

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-TEACHER MOBILITY: A TOOL FOR DEVELOPING STUDENT-TEACHER PROFESSIONAL POSTURE

MOVILIDAD INTERNACIONAL DE LOS FUTUROS-MAESTROS: UNA HERRAMIENTA PARA DESARROLLAR UNA ACTITUD PROFESIONAL

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary Europe international student mobility has become relatively common and the idea that spending time studying abroad is advantageous is now widely accepted. Through analysis of student-teacher responses to a questionnaire completed at the end of an Erasmus Intensive Programme, this paper examines the extent to which participation in a period of student mobility could help student-teachers to develop four key actions of teacher professional posture: critical self-reflection, participation in professional networks, turning to theory and distancing. The conclusions suggest that the period of student mobility made a positive contribution to the development of teacher professional posture amongst the participants. However, this study does not reveal the extent to which similar transformative processes could be triggered simply by engaging in collaborative group work with student-teachers working within other education systems without leaving the country of origin.

Key words: Teacher Education. Student Mobility. Professional Identity. Heterogeneous Classroom.

RESUMEN

En la Europa actual, la movilidad estudiantil internacional se ha vuelto relativamente común y la idea de que pasar tiempo estudiando en el extranjero es una ventaja está ahora ampliamente aceptada. A través del análisis de las respuestas de los estudiantes y maestros a un cuestionario completado al final de un *Erasmus Intensive Programme*, este trabajo examina la medida en que la participación en un período de movilidad de los estudiantes podría ayudar a los futuros maestros a desarrollar cuatro medidas clave del maestro en su desarrollo profesional: la auto-reflexión crítica, la participación en redes profesionales, la vuelta a la teoría y el distanciamiento. Las conclusiones sugieren que el período de movilidad de los estudiantes contribuye de forma positiva al desarrollo de la postura profesional entre los participantes. Sin embargo, este estudio no revela el grado en que los procesos de transformación similares podrían activarse simplemente mediante la participación en grupo de trabajo colaborativo con los estudiantes-maestros que trabajan en otros sistemas educativos sin salir del país de origen.

Palabras clave: Formación docente. Movilidad de los estudiantes. Identidad profesional. Aula heterogénea.

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Introduction

In contemporary Europe international student mobility has become relatively common and the idea that spending time studying abroad is advantageous is now widely accepted by many education stakeholders (Rodrigues, 2013:2). Furthermore a growing body of research literature on the real rather than simply perceived outcomes and impacts of student mobility programmes now exists (Fligstein 2008 and Van Mol, 2011). The literature identifies two types of student mobility: full courses of study in a foreign country, and short-term mobility where only a part of a study programme takes place elsewhere. According to Papatsibas (2006) the rationale for supporting student mobility is both “economic” - engendering increased employability and willingness to work abroad - and “civic” - encouraging international understanding and the development of a European identity. This paper focusses on the “civic” aspects of short-term student mobility.

Interest and support for student mobility is both a part of, and a reaction to, the wider phenomenon of increasing economic migration into and between European nations. This migration has led to marked changes in the makeup and organization of the professional contexts within which today’s students are likely to find themselves working. Nowhere is this more obvious than for today’s student-teachers who are likely to find themselves in classrooms where linguistic and cultural heterogeneity has become the norm. Of particular interest in the study described in the current paper is the evolution of attitudes, assumptions and expectations regarding the challenges posed by the diversity found in the 21st century classroom.

“Research on teachers’ professional identity formation contributes to our understanding and acknowledgement of what it feels like to be a teacher in today’s schools, where many things are changing rapidly” (Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop 2003: 109). As a consequence, since the late 1980s professional identity has grown significantly as an area of research (Antonek et al. 1997, Volkmann and Anderson 1998, Samuel and Stephens 2000). This paper investigates the possible role of periods of study abroad in the development of a strong professional identity.

The data analyzed comes from a questionnaire completed by student-teacher participants from four different European countries who carried out classroom observations in one of the partner countries as part of a European teacher education project (TIMMS - Teacher Training in Multicultural Settings, set up in April 2014). Before analyzing the data we first explore the notions of professional identity and professional posture and investigate the goals, outcomes and possible impacts of student mobility programmes. In the light of our findings, we examine the extent to which the aims, content and organization of the period of student mobility which took place during the Erasmus intensive Programme TTIMS could be expected to help students to move from a student-centered perspective towards a vision of themselves as teachers.

1. Professional identity and professional posture

Although a variety of definitions of professional identity can be found in the literature, one thing that most studies agree on is that professional identity should be viewed as a process rather than as a static phenomenon. Beijaard *et al* (2003: 113) describe it as “an ongoing process of integration of the ‘personal’ and the ‘professional’ sides of becoming and being a teacher”. Evolving as a consequence of changes in teaching situation, social environment and curriculum, in methodological advances, and modifications in personal beliefs, attitudes, etc. “Identity development occurs in an intersubjective field and can be best characterized as an ongoing process, a process of interpreting oneself as a certain kind of person being recognized as such in a given context” (Gee, 2001: 103).

A number of studies, (Gaziel, 1995) also make links between professional identity and job burnout. It seems that a strong sense of professional identity makes teachers more inclined to stay in the profession, even in the face of difficult working conditions. As Beijaard *et al.* note (2003: 123) “professional identity is not something teachers have, but something they use in order to make sense of themselves as teachers”. It follows that the more a person can make sense of what they are doing, the more likely they are to be motivated to continue with it.

This fact alone would seem to make the development of a strong sense of professional identity in their students a priority for teacher educators. The question that this raises is how this can be done. What do teachers (and student-teachers) need to do, in order to make sense of what they are doing, and thus to develop their sense of professional identity? For the purposes of the present study the term professional

posture is used to describe the acts which teachers and student-teachers need to engage in in order to nurture the development of a their professional identity. However, before we can identify the different acts which constitute a professional posture, we need to look more closely at the notion of professional identity.

Quite a high proportion of studies on teacher professional identity treat the topic of identity formation (Goodson and Cole 1994, Sugrue 1997). Their findings are of particular pertinence in the present context. As Beijaard, *et al.* note (2013: 208) “Research on teachers’ professional identity formation is seen as relevant to teacher educators and mentors in schools in order to better understand and conceptualize the support student teachers need”.

These studies bring up a number of points which need to be borne in mind by teacher educators. The first of these is the multifaceted nature of professional identity which is constructed through the interplay of cultural, historical, sociological and psychological factors (Cooper & Olson 1996). The interactions between these often contradictory influences can lead to conflict. External forces - knowledge, beliefs and values found in the teaching environment or in society - may be at odds with teachers’ personal desires and beliefs. “Such a conflict can lead to friction in teachers’ professional identity in cases in which the ‘personal’ and the ‘professional’ are too far removed from each other” (Bierjaard *et al.* 2003: 109). The rapid pace of change in 21st century teaching environments, changes in programmes and curricula, the introduction of new methodologies and career structures and the increasing diversity of the classroom may all leave teachers feeling unsure of how to react. Teachers who do not feel that they have the tools necessary for adapting to a new situation may resist or reject the change for want of another solution.

In their research review Bierjaard *et al.* (2003: 122-123) identify four key features of teacher professional identity. Firstly, they highlight the notion of professional identity as a dynamic, ongoing process involving constant interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences. Secondly, they draw attention to the fact that teacher identity involves both person and context. In any given situation no two teachers will act or react in exactly the same way. Teaching culture is a personal thing which arises through the interaction of person and context. Thirdly, they underline the fact that professional identity consists of a number of sub-identities which, as far as is possible, need to be in harmony with one another. Finally, they evoke the notion of agency – teachers need to be active in the process of professional development.

In order to develop these features, teachers need to engage in a number of acts which together can be said to constitute their professional posture. Four different acts can be identified: critical reflection, communication with in-group and out-group members, recourse to a variety of knowledge sources, and distancing. Each of these acts will be treated in one of the following sub-sections.

1.1. *Critical reflection*

“Unless teachers develop the practice of critical reflection, they stay trapped in unexamined judgments, interpretations, assumptions, and expectations. Approaching teaching as a reflective practitioner involves fusing personal beliefs and values into a professional identity” (Larrivee, 2000: 293). Central to the notion of identity is the notion of ‘self’; and central to the notion of professional identity is the notion of the self as teacher. A vision of the self as teacher has to be created through the process of reflection. This process enables the teacher to make links between experiences, personal feelings and theory, and to adjust his/her practice – and ultimately view of him/herself as practitioner - accordingly. Schön (1983: 68) summarises the situation as follows: “[the practitioner] reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behavior. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation. ”

McIntyre suggests that reflection in initial teacher education has two main functions. It helps student-teachers to understand their own problems, giving them direction in their search for helpful ideas on the topic, and it gives them guided practice in a skill which will be invaluable to them as they become more experienced (McIntyre, 2004: 44).

However, a number of researchers have highlighted the fact that unless reflective practice is well taught and adequately supported, it can all too easily become an end in itself without necessarily leading to more general insights, personal growth and professional development. (Finlay 2008:13). More recent work on reflective practice thus advocates engaging in critical self-reflection “reflecting critically on the

impact of their own background, assumptions, positioning, feelings, behaviour while attending to the impact of the wider organizational, discursive, ideological and political context” (Finlay 2008:6).

Assuming a professional posture which incorporates critical self-reflection will allow teachers to have a dynamic professional identity whilst enabling them to act as agents in their own professional development. Furthermore, engaging in critical reflection is also likely to be useful to the teacher in situations of conflict between personal belief systems and professional demands. Reflecting on the origins of belief systems and on the social, political, historical and cultural contexts within which professional demands are made may help teachers towards harmonizing the different ‘voices’ within their professional identity. Thus critical self-reflection is essential for each of the four features identified above as being key to the development of a strong professional identity. During their professional training student-teachers need to be given opportunities to carry out guided critical self-reflection in order to integrate this skill into their professional posture.

1.2. . *Communication with in-group and out-group members*

Finlay (2008: 2) points out that “the term ‘reflective practice’ carries multiple meanings that range from the idea of professionals engaging in solitary introspection to that of engaging in critical dialogue with others.” However, as she goes on to point out (2008: 17) “some commentators argue that working alone does not nurture critical reflection and that we need others to clarify and challenge tacit assumptions, the existence of which we may be unaware”. Brooke (1994) also examines the notion of interaction as a central element of the growth process, implying that the growth process is characterized by learning from experiences and engaging in dialogue about these experiences with colleagues.

Particularly in situations where changes in the immediate in-school educational landscape are causing tensions and dilemmas, communication with colleagues, (in-group members), is likely to be fruitful. However, communication with members of out-groups – i.e. people who belong to other communities of practice - is equally important as a means of gaining new perspectives, and having assumptions challenged. Engaging in sustained, systematic, dialogic critical self-reflection requires a communicative space. Given the busy nature of many teaching environments this may pose a problem. One possible solution is membership of professional networks – either local or online – which provide teachers with access to discourse communities, support, and new sources of knowledge.

Since engaging in dialogue with others can be seen as necessary for effective critical self-reflection; communication with in-group and out-group members can be viewed as an essential element of a professional posture which facilitates full engagement in the dynamic process of professional identity formation. Therefore, student-teachers need to be provided with opportunities to take part in discussion, and to be encouraged to participate in professional networks.

1.3. *Recourse to external sources of knowledge*

The role of theory in teacher education is a much-debated issue, with changes in the level of theoretical content found in teacher education programmes often being as much a consequence of changes in the political orientation of education ministries as anything else. One clear example is the move towards school-based teacher education which has taken place in the UK over the last 15 years. Another point to bear in mind is the distinction between theory - propositional knowledge - and theorizing - theory as intellectual process (Alexander 1984: 145). In recent years, the second of these has gained ground in many teacher education programmes (for example in the UK), as a consequence of moves towards school-based teacher education and due to the association of theorizing with the notion of reflective practice. However, “the acceptance of theory as process should not ... limit the importance we attach to theory as content” (McIntyre 2004: 41). Theorizing as an intellectual process is invaluable. It provides a structured and systematic means of examining information in order to ascertain its veracity, pertinence and possible practical applications. Scientific knowledge, like any other type of knowledge should not be taken at face value and certainly as the process of scientific investigation proceeds, many theories are disproved, or become outdated and thus lose their value or relevance. However, as McIntyre points out (2004:41) “our commitment to the process of experimentation and falsification should be

equaled by our commitment to making available to our students theoretical knowledge which they will mostly, with refinement, be able to usefully assimilate to their professional thinking.”

McIntyre goes on to highlight the particular importance of external knowledge for student-teachers and beginner teachers, remarking that: “in extreme contrast to the needs of experienced practitioners, the needs of novices and the best opportunities available to them are in gaining access to useful ideas from various other sources, with reflection on their own experience being primarily useful to them for the important but limited purpose of motivating and enabling them to see the need for these ideas from external sources” (2004: 44).

Recourse to external knowledge sources needs to be a part of the professional posture of teachers and student-teachers alike. Resolving conflict between person and context, and harmonizing the different sub-identities that make up a teacher’s professional identity cannot be done through personal reflection alone. Only by turning to external sources can the practitioner gain the depth of knowledge needed to fully understand the various forces at work in many educational contexts.

1.4. *Distancing*

Taking distance from a person, event or situation is an objectifying experience and allows the practitioner to step outside of the everyday to look at it with new eyes. Even if the practitioner was a participant at the outset, taking distance allows the practitioner to step into an observational role. This often makes it easier to see the need for change and to identify alternative practices. The notion of distancing has been used to distinguish reflection from critical reflection. The first can have a too narrow focus, encouraging teachers to interpret their own actions, values and beliefs without leading them to question the influence and validity of the institutional, societal and ideological context within which they work (McIntyre 2004: 46-47).

Taking distance from one’s own practice can take different forms. Practically speaking a practitioner can actually go and observe what happens in another teaching context; on the other hand, in certain circumstances turning to research sources which present an external or theorized view of the situation may be helpful. In any case, in order to be able to make real sense of what they are doing, periodically, teachers and student-teachers need to take the time to step outside of the systems of which their work is an integral part.

In the next section we look at student mobility in the light of these observations. We examine the extent to which student mobility can be used as a tool for encouraging the evolution of professional posture with reference to the TTIMS project.

2. Student mobility and the Teacher Training in Multicultural Settings (TTIMS) project

TTIMS (Teacher Training in Multicultural Settings) was set up by teacher educators from Austria, France, Great Britain and Spain. The primary aim was to “provide trainee teachers with knowledge on intercultural issues in school and society and engage them in working in a culturally diverse society” (<http://ttims.espe-aquitaine.fr/>). Four student-teachers from each institution were chosen to take part in the project. Central to the programme was a two-week period of student mobility during which the 20 student-teachers carried out class observations in one of the partner countries. The observations were carried out from a child-centered perspective. Each student-teacher shadowed an allophone child through his/her school day, noting in particular moments when the cultural and/or linguistic specificity of the situation or interaction caused difficulties either for the child him/herself or for the other participants in the event. They also observed how and if the incident was resolved, and later reflected on why this was/wasn’t done in this way.

It was assumed that carrying out the observations in another country would enable the student-teachers to be in a situation as similar as possible to that experienced by the foreign children they were shadowing (i.e. being in a situation which was linguistically and culturally ‘other’). Furthermore, it was hoped that this particular observational situation would not only give them the opportunity to observe the workings of an education system other than their own, but also provide them with an impetus for

considering their own education system from an external perspective – to recognize (educational) cultural diversity, and at the same time acknowledge the diversity of their own educational culture for others.

Since this period of student mobility was an integral part of the initial teacher training which each student-teacher was involved in in their home country, a second major objective underlying the choice of content and activity undertaken during the TTIMS project was furthering the development of the professional posture of the participants. In this section we consider the links between the acts which define professional posture and the content and organization of the period of student mobility in which the participant student-teachers in the TTIMS project were involved.

There is both theoretical and empirical support for the claim that student mobility breeds intercultural understanding. Theoretical support comes largely from the field of psychology where social communication theory (Deutsch *et al.* 1967), the contact hypothesis (Hewstone & Brown 1986) and the common in-group identity model (Gaertner *et al.* 2012) all suggest that transnational and intergroup contact are important mechanisms for identity-formation and reducing intergroup bias (Mitchell 2012: 491). While the first two theories focus on the role of face-to-face interactions between members of socially distinct groups as a means of forging a sense of community, the common in-group identity model goes further, claiming that under certain circumstances direct contact between in-group and out-group members may have a transformative effect leading members of distinct groups to recategorise themselves as a single group (Gaertner *et al.* 2012: 3).

Empirical support for the links between student mobility and increased intercultural understanding can be found in studies focusing on student mobility as a tool for fostering European integration (Papatsiba 2003, Green 2007, Van Mol 2011). Key to Papatsiba's analysis of the creation of European identity is the notion that it is through real communication with the other that the student becomes capable of developing a new vision of him/herself. Simply being in a culturally different situation is not necessarily enough to trigger a transformative process. Indeed, in certain circumstances it may have the opposite effect and lead to closure and insistence on a person's own cultural perspective as the norm.

Focusing on the student-teacher participants in TTIMS, it becomes clear that in order to ensure that their period of student mobility was to have a positive transformative effect, simply giving them the opportunity to observe the workings of a foreign education system through the eyes of an allophone child was not going to be enough. It was also important that the student-teachers were invited to engage in constructive debate concerning their observations. To do so they needed to be in a situation where they felt secure enough to be open to criticism and prepared to have their hegemonic beliefs and the system of which they were a part, and in some senses a representative, questioned by others.

We have seen that constructive critical reflection at the level of student-teachers needs to be fed by knowledge from external sources. It could be hoped that in engaging in communication with in-group and out-group members, the TTIMS participants would be appropriating one aspect of teacher professional posture. However, for these discussions to be really useful the student-teachers needed to be able to draw on more than their own, so far, limited experiences as educators. In order to address this issue the student-teachers carried out pre-mobility reading assignments in their home institutions which were then discussed at length by the mixed nationality group during the mobility period.

To summarize, it was hoped that through participation in the period of student mobility, acquisition of the four key attributes of teacher professional posture previously identified would be reinforced, thus further engaging the student-teachers in the transformative process of moving from a student-centered image of self, towards a vision of the self as teacher. The content of the period of student mobility was set up to maximize this process. Distancing from the system in which they normally functioned was achieved by asking the student-teachers to carry out classroom observations in a foreign learning environment. It was hoped that critical reflection would be triggered as a result of observing an 'other' education system and their own reactions to it; perhaps leading them to question the ideology on which their own education system was based. It was hoped that the critical self-reflection would be intensified by having their own education system and teaching philosophy challenged by student-teachers from different educational backgrounds. Based on their institute of origin, the student-teachers were initially members of five distinct groups in an out-group relationship, however, participation in the TTIMS project gave them the opportunity to forge a new in-group (student-teachers sharing an interest in managing diversity in the classroom)

which could eventually become a functioning professional network. The collaborative group work projects that the student-teachers carried out during their period of mobility were set up in such a way that their successful completion required the student-teachers to search for theoretical information from external sources.

In the following section we analyze student-teacher responses to a questionnaire completed at the end of the mobility period. We are interested in student perceptions of their period of student mobility. How far do they themselves recognize evolution in their professional posture?

3. Questionnaire analysis: methodology

At the end of their two-week mobility period the student teachers were asked to complete two online questionnaires. The first concerned their point of view concerning the organization and content of the TTIMS project, and the second concerned the learning outcomes. In this paper we will focus on the answers to one of the questions in the first questionnaire in which the participants were invited to “summarize three main positive aspects of the intensive program for you personally”. The participants answered specific questions about the theoretical references (in the first questionnaire) and about professional development (in the second questionnaire). However, for the purposes of the current study we are interested in knowing whether or not, when given a free choice of response, actions which can be said to constitute part of a teacher’s professional posture came to the student-teachers minds as being major positive features of the student mobility experience.

All twenty student-teachers responded to the questionnaire, but they did not all give three separate answers to this question: therefore, in total there are 59 comments. The comments have been classified into the following categories:

- 1) Reflective practices
- 2) Value of group discussion / forging new professional networks
- 3) Reference to theory
- 4) Learning about other education systems
- 5) Diversity: recognition of need to be able to teach in a diverse classroom / positive attitude to diversity in the classroom / recognition of improved knowledge about issues related to diversity
- 6) Other

The first four categories are related to the four aspects of professional posture previously outlined. The fifth category can be more easily related to professional identity itself since in a 21st century setting feeling able to manage in a culturally and/or linguistically diverse classroom situation has become key to having a strong professional identity. It is included here because the TTIMS project focused on this particular aspect of teacher education. However, it is not the central issue in the current paper and therefore three different types of comments about diversity have been grouped together in one category. Since this question did not specifically ask about professional posture, a category was created for comments which touch on other areas of the project organization and content.

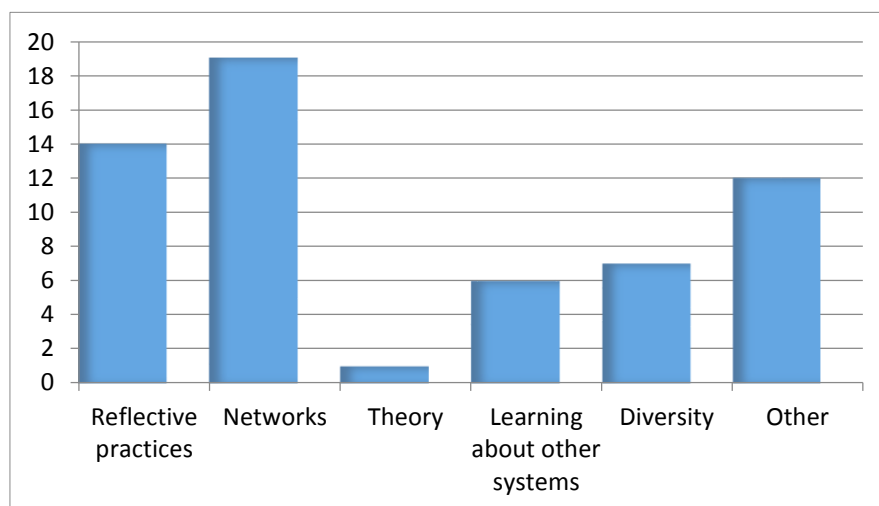
Whilst the first three categories are relatively self-explanatory, the choice to separate category 4 from category 3 might be less evident. ‘Learning about other education systems’ is here associated with the notion of distancing in the sense that one outcome of distancing is the identification of alternative practices, and ‘learning about other education systems’ can also be viewed as a means of identifying alternative practices. The author accepts that ‘learning about other education systems’ could also be assimilated to ‘reference to theory’ if ‘reference to theory’ is interpreted in the broader sense of ‘reference to external knowledge sources’. However, the author wanted to differentiate between knowledge acquired through theoretical input, i.e. reading research articles / listening to lectures, and knowledge that may have been acquired through observation or discussion which did not involve recourse to theoretical sources. Since, in the context of the answers to this questionnaire, it is not clear whether when the participants mention ‘learning about other education systems’, they are referring to information gained through observation, group discussion or theoretical sources, it was deemed preferable to separate ‘learning from other education systems’ from ‘references to theory’.

The division could be considered slightly arbitrary, but in some ways this is not unexpected. The different aspects of a professional posture previously identified are closely interrelated and difficult to separate. Critical reflection relies on distancing and communication with other group members. Turning to external knowledge sources or theory can be a way of creating distance between the teacher and their usual working context. Distancing can also be used to distinguish reflection from critical reflection, and critical reflection itself needs to be supported by theoretical input if it is to be fully constructive.

The following sections will focus on comments related to the first four categories only.

4. Qualitative analysis of questionnaire responses

The graph below shows the distribution of comments across the different categories identified above. The majority of comments were related to communicating with in-group and out-group members and networking (19 comments). There were 14 comments related to reflective practices, 7 comments which focused on diversity, 6 concerning the experience of learning about other education systems and 1 comment about turning to theoretical references. 12 comments were related to other topics. It is important to mention at this point that only four of the student-teacher participants were native speakers of English. Therefore certain comments contain linguistic errors and/or stylistic problems. However, in the name of authenticity all comments are reproduced here without alteration.



Graphic 1: Distribution of comments across categories

4.1. Reflection

There were 14 comments from 11 different students which suggest that the students engaged in critical reflection during the course of the Intensive Project (IP). Three of the comments mention making comparisons: comparing school systems (comment 4), comparing points of view (comment 3) and comparing their teacher training (comment 14). Several comments indicate that the student-teacher feels that participation in the TTIMS mobility experience has helped them to evolve as a teacher, with vocabulary such as “obtain a new perspective” (comment 2), “make better” (in relation to teaching methods, comment 3), “my teacher style will evolve” (‘evolve’ comment 8), “I have grown up” (comment 12) and “helped me to become a better teacher in the future” (comment 13). A number of the student-teacher comments refer to confrontation between their own practices and ideas and those of the ‘other’. Comment 5 talks about the “exchange of perspectives” “challenging own view”, and comment 9 speaks of having teaching practices “called into question”. In fact, comment 9 demonstrates that this student-teacher has clearly understood the need for the effective teacher to engage in constant critical reflection, stating “I think now I must every time call into question my teaching practice”. Three of the comments also indicate

the event which triggered the reflection on self. Comments 2 and 5 both identify interaction with others – “discussion with teachers” (Comment 2) and “exchange of perspectives” (comment 5), and comment 1 points to “observation in a new setting”. Comment 1 also mentions “interpretation of context” as being important, suggesting that this student-teacher has understood the need to look at the broader context within which an action is taking place in order to be able to fully understand that action – to move beyond self-reflection towards critical self-reflection.

Generally speaking, the comments in this section demonstrate the potential value of placing student-teachers in a situation where they encounter the ‘other’ – other teaching methods, other education systems, out-group peers –in terms of triggering transformative reflection on self.

4.2. Value of group discussion / forging new professional networks

The second and largest category grouped together comments relating to the value of group discussion and comments relating to becoming part of new professional networks. There were 19 comments from 16 different students.

The large number of comments on this issue is not surprising considering the context within which the questionnaire was completed – on the last day of a two week mobility period during which the 20 participants had spent all day every day and many of their evenings together in both professional and social settings. In contrast to their institutional differences and diverse countries of origin, the TTIMS participants had a number of shared characteristics - all were student-teachers with a particular interest in multi-cultural classroom settings (this last can be assumed by the fact that they chose to participate in a project focusing on this issue), and all of them had volunteered to undertake a period of student mobility. In such a context, talking was clearly going to be high on the agenda.

However, what is interesting in the comments is that the student-teachers systematically go beyond mention of the ‘fun’ aspect of meeting each other, to point out the value of communication with the ‘other’ as a source of information leading to professional enrichment. Thus we hear of “group mixing to widen the experience” (comment 1), “getting ideas from other students on intercultural education” (comment 3), and “I have learnt from my classmates” (comment 18). The two-way nature of the interaction is highlighted by the use of expressions such as “discuss” (comment 4), “reflexions between participants” (comment 6), “discuss and interact” (comment 9), “discussions and group dynamic” (comment 14), “exchange ... of views and ideas” (comment 7), and “collaborative work” (comment 11).

Several comments also demonstrate awareness of the possible future value of the contacts being made. Both comments 12 and 19 describe establishing good relations with peers from different nationalities, comment 15 speaks about “build[ing] up international contacts”, and comment 17 identifies “to meet colleagues and keep this relationship” as being one of the key positive points of the mobility experience.

In our discussion of the in-group identity model we saw that transnational and intergroup contact can be catalysts for the formation of new in-groups which incorporate members of previously disparate groups. We also discussed why dialogue between in-group and out-group members, and participating in professional networks, should be viewed as integral elements of professional posture. Therefore, the relatively large number of the TTIMS participants who identify one of these two aspects of the TTIMS IP as being positive, supports the claim that student mobility can be an effective tool in the development of professional posture in student- teachers.

4.3. Reference to theory

There was only one comment in which specific reference was made to the value of theoretical input. This may be a consequence of the method of classification of questionnaire responses chosen, as discussed in section 4.1. However, it may also be a consequence of the less direct relationship between theory and student mobility. Having recourse to external sources of knowledge can be identified as an essential feature of a professional posture. However, the role of theory is as an aid to critical reflection and as a tool for distancing a practitioner from his/her immediate teaching situation. As we have seen, distancing is one of the most immediate consequences of student mobility, since by the very act of

participating in a mobility programme, the participant is automatically removed from his/her normal working context. We have also seen that this shock may well be the trigger for critical reflection and ultimately prove to be a transformative experience leading to attitudinal change. Furthermore, it was noted that this last is more likely to happen if the critical reflection is informed by theory. Reference to theory thus has a clear link with student mobility. However, the link is indirect; theoretical input is a tool which can facilitate the processes which can result from participation in a period of student mobility. As such the usefulness of theory is perhaps less prominent in student-teachers' minds during the mobility period than other elements of their professional posture, like for example engaging in discourse with out-group members with whom they do not have the opportunity to communicate directly within their normal working environment. The benefits of theoretical input are therefore perhaps felt more strongly during the pre-mobility and post-mobility periods.

4.4. Learning about other education systems

There were 6 comments from 6 different student-teachers. The comments are all of a positive nature employing vocabulary such as "learning more" / "a lot" (comments 1 and 6), "getting practical insight" (comment 3), and "meeting a new culture" (comment 4). Also of interest is how the education system is referred to. Comment 1 refers to "their system", comments 2 and 6 both use the word "different", comment 1 to talk about a system and comment 6 in reference to "other ways of teaching in different countries in Europe". Comment 4 talks about meeting a "new culture" and a "new system" and comment 5 uses the adjective "foreign". This suggests that although all the student-teachers view gaining knowledge about education systems positively, the speakers who use the terms "their" and "foreign" perhaps remain more firmly centered within their own culture than the speaker who refers to learning about a "new" system. The word "new" suggests the positive addition of knowledge, whilst "their" and "foreign" suggest opposition between the speaker and that which is 'other'.

Conclusion

Analysis of the student-teacher responses to the questionnaire completed at the end of the Erasmus Intensive Programme TTIMS suggests that participating in the two-week period of student mobility incorporated into this project made a positive contribution to the development of the professional posture of the participants. 66% of responses to the question analyzed related to three of the four dimensions of professional posture identified as being important for student-teachers if they are to be able to form and maintain a strong professional identity during the course of their teaching career. Furthermore, it should be borne in mind that the question to which the student-teachers were responding was open, simply asking what had been, for them, the three most positive aspects of the TTIMS project for them. They were not in any way obliged to comment on anything related to professional posture. This suggests that student mobility is potentially an interesting tool for the development of student-teacher professional posture. However, care needs to be taken with the interpretation of the results. Clearly the international make-up of the group of TTIMS participants played a significant role in providing the variety of perspective necessary for engagement in critical self-reflection, and gave the opportunity to form a new professional network. Furthermore, observing the workings of an education system other than their own at first hand, provided the student-teachers with an invaluable opportunity to be distanced from their normal working environment. However, whilst it is hard to imagine how this level of distancing could be achieved without engaging in a mobility programme, participation in online communities of practice could provide student-teachers with the opportunity to engage in debate with student-teachers from other countries without actually leaving their country of origin. Therefore, whilst it seems clear that participating in a period of student mobility has some clear advantages for student teachers, what this study does not reveal is the extent to which similar transformative processes could be triggered simply by engaging in collaborative work with student-teachers from other countries.

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