

Possibilities for re-envisioning the work of the teacher in early childhood education.
Notes for a polyphonic and participatory university practice.

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Possibilities for re-envisioning the work of the teacher in early childhood education connected with a critical ecology of the profession.

We analyse a training proposal¹ in the Degree in Early Childhood Education at the University of Cantabria (Spain) which consists of the elaboration of a critical and collaboratively created dictionary of concepts identified as important by the participating students. Through enquiry projects in which they adopt the role of researchers, they construct new definitions that affirm the plurality of languages and diversity of experiences and knowledge that form part of the school reality. These three enquiry projects allow us to discuss the diverse professional models of Early Childhood Education (the maternalistic assumption, the outcome pedagogy, and the critical ecology of the profession). In addition, we describe and analyse the enquiry processes employed with a special focus on listening processes for the different voices (non-directivity or respect for ideas in their interpretation and representation) and the difficulties encountered. Finally, the proposal makes it possible to explore the political and structural implications for teacher training (the theory-practice relationship and the need for an integrated training model).

Keywords: critical and collaborative dictionary; Early Childhood Education; teacher as researcher; pedagogy of listening; pedagogical deliberation.

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Introduction

Early Childhood Education currently occupies a prominent place in national and international political agendas. This interest turns the spotlight on the professionals working in this stage of education, since their training and professional development is key to educational quality (Moss 2006, 2018; Oberhuemer, Schreyer and Neuman 2010; Urban, Vandenbroeck, Lazzari, Van Laere and Peeters 2013).

In Spain, the expansion of services for children from birth to three years old has recently been incorporated into the debate. In this country we find a unitary system that regards Early Childhood Education as a stage that covers the period from birth to six years of age. It is divided into two cycles (birth to three years and three to six years) with obvious differences in relation to: organisation (political responsibility and teaching professionals), material conditions (qualifications, remuneration and employment conditions), composition (highly feminised) and training (Araújo 2018; Moss 2006; Oberhuemer and Schreyer 2017). Regarding this last aspect, while the professionals in the second cycle have university training, in the first cycle, teachers coexist with educational technicians, who are less qualified, having only studied a two-year course, and more precarious working conditions. Their training is essentially practical and linked to the first cycle (0-3 years). This dual training path (for teachers and technicians) generates different teaching identities with limited and hierarchical knowledge and functions, divided between care and education, that exert a tight control over training and educational practice.

Meanwhile, the teacher training curriculum has been extended by a year, and the practicum from three to eight months, due to the Bologna process recommendations. However, some studies in Spain (Martínez-Bonafé, 2013; Saiz and Ceballos, 2019) indicate that here there has not been a debate about fundamental questions such as the type of educational professional that is required in light of the current uncertainties and complexities. This is

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resulting in structural modifications that do not affect key elements such as the curriculum, culture or school practices (Martínez-Bonafé, 2013).

Consequently, the challenges in initial teacher training in Spain involve, on the one hand, overcoming the problem of excessively theoretical and expository training models by replacing them with others that recognise future teachers as researchers into their own educational reality. Likewise, the current division of knowledge has to be broken down, in order to allow a more complex vision of teaching work. We also propose the need to incorporate into university epistemologies the knowledge and voices of those currently silenced in teacher training (in-service teachers, students, families and educational technicians, etc.). Likewise, with regard to the role of technicians and early childhood teachers, we assume a sociocultural pedagogical model for all Early Childhood Education professionals (Arndt et al. 2018; Moss 2014; Oberhuemer 2004), based on the construction of communities that are reflective and in pedagogical dialogue, sustained by participatory relationships and alliances (Araujo 2012, 2018; Oberhuemer 2004; Oliveira-Formosinho and Araújo 2011). This involves promoting a “critical ecology of the profession” (Arndt et al. 2018; Dalli, Urban and Miller 2012; Urban 2007; Urban and Dalli 2010, 2012), where the teacher’s professional development is a continuous process constructed around reciprocal relationships between individuals, teams, institutions and the wider socio-political context (Arndt et al. 2018; Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink, and Hofman 2011). Urban (2008, 135) defines this as an “alternative paradigm of a relational and systemic professionalism that encompasses openness and uncertainty and encourages the co-construction of professional knowledge and practices”. The key question is: What kind of Early Childhood Education do we want and what type of educators are capable of responding to these challenges? (Moss, 2010). We find various answers to this question.

An initial response defines Early Childhood Education as a substitute environment for

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the home that should prioritise aspects related to care and affection. Professionals are thus shaped according to a “maternalistic assumption” (Randall 2000). A contrasting approach is “outcome pedagogy” (Solway 2000), which finds its niche in market discourses and which consider this stage of education as a service, as a commodity to be consumed by families (Dahlberg and Moss 2005; Moss 2014; Urban 2010; Wasmuth and Nitecki 2017) and whose quality is defined according to a managerial model. Education is understood as a technology and teachers as technicians (Moss 2010) who apply processes and tools defined by experts to obtain pre-established and measurable results (“human technologies”) (Diaz-Diaz, Semenec and Moss 2019; Moss 2010, 2014; Urban 2010). This is particularly dangerous if we consider that this ultimately leads to replacing political responses with technical actions and economic performance goals (Delaune 2019; Moss 2014).

However, there are alternative discourses, based on democratic educational proposals (Fielding and Moss 2011; Oliveira-Formosinho and Formosinho 2013; Moss 2014; Ceballos, Susinos and Saiz 2016; Ceballos, Calvo and Haya 2019; Susinos, Ceballos and Saiz 2018; Susinos 2019) that seek to build educational spaces for democracy and within a democracy that permeate all aspects of school life. This position calls for thinking about the meaning and nature of the teaching profession starting from the conviction that education is a political practice that requires both an ethical and an educational position (Moss 2011). Along these lines we find the European research project CORE (Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care) that seeks to define the dimensions and competencies required by professionals in Early Childhood Education to build quality educational proposals. The knowledge, practices and values to be developed are defined for each of the levels of work: individual, institutional and team, inter-institutional and governance (Urban, Vandenbroeck, Lazzari, Van Laere and Peeters 2013; Vandenbroeck, Urban and Peeters 2016). These authors emphasise the point that any proposal that seeks to promote educational quality must be considered contextual, process-

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based and constructed in a continuous dialogue between all those involved (professionals, families and students). In other words, making decisions that involve choosing between the multiple and conflicting alternatives that exist means that teachers must build knowledge from different sources, be curious enough to ask themselves questions about the day-to-day life of the school, cross boundaries, breaking down the established limitations in the fields of knowledge, and recognise that knowledge is always partial, local, provisional and multivocal (Moss 2010). Thus, we encounter the idea of teachers as researchers of their practice (Moss 2006) whose knowledge is transboundary since it puts different people (teachers, students, families), ideas and theories in dialogue.

Within this framework, this article analyses a training proposal in the Degree in Early Childhood Education at the University of Cantabria (Spain) that aims to contribute to the training of teachers who are capable of working with diversity and democracy (Urban 2010) and who develop an attitude of enquiry and experimentation in their professional activity (Moss 2010).

A project for the training of critical teachers

The project that we analyse consists of the elaboration of a critical and collaboratively created dictionary made up of the core concepts that the students identify in Early Childhood Education. To develop this multivocal dictionary, students undertake enquiry projects in which they adopt the role of researchers.

Dictionaries gather together words that attempt to provide explanations about the world through the selection of concepts and the description of reality. The definitions they contain are socially constructed and contain a determined and partial view of reality that corresponds to the imposed regime of truth (Moss 2014; Van Manen, McClelland, and Plihal 2007). In this training proposal, we intend to show the complex and sometimes conflicting nature of pedagogical epistemologies and review new definitions that defend nuances, the plurality of

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languages and the diversity of experiences and knowledge. Consistent with the assumptions of Horsthemke (2017), the proposal calls for an epistemically diverse university curriculum that encourages future teachers to understand that knowledge is socially constructed and historically and culturally specific. For this reason, it seeks to give importance to the construction of knowledge in dialogue with others, through processes of democratic deliberation (Thompson 2008; Saiz, Rodríguez and Susinos 2019; Ceballos, Calvo and Haya 2019), recognising the agency and the value of the voices of those who are not usually represented in university epistemologies but who are essential agents in the development of an inclusive and democratic school (Susinos, Ceballos and Saiz 2018).

The preservice teachers become researchers by employing a process of enquiry that seeks to promote observation, deliberation, questioning and reformulation of the concepts chosen to make up the dictionary. The purpose is not to acquire “recipes” to transfer to other contexts, but to generate knowledge through listening and reflection on, about and for practice, assuming the responsibility to choose, experiment, discuss, reflect and change. Undertaking these enquiry processes offers the opportunity to approach the chosen concepts from the complexity and uncertainty of specific educational contexts (Urban 2010) and requires that they are open to new ideas, theories and practices (Moss 2010) to address the needs of those that demand their space from the margins.

Methodology

This work has been carried out within a framework of qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017) and more specifically the case study (Simons, 2011), with a dual purpose (Flick, 2018): to understand the reality studied (the training proposal) and to transform and improve (the initial teacher training). The training proposal was implemented during the last academic year in the syllabus of the Degree in Early Childhood and Primary Education of the University of Cantabria (Spain). More specifically, it was included in: two compulsory subjects (“Tutorial

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Action” and “Didactic and organisational contexts of Early Childhood Education”, 6 ECTS each one, in the Practicum (a period of 2-4 months in which students combine their placement in the schools with enquiry projects) and in the Final Degree Project. This proposal has involved seventy students and four teachers (Table 1), carrying out a total of eight enquiry projects.

Table 1 about here

This article analyses three of those projects (Table 2), selected because of the thought-provoking analysis that accompanies the research activity and because they allow us to illustrate the diverse models of Early Childhood Education and, therefore, the different professional models followed by the participating preservice teachers, described previously.

Table 2 about here

The enquiry projects undertaken follow a planned process (Figure 1).

Figure 1 about here

The deliberation phase began by asking the question for discussion: What are the pedagogical issues that concern you in relation to Early Childhood Education? We designed this process in two phases: an initial phase to respond individually to the question and a later phase in which we discussed all the ideas with a deliberative purpose of justifying, challenging and problematising them.

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The next step was the design and development of the enquiry projects, for which we posed other questions for discussion: whose voice is going to be heard? How are we going to access the experiences and voices of our informants? Organised in groups of four to five people, the participants negotiated and agreed on the concept to be explored, the voices to be heard and the enquiry strategies.

In one session, a number of ethical issues of the research processes (ethical codes of EECERA and the University of Cantabria) were addressed, including: informed consentⁱⁱ, the choice of methods and instruments that are respectful of people; processes of data collection and analysis; and dissemination that maintains a commitment to children's rights and to ethical research (Arnott et al. 2020). Data protection was also ensured based on the guidelines of Spanish legislation. Following these premises, they began their field work to collect the information to be analysed.

In the last phase, the participants designed a digital object that summarised their findings and for its design they used written, spoken, visual and audiovisual languages. Finally, the concepts were compiled in an open dictionary published on the website (<https://dixit.unican.es/> and <https://dixitlab.unican.es/>).

This project involves important innovations with respect to the subjects taught at University of Cantabria, with respect to the students' relationship with knowledge (replacing academic and expository models with the construction of knowledge through collaborative enquiry), with other educational agents (the inclusion of other legitimate voices) and among themselves and with teachers (deliberation and co-creation).

Information gathering strategies

An information gathering process was designed based on: participant observations that led to the research diary; analysis of documents produced by the students (Project); an online questionnaire with open questions; and focus groups with students (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017)

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Analysis

A deductive-inductive categorisation process was carried out to organise the data into units of meaning (Flick, 2018). First, we carried out categorisation to identify the information segments and grouped these into the thematic categories. Then the categories were analysed again in the light of the data and codes defined for each of them.

Results

We present the main results obtained from three enquiry projects that allowed the preservice teachers to reflect on the idea of school and the teacher in early childhood.

Enquiry project into the concept of “Teacher”.

This project has raised key ideas and generated reflection in order to build new knowledge about the school and the participants’ role as teachers. An example of this is provided below in the analysis of the enquiry project based on the concept of “Teacher”. To construct the definition, the participants conducted ten in-depth interviews with Early Childhood teachers from whom they had previously requested eliciting images. Based on the transcriptions of the interviews, they reflected on the image of the teacher that underlies the discourses, for which they organized the data into units of meaning, in a process of categorization.

The analysis they carried out revealed an initial unit of meaning that linked the teaching task with the ability to offer affection and show patience with the children (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence 2013; Moss 2006; Randall 2000).

We begin the session by discussing the following excerpt from the interview.

Q - What is a characteristic of the work of a teacher?

E2 - Being affectionate. You have to be affectionate, at least in Early Childhood Education. The children are very young. And patient, because patience is very important. And also very dynamic. (Research diary)

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These in-service teachers seem to affirm that the essential element of their work is to be affectionate, have patience, etc., putting to one side questions related to political, ethical and pedagogical approaches to education. When asked what type of teacher is revealed by those words, in eight of the ten interviews conducted the group identified a maternalistic assumption. One of the teachers even suggested that this quality is characteristic of Early Childhood Education and linked it to the idea of childhood as an object of protection and care (Moss 2006). The reflection on these ideas allowed the future teachers to recognise the emotional and caring elements of their educational activity, but also that these should not supplant the pedagogical premises. There was only one interview in which there was a balance between affection and learning as central elements.

E8 - In the school there are two floors: there is the lower floor, that of emotions, and the upper floor, that of intellectual learning. For good learning to take place, the lower floor – our emotions – must be balanced and in harmony. (“Teacher” project)

Continuing with the analysis, we found a unit of meaning that, although not as prevalent as the previous one, emerged in a considerable number of interviews.

At one point in the discussion, R. introduced an excerpt from an interview.

E9 - You have to look after them well and be a transmitter of a lot of knowledge. I think that it is particularly in the Early Childhood Education stage when they learn the most; they are like sponges. (Research diary)

A second view of the work of the teacher thus emerges that is related to outcome pedagogy (Solway 2000), where the teachers see their activity subordinated to the achievement of pre-established and measurable learning results that are preparatory for the next stage. This sometimes generates conflicts and dilemmas because, on the one hand, the teachers are pressured to achieve instrumental learning, but on the other hand they recognise the diversity

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of needs and characteristics of the children and the possibilities that other types of pedagogical proposal would facilitate:

E9 - You start with them from a very early age and you see the progress. When they reach five they seem like professors. So for me, literacy is hard when I start it in the Early Childhood stage, perhaps because you want everyone to learn, but some are not mature enough. ("Teacher" project)

In contrast, we should point out that none of the interviews suggested the idea of the teacher as a researcher (Moss 2010). Students could only identify a number of hints that alluded somehow to it.

E7 - Another of the basic functions of a teacher is the creation of situations that provoke in the children an interest in discovering and acquiring knowledge for themselves. To achieve this, they must be able to capture the attention of the students and introduce motivating elements into the classroom. (Excerpt from interview-teacher project)

In their initial training the students have been exposed to alternative discourses about the school and the role of the teacher, but in this project, they confirm that these narratives are not the most widespread. Although we are aware that we cannot extrapolate the results of ten interviews to all educational narratives, we consider that they offer an approximate picture of how a number of discourses, related mainly to infantilisation and early learning, are becoming established in early childhood education.

This enquiry project into the concept of "teacher" has allowed the participants to draw attention to the different views and ways of understanding the work of the teacher that coexist in the educational reality of our schools. Listening to the teachers' discourses and reflecting on these as a group has allowed them to ask themselves questions about what kind of teacher they want to be.

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We have chosen this concept because we believe that it requires a clearer and more concise definition. The concept encompasses different ideas. We have become aware that there are differences and similarities between teachers regarding the construction of their teaching identity. Thinking about this term has allowed us to find out about different perspectives of what our future job entails. (Focus group: teacher project)

Enquiry project into the concept of “Educational spaces”.

We also find other concepts that have become opportunities for reflection on the role of the teacher. The enquiry project into “educational spaces” sought to reflect on the children’s geographies of five-year-olds, focusing on the physical aspects and the establishment of relationships, use and occupation of these spaces (Holloway 2014; Horton et al. 2008).

When the preservice teachers asked the children to choose their favourite place in the school, they mostly selected alternative spaces for learning and playing: the sports hall, the football pitch, the playground or the green area. This fact raised a question for the participants:

The classroom has hardly been mentioned. But that’s the space where they spend the most time! And where they are supposed to learn, etc. So the question is: why?
(Research diary)

Only two children chose the classroom as their favourite space. However, the participants found that the most significant activities were not related to the pedagogical proposals designed by the teacher. On the contrary, unstructured activities, in play time, involving games or related to celebrations stand out. This leads to reflection on the importance of the decision-making capacity of the students and avoiding the constant intervention of the teacher:

Look at what they say:

Teacher: “Why do you do in class?”

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*J.: "We play, we draw pictures and we also make gifts for the mums and dads."
(Research diary)*

In short, this conflict turns into a critical incident since it promotes reflection on the reasons why classrooms are not meaningful spaces for the children and questioning of the educational activities that are carried out. The dialogues revolving around this question carry on over days, during which the preservice teachers reread and analyse all the answers and review the literature on the subject (Ceballos and Susinos 2018), drawing the conclusion that there is a shortage of playing time and few opportunities for the children to make choices in the classrooms.

L. brings to this session excerpts from the recordings during the educational walks that have led her to conclude that what the chosen spaces have in common is that they are places involving freedom of action and play, something that is absent from the classroom.

Excerpt:

Teacher: "Tell me why you like the tatami."

P. and A.: "Because M. lets us play for a little while."

Teacher: "And what do you play?"

P.: "At whatever we want, and at 'la zapatilla por detrás tris tras' (a kind of circle game), or 'las chapas' ('bottle top football')."

Excerpt:

Teacher: "And you A., what do you do in class?"

A.: "We do activities."

T. What kind of activities?

A. Worksheets (activity sheets designed by the teacher): addition, reading, writing.

("Spaces" project)

Comentado [RP1]: This seems very similar (but not identical) to the excerpt used earlier: *Teacher: "Why do you like the class?"*

J.: "We play, we draw pictures and we also make gifts for the mums and dads." (Research diary)

If the same excerpt has to be included twice (which is not ideal) it should be the same on both occasions!

Comentado [D2R1]: You are right, it is not well understood. We have incorporated a piece more of the conversation.

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In the last excerpt another suggestive idea emerges: the understanding that the classroom for five-year-olds is a preparatory space for primary education. This implies an increase in formal activities, pressure and demands regarding reading-writing and logic-mathematics. This is an idea that connects again with results-based education and led the trainee teachers to rethink the pedagogical activities carried out.

“What strikes me is the issue of the classroom. I keep thinking about it. I think hearing children say that classrooms are not their favourite places makes me uneasy. We spend our time and effort thinking about what activities to do in the classroom and it turns out that when we listen to them they tell us that they are not meaningful. Perhaps we have to think about what we’re doing.” (Research diary)

“Perhaps we have to think about what we’re doing” was the second key to this process of reflection. The participants analysed the chosen spaces in order to understand what made them significant, using different strategies: pedagogical walks, child conference and drawings. They found that children identify as activities of greater significance those of a playful nature, which involve body movement and in which they enjoy greater autonomy and decision-making power. This made them rethink the role of the teacher, especially the extent to which they direct activities.

“When I asked why they liked those places, they said it was because they could play, jump ... things that they can’t do in class.”

Excerpt:

Teacher: “What do you do in the playground?”

N.: “We are investigating that door.”

P. “Whatever we want.”

(Research diary)

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They also identified the fact that the children indicate places which more often involve activities where they relate to other children (sports hall, playgrounds, tatami, etc.) and that they can choose.

If we analyse the drawings, what do we find? Look at this one, it only has people drawn on it. We know it's the tatami because she writes it. (Research diary)

Image 2: Children's drawing

T. C. What have you drawn?

C. the tatami (area of the gymnasium with a mat)

T Why did you draw it?

C. I like it

T. Why?

C. Because I like it

T. And what do you do on the tatami?

C. We play, and we run to chase F. If you fall you don't get hurt.

T. Who are the people you have drawn?

C. They are F, N, Al. and A. and some other children. We like to play together. We run a lot. We are always together.

(Research diary)

Comentado [RP3]: I am not sure that the inclusion of a child's drawing is justified if it is just put in without the analysis referred to. I think you need to include something of what the students had to say about their analysis of the drawing. Perhaps this could make a clearer link to the following paragraph which now feels a bit disconnected - the recognition of the need to analyse the drawing does not (itself) show the need to relate ...

Comentado [D4R3]: We add some more fragments to help to understand it.

This shows the need to relate, to learn in relationship and to undertake collective actions (Riera, Ferrer and Rivas 2014), in contrast to the prevalence of individual activities that take place in the classroom.

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“What they tell us is not what we need.” The pedagogy of listening as a complex process with an ethical commitment.

In this last section we analyse how the training proposal has allowed the trainee teachers to reflect on how to build a participatory and democratic school, with a special focus on the listening processes (Oliveira-Formosinho and Formosinho 2013; Susinos 2020): How can we listen? How do we analyse and interpret what they say?

The enquiry into the concept of “story” illustrates the complexity of the pedagogy of listening, especially when we tackle it in the early childhood stage. The group initially designed a listening process consisting of:

A script of questions for the interview that we thought was suitable for children of this age. We aimed to interview the children in pairs in two different spaces: the classroom and the library. (Research diary)

They drafted the questions shown below (Table 3).

Table 3 about here

The discussion about the design of the tools was a critical incident in almost all the studies (Susinos and Ceballos 2012; Blaisdell et al. 2019) arising when we asked ourselves how we could listen to our participants honestly. Although a seminar was held to address the ethical issues of the proposal, these reflections were always there (Arnott et al. 2020). In the case of the “story” project that we are currently discussing, the issue related to the questions to be asked (Formosinho and Araujo 2006). As we can see, some of the initial questions were abstract and decontextualised, which made it difficult to grasp their meaning. Others were questions that directed the answer or that defined a priori the situation about which they were asking, for example: “What was the last story that was read to you?” In this question, it is

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inferred that the children's access to the story is always through listening to someone else – an adult – reading it to them. This information does not emerge from the classroom analysis, since they have not yet begun work in the field – it is an a priori inference. This dialogue on ethics in the design of the interviews led us to the conclusion that not just any question was adequate, but that they needed to be open and not directed (Formosinho and Araujo 2006).

A second critical incident occurred during the analysis of the data.

“What they tell us is not what we need.” (Research diary)

This trainee teacher verbalised a common concern of the group: How would they analyse the information if the children did not answer the questions in the way they expected? (Horgan et al., 2017). As we pointed out previously, a constant concern of the participants was to find answers that would conform to the academic canons, despite the fact that one of the key principles of this educational project was the idea of listening to alternative voices and those that are peripheral to the pedagogical epistemologies. From this point of view, they expected answers that were complete, direct and that related to their body of knowledge. Instead, they were confronted with the perspective of the children and a culture of childhood constructed on the basis of the children's particular way of asking their own questions about their daily lives and finding their own answers.

Among the children's responses we find:

“They have pages, paper on the outside, and you can read them.”

“I've liked them since I was a baby and I still like them now that 'I'm older'.”

“We like monster and dinosaur stories.”

“My mum puts glitter on them.”

“They have pictures.”

“I only like my mum to tell them to me because dad tells them very badly.”

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“A story is something that has a thing like a triangle, it’s a whoosh, whoosh, whoosh that has some big letters and other little ones.” (Research diary)

However, we know that participation does not depend solely on strategy, but also on the possibility of dialogue, shared power, interaction and authenticity that exist within it (Fielding 2018; Wall et al. 2019).

In summary, the deliberative dialogue made it possible to consider a number of essential issues relating to the listening processes in more depth. The first of these is that authentic listening processes require overcoming the idea that there are answers that are relevant and valuable and others that are not relevant simply because they do not coincide with our expectations (Ceballos, Susinos and Saiz-Linares 2016; Ceballos, Susinos and García 2018). Educational reality is not unique and objective, it is something constructed by those who inhabit it. Therefore, the point of view of each individual is relevant in the dialogue with others (Moss 2010). In short, the process of analysing the data based on a commitment to inclusion and respect for the diversity of ideas and reflections made evident the need to adopt an attitude of openness to what is actually happening rather than seeking verification of our ideas.

At the same time, the enquiry project allowed us to reflect on the idea that there is no single and homogeneous voice. This idea emerged in a particularly striking way during the making of the digital object. During several sessions the preservice teachers discussed how they could organise the information to ensure that diversity was visible.

Since we had the responses of many subjects, we have created a story that consists of a common beginning and several alternative endings, which correspond to the responses of the boys and girls of each different age. Therefore, there are three endings, one for each of the ages: three, four and five years. In this way, it is an interactive story that shows the different responses. (Questionnaire).

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The preservice teachers thus recognise that the students are not a homogeneous group, but that their voice is provisional, developing and multiple (Arnot and Reay 2007; Susinos 2020), and that a democratic school must recognise this diversity of existing voices and represent and value them (Cook-Sather 2018; Oliveira-Formosinho and Araújo 2014; Thomson 2007).

Discussion

This section explores the political and structural implications of this proposal, as well as the resistance that affects teacher training.

As has been pointed out, in Spain we have a dual training path that hinders the development of a critical ecology of the profession. We therefore propose an integrated and common training model that removes the division between care and education. This split can be seen in both educational practices and in the regulations. For example, educational legislation does not include technicians in teacher coordination meetings. Breaking down this culture and training structure is a complex process, but we must establish shared training spaces, as suggested in our proposal, in an attempt to incorporate the different voices and positions.

In the university training, we also observe a lack of connection between the theory, linked to subjects, and teaching practice, limited to the school placement. We warn about this cultural and structural resistance (with independent times and spaces) and we advocate the need to create spaces in which the knowledge generated in the academic world and in the school environment converge in a circular process connecting theory and practice, as we attempted in our programme. This is in tune with the "hybrid spaces" proposed by Zeichner (2010).

Finally, the traditional training orientation in initial teacher training in Spain based on masterly teaching and the uncritical application of theoretical knowledge has shown serious training deficiencies. For this reason, we emphasise the need to formulate training proposals

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based on reflective models (Beavers, Orange and Kirkwood, 2017) and guided by enquiry (Flores, 2018), which seek to promote a teaching professional identity that is informed and improved through systematic research.

Conclusions

The article presents a teacher training project undertaken with future Early Childhood Education teachers at the University of Cantabria. The students implement a number of enquiry projects related to their interests in which they adopt a research attitude that puts them in dialogue with the expert voices of those who inhabit the school in order to add complexity to the educational reality studied. This innovative training model aims to respond to some of the challenges facing teacher training in Spain: linking theoretical and practical training based on a model of teachers as researchers of their reality; overcoming the fragmentation of knowledge; and incorporating new voices in the epistemological construction. The results show, on the one hand, that the project provides a cogent answer to the question, “What kind of early childhood education do we want and what type of educators are capable of responding to these challenges?” (Moss 2010). The process carried out has allowed future early childhood teachers to draw attention to and confront the different perspectives and ways of understanding the work of the teacher that coexist in the educational reality of schools. Thus, the narratives to which they have had access offer a model of the school and of the teacher based on maternalistic assumptions (Randall 2000) and “outcome pedagogy” (Solway 2000). As a consequence, they were prompted to ask themselves what type of teacher they wanted to be and to rethink the pedagogical activities carried out in schools.

On the other hand, experiencing a process of enquiry in which they adopt the role of researchers has allowed the preservice teachers to reflect on how to build a participatory and democratic school, with a special focus on listening processes (Oliveira-Formosinho and Formosinho 2013; Susinos 2020). Understanding the school as a democratic space in which a

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“radical collegiality” develops (Fielding and Moss 2014) requires the opportunity to make available spaces for shared reflection and to launch deliberation processes that make it possible to: engage in dialogue on all proposals; understand the multiplicity of existing views; adopt an attitude of openness to what is happening instead of collecting evidence to confirm preconceived ideas; and reflect on the idea that there is no single and homogeneous voice. In other words, it is necessary to listen to the expert voices of those who inhabit the school and fill it with their actions and meaningful relationships, so that these voices become a powerful force for educational and teaching improvement (Susinos 2020).

Thus, this training proposal has allowed the participants to move towards a sociocultural and more relational and systemic pedagogical model of the teacher as a researcher who needs to create listening devices and ask questions in order to improve their teaching practice (Araújo 2012, 2018; Oberhuemer 2004; Oliveira-Formosinho and Araújo 2011).

This article calls attention to the need for a complex process of deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge leading towards a new professionalism. This is a long and complex process, requiring time, support and constant movements between theory, practice and beliefs. What we present here is only the beginning, and the future holds various challenges, including an analysis of how we can sustain this experience over time and turn it into a cross-cutting proposal in all the initial training, and not only in some of the subjects.

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ⁱⁱ All the enquiry projects were carried out with informed consent. The project, its purpose and the strategies were presented to participants. Also, although this consent was given at the beginning of the research, it must be constantly reaffirmed.