

## Competencies of language teachers

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#### Summary:

Talking about teaching competencies is reflecting on the way teachers develop their teaching practice. This reflection leads to an understanding of the teachers' views on education, their performance in the classroom, and their objectives. Teachers who are committed with their practice, their social environment, and, overall, with their students allow themselves time to reflect on their performance and on what can be done to improve it. They also have to establish objectives of constant learning and development of the abilities that would enhance them to reach teaching competence.

Developing competencies allows teachers to perform better in the classroom, and better performances imply, most of the time, higher quality in education. That quality can only be acquired by means of a reflective teaching practice where teaching competencies are developed by teachers who apply all their knowledge, use their abilities to promote and motivate learning, and evaluate the result of their performance.

Teaching competencies can be defined as the ability to respond successfully to a complex requirement that involves attitudes, values, knowledge, and capacities in a meaningful and effective way. In other words, it is the way in

which knowledge, beliefs, capabilities, abilities, values, and strategies that teachers possess and that determine the outcome of his/her performance are articulated.

According to Roegiers and De Ketele (2001), a competence can be measured by the ability to perform a task, whether it is professional or school nature and it complements other competencies that an individual possesses and has acquired through an empiric or a systematic learning process. Competencies can be integrated through interdependence and dynamic mobilization whose objective is the solution of different teaching-learning situations.

Philippe Perrenoud (1997) establishes that a competence is a *savoir-mobiliser*, it is not a matter of knowing “something else” it is the ability to mobilize resources; to know, to know-how to do, to know-how to be, to understand processes of evaluation and of action, and to use tools to face complex and new situations.

It is not enough to enrich the obtained resources for the competencies to be extended immediately, it is necessary to go through a process of integration and adaptation of these resources in a determined situation. Facing complexity means being a reflexive practitioner (St-Arnaud, 1992; Schön, 1994; 1996), who possesses multiple knowledge, can cooperate with colleagues and, overall, is able to analyze and guide observations, interpretations, and regulations.

It is necessary to point out that teaching performance allows us to establish a dynamic that involves behavior competencies, functional competencies, and basic knowledge competencies that any teacher must possess. That means that any teacher should be a professional who knows, internalize, applies, and evaluate the activities that lead to a process where abilities and capabilities are integrated, mobilized, and adequate for the teacher to use them appropriately in order to gain a successful professional development. Schön (1996), points out that continuous learning is the result of reflection and analysis of our abilities and performance. Each professional should base his/her principles on professional development by means of a systematic process found in the principle of knowledge-action that determines the way in which a teacher

makes decisions related to his/her performance: he/she learns, unlearns, reaffirms how to teach, and organizes substantively his/her teaching practice. In other words, the teacher considers his/her knowledge, ethical values, and context, and more importantly is aware of her/his teaching competencies.

According to the proposal of C.I.C.S UMA, IPN (Centro Interdisciplinario de Ciencias de la Salud, Unidad Milpa Alta, Instituto Politécnico Nacional) competencies are organized in six categories that represent diverse aspects to describe and evaluate the teaching practice:

- Pedagogical knowledge (Use technology, explanation of the social reality, logical mathematical thought.
- Social Interaction ( socializing and conflict- solving social participation, interculturality)
- Teaching organization (planning and assessing)
- Psicopedagogical Intervention (attention to needs and interests, strategies and ways to work).
- Communication (listening. Speaking, Redding and writing)
- Professional development ( continuous formation)

On the other hand, Fulquez (2007) mentions that nowadays any teacher has a big challenge, to fulfill with the ten requirements of teaching competencies:

1. To make a plan for the teaching-learning process
2. To select and develop the curriculum contents
3. To convey simple, comprehensible, and well organized information (communicative competence)
4. To use technology
5. To design and organize different kind of activities.
6. To interact and communicate with colleagues
7. To provide tutoring
8. To assess
9. To reflect and research
10. To adapt to the organization of the school and to be willing to work in teams.

The European Profile for Language Teacher Education: a Frame of Reference, (2004) is a document whose purpose is to serve as a referent in the area of teaching education based on competencies that include four main guidelines: knowledge, strategies, abilities, and values.

It is true that competencies in language teaching are derived from general teacher education competencies but it is also true that they have some specific characteristics due to the nature of its purpose.

We could place the competencies mentioned below among the general areas of: knowledge, abilities, capabilities, values, and attitudes.

1. To use the foreign language in oral and written form.
2. To know the culture of the target language.
3. To handle the metalanguage.
4. To identify the theories, approaches, methods, teaching and evaluation techniques.
5. To know the philosophy behind autonomous learning
6. To use the appropriate teaching method according to the context.
7. To establish successful links with international institutes of education.
8. To design learning units.
9. To design teaching programs and lesson plans.
10. To design and apply learning strategies for the different learning styles and needs.
11. To perform good classroom management.
12. To be able to identify students needs
13. To be able to identify class integration problems.
14. To handle unexpected situations.
15. To promote learner autonomy
16. To coordinate group projects.
17. To enhance students' self-evaluation
18. To involve students in their own learning process
19. To know and use new information and communication technologies

20. To promote ethic values
21. To accept and respect diversity
22. To be responsible and fair when making decisions
23. To accept his/her own mistakes
24. To design and apply assessment instruments
25. To sustain dissertations and projects promoting action research.
26. To present and publish research papers.
27. To take part in activities related to his/her professional development.
28. To participate in projects with colleagues.
29. To participate in teacher training
30. To reflect and evaluate his/ her own teaching practice.

(adapted from Perrenoud,.1996, Vidales, 2005, The European Profile for language Teacher Education: a Frame of Reference 2004)

The former guidelines describe an ideal model. It is pertinent to point out that not all teachers are able to develop all the competencies; however, through reflection teachers can reach to a point within the teaching process where they can question, evaluate, and argue over those factors that intervene in it. The results that come out from this reflection should be faced with creativity and innovation in order to provide a great benefit to the students.

According to Bruner (1998) reflection that does not fulfill the requirements for a standard professional development, often results on the lack of the essential capacities for an optimal teaching performance.

Lack of competence is not always visible, and each teacher with problems will look for excuses and will try to justify his/her incompetence arguing that every person has the right to be different or free to perform.

Teaching competencies are part of a cognitive system that leads teachers to reflect on what they do, how they do it, how it works, and where they apply it. This reflection implies a big benefit that determines the very difficult and complex teaching practice and allows teachers to value objectivity without losing sight of the relationship between the performed task and the performer. In other words,

teaching competencies cannot be considered abstractly but as a result of social intervention.

Thus for competent professionals to become aware of the importance of their task and to perform it effectively, it is necessary that they start reflecting over their teaching practice, their values, their doings and sayings. This constant reflection and every day evaluation lead teachers to a specific contexts where it is important to know the obstacles that limit their teaching practice and overcome those obstacles through real actions designed to build possible worlds and not only those that are product of forms of expressions and language (Bruner, 1998).

Despite all the obstacles that teachers might find in their every day tasks, it is possible to change, as long as that change is founded in reflection over the practice and the practice itself. It is true that the process is long, but it is also true that the results will be reflected in their professional development and therefore in the acquisition of teaching competencies.