should be the way in which the school approaches and reduces the digital gap, then we do have a training problem of some transcendence. Because of this, from our position as teacher trainers we coincide with what is stated in the Grado de Maestro de Educación Primaria (2008): one of the competencies which future teachers should acquire in their initial training is a knowledge of ICT and how to apply it in the classroom. However, including ICT in the training curriculum (whether in initial or in-service training) should take into account that didactic, not purely instrumental, training is needed, i.e., it should enable teachers to create ICT situations in the classroom which facilitate the students’ learning.
(v) The low value given to participative aspects of the school in its environment is a wake-up call to re-think training in this area. In the Grado de Maestro de Educación Primaria (2008) it is stated as a clear objective: To collaborate with the different sectors of the education community and the social environment. We agree with this aim because it means education has to be considered from a community based perspective, with more participation and dialogue, where the school, the family and the local authority are in close collaboration. The future teachers must acquire competencies which allow them to turn the school into a true learning community, which transcends the school itself to involve the main community-based agents for education.

(vi) Finally, the teachers coincide in pointing out the intensive use in their teaching of knowledge-based competencies. They also declare these to be the only ones where they feel fully trained. The ANECA study, where 180 teachers from the Education Faculties of 18 Spanish Universities took part, highlights the importance of knowledge-based competencies. The Grado de Maestro also gives considerable weight to the subject based and didactic module (100 ECTS out of a total of 240). However, competence based training requires the articulation of theory and practice to give a more professional and less academic training curriculum.

To sum up, the highest importance has to be given to the training of future teachers in competencies which allow them to relate appropriately to the families and educate in values (those most highly valued by the teachers) because this is a very conflictive area and one where teachers have considerable social responsibility. The competences least valued by teachers, such as those related to ICT or participation in the community, are a wake-up call for initial teacher training and a challenge for the new Grado de Maestro adapted to the EHES.

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Notes on contributors
Encarnación Pesquero is a lecturer in sociology of education in the Complutense University of Madrid. Her main research interest is oriented to the relationship between education and knowledge society. At the moment she is paying a special attention to the role primary teachers have in the current technological changes and the professional competences they need to acquire.

Ángel De Juanas is a doctor in educational psychology and professor of the Spanish Open University (UNED). At present, he is focusing on the study and evaluation of the professional development of teachers and their relationship to the epistemological beliefs of students in higher education. Moreover, in recent years, he has been interested in investigating the conceptions of teachers on teaching and learning in the early levels of education.
Mairena González Ballesteros is a doctor in psychology. She is a lecturer at the Complutense University of Madrid. Her main working schedule is oriented to themes related to the methodology and evaluation of university learning, and the study of the professional competences in teacher training.

Rosa Martin del Pozo is a lecturer in the Complutense University of Madrid. Her research interest is oriented to studying the conceptions of science teachers, both in general aspects related to science and how it is taught and learnt, and in the educational knowledge of the content of chemistry topics. At present she is working on projects on the necessary professional competences to be a teacher of primary education.

Pilar Fernández Lozano is a doctor in psychology. He is a lecturer at the Complutense University of Madrid. The main issue of his current investigation is related to the training of teaching staff from two complementary perspectives: professors’ conception about learning–teaching, and professional competences of the teaching staff.

Maria E. Sánchez Martín is a doctor in journalism, professor of the University School and professor of sociology of education in Sociology Department VI of the Complutense University of Madrid. Her line of work and research and her publications are targeted primarily to the field of academic and professional teaching. They refer to the Spanish educational system: education reforms of basic teaching, the market for intermediate education and career choices by the students. They include the training and professional skills of university education and primary teachers and some follow the line of sociological research methodology, with quantitative and qualitative approaches.

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