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El Valor del Compromiso del Estudiante para la Garantía de Calidad de la Educación Superior. Alejándose del Enfoque Regulatorio

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ABSTRACT:

There is a lack of research into quality in the practicum, despite widespread acknowledgement of its value in graduate training. This paper look for a) to determine the quality of the practicum placements where students from Pedagogy Degree performed their practicum; b) to investigate the relationships between the students' and teachers' views and the Regulatory Model criteria; and 3) to identify Regulatory Model indicators that may be associated with participants' views on the quality of practicum centres. Data was collected in two surveys, the sample comprising 106 students, 15 tutors and 291 practicum centres. The results shown that the three actors held positive views of its quality, there is a correlation between the tutors' views and the Regulatory Model, and there are two main variables related to the placement centre quality: type of practices and coverage of competences. This paper highlight the social value of students' engagement in conceptualization of quality and its indicators, going beyond the passive approach, which deals only with client satisfaction.

KEYWORDS: Teacher education, Trainees, Educational quality, Assessment, Student participation.

RESUMEN:

Existe una falta de investigación sobre la calidad del Practicum, a pesar del reconocimiento de su valor en la formación de graduados. Este artículo busca a) determinar la calidad de los centros de Practicum del Grado de Pedagogía de la Universidad de Barcelona; b) investigar las relaciones entre los puntos de vista de los estudiantes y los tutores y los criterios del Modelo Regulatorio; y 3) identificar los indicadores del Modelo regulatorio que pueden estar asociados con las opiniones de los participantes sobre la calidad de los centros de prácticas. Los datos se recopilieron mediante dos encuestas, la muestra comprendía 106 estudiantes, 15 tutores y 291 centros de prácticas. Los resultados indican que los tres actores tienen puntos de vista positivos sobre su calidad, que existe una correlación positiva entre los puntos de vista de los tutores y el Modelo regulatorio y se identificaron dos variables relacionadas con la calidad del centro de prácticas: el tipo de prácticas y la cobertura de competencias. Este artículo destaca el valor social de la participación de los estudiantes en la conceptualización de la calidad y sus indicadores, yendo más allá del enfoque pasivo, que trata sólo la satisfacción del cliente.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Formación de docentes, Estudiante de prácticas, Calidad de la educación, Evaluación, Participación estudiantil.

INTRODUCTION

There is plentiful literature studying the normative or regulatory aspects of quality variables and assessment and accreditation systems in higher education. This contrast starkly, however, with the lack of research into quality in the practicum, despite widespread acknowledgement of its value in graduate training (Bay 2006; Martin, & Leberman, 2005; Ryan, Toohey, & Hughes, 1996) and its significant impact on future employability (Gamboa, Paixão, & De Jesús, 2013).

Most studies of the quality of the practicum have concentrated on its organization and/or its pedagogical design (Cole, Kolko, & Craddick, 1981; Keogh, Dole, & Hudson, 2006; Lam, & Ching, 2007; Murphy, & Kaffenberger, 2007; True, 2002, amongst others). We were unable to find references in the literature to placement centre quality, apart from the study by Freixa, Vilà, & Rubio (2015) despite the crucial role played by these centres in students' learning, and, therefore, in the achievement of the university's educational goals. This is implicitly recognized in the literature when it states that the development of competences depends on the conditions and possibilities of their being put into practice (Vázquez, 2001). Thus, the practicum is the most realistic and natural context in which students can apply the competences taught on their degrees; and it is for this reason that the assessment of placement centre quality is so important. The success of the practicum, in terms of students' learning, depends to a large extent on the quality of the centre and its ability to offer students an organized environment in which to carry out the functions and activities proper to their degree, along with the resources they need and appropriate guidance and supervision, thereby enabling them to learn from their practice.

The Spanish National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA, 2008) and the Catalan Universities Quality Assurance Agency give only generic indications for teaching internships and are vague on the quality criteria for the placement centres. They do not include specific dimensions or any

measurement instrument for the actors involved in the practice. It is in this general context and in particular in the Faculty of Education of the University of Barcelona where the research that is presented is located. In several versions of Quality Assurance of Practice Learning developed for the social work professions involve four types of questionnaires: for the students, for the university, for centre tutors and for the placement centres. In a first phase, the Education Placement Center Quality Regulation Model (MCP) was developed to assess the quality of three practice courses: Pedagogy, Social Work and Social Education. Pedagogy degree developed questionnaires of satisfaction of the practices directed to the students that finalized their practices and to the tutors of the Faculty. Thus, the quality of Practices was approached from a more normative aspect with the CCM and one from the satisfaction of the students. In this sense, both national (Pérez, & Burguera, 2011) and international research (Ralph et al., 2007) indicate that students value Practices as the most significant part of their training as educational professionals.

The overall objective of this study was to analyze the Placement Centre Quality Regulation Model for the Pedagogy Degree at the University of Barcelona, taking into account the following specific objectives:

- To determine the quality of the Pedagogy degree placement centres according to the UB Education Faculty regulatory model and according to the views of the students and teachers on the degree.
- To verify whether there are any relationships between the views of Pedagogy Degree practicum participants (UB students and tutors) on the quality of centres and the regulatory perspective of the Education Faculty Quality regulation model.
- To identify factors in the Education Faculty Practicum Quality Model that may be associated with participants' views on placement centre quality.

1. THE UNIVERSITY OF BARCELONA PEDAGOGY PRACTICUM

In order to gain a better understanding of the University of Barcelona Pedagogy Degree Practicum, below we outline the professional profile of the degree and some of the outstanding features of the program.

The External Practice module, in which students undertake the Practicum, includes a total of 18 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) organized into three study areas: individual assignments (150 hours), the practice community (consisting of the students' group and their tutor, 75 hours), and a period of immersion at a centre (225 hours). In each of these three areas students engage in a series of activities and learning situations giving them the opportunity to apply most of the competences studied on the degree, and particularly the competences included in the module (Vilà, & Aneas, 2013), as table 1 shows.

TABLE 1
General and specific competences in external practice on the UB pedagogy degree

OVERARCHING COMPETENCES	SPECIFIC COMPETENCES
Ethical commitment	Communicating educational knowledge to different audiences
Learning and responsibility	Analysing pedagogical needs and making educational assessments
Teamwork	Working with educational data and information
Creativity and initiative	Leading educational groups and relationships
Sustainability	Designing, implementing and assessing programmes
Communication	Designing and applying learning-teaching strategies in varying educational and training contexts
Applying pedagogical knowledge	Understanding the teaching-learning processes
Self-awareness for personal and professional development	Education research
Awareness of complexity	Educational analysis
Problem-solving in education from a complex and multicultural perspective	Embracing diversity
Innovation	Mediating and advising
Adaptation to change in a knowledge-based society.	Design, implementation, consultation and assessment for training programmes, projects, initiatives and products in organizations
	Analysis, design, management, use and assessment of information and communication technologies in educational and training settings, both virtual and physical, including the creation of multimode and multi-alphabet resources.
	Management and leadership
	Trainer training

Source: Developed by the authors.

The University of Barcelona Pedagogy Degree graduate is defined as an education professional who can work in varying environments in which direct and indirect educational phenomena are found (Millan et al., 2013). Her/his training equips her/him to carry out the following functions: a) interpreting the changes and trends stemming from the information society in educational/training settings; b) designing, implementing and assessing educational/training programmes, projects, and resources adapted to the needs of individuals, groups, and organizations in differing contexts; c) managing pedagogical programmes, products and resources; d) creating educational/training services and resources adapted to groups, including information technologies; e) carrying out research and applying critical thinking to current studies; and f) acting as a consultant in education/training.

The professional tasks involved in the profile may be: a) working with different groups (children, young people, senior citizens, specific groups, unemployed people, working people, amongst others); b) working in organizations that differ in size, activity (service sector, museums, consulting, schools, companies) and type (public, private); and c) specializing in specific subjects (digital learning environments, mediation, careers advice, cultural promotion, amongst others).

The systems and fields where the graduate can work when undertaking the practicum are:

- The formal education system: in this context, the pedagogue may for example impart regulated programmes, offer support in formal education, or take charge of specific regulated programmes.

- The social field: here the pedagogue can perform work such as boosting social and labour integration, promoting social cohesion, or fostering people's welfare.
- The business field: in this area, the pedagogue can work in human resources, cultural management, or developing educational/training resources.

These fields afford environments with varying degrees of formalization, complexity and structure, which can offer work settings ranging from those with wide autonomy and creativity (such as some business contexts, for example a consultancy in virtual education environments) to those which are more tightly specified and regulated (such as some formal organizations, for example a pedagogical consulting team).

The University of Barcelona Pedagogy Practicum adopts an immersion approach which specifically encourages both autonomy and integration into the placement centre (Zabalza, 1998; Ventura, 2005). The module is organized around the Reflective Practice Seminars (RPS, SPR in Catalan) in which the Practice Community meets (Wenger, 2001). Each Community is made up of a group of students carrying out their practicum in various types of centres and under the supervision of their tutor at the UB. In the RPS, based on Eraut's (2000) non-formal learning principles and the R5 Reflective Practice Model (Domingo, & Gómez, 2014), a series of individual and group activities are carried out in order to develop awareness, reframing and articulation, thereby making explicit the implicit non-formal learning acquired in the centre. Another methodological dimension of the Community is problem-centred learning (ABP in Catalan, Bueno, & Fitzgerald, 2004). As we can see, the design of the module aims to help students develop, amongst other things, critical thinking skills, which have been validated by various studies (Aneas, & Vilà, 2015; Vilà, & Aneas, 2013; Vilà, Aneas, & Rajadell, 2015).

2. THE EDUCATION FACULTY PLACEMENT CENTRE QUALITY REGULATION MODEL (MCP)

The quality of placement centres for Education Faculty ¹ degrees at the University of Barcelona began to be researched in 2011. The study in question aimed to identify and evaluate a series of indicators for centres involved in the Faculty's practicums on the Pedagogy, Social Education and Social Work degrees. Each of these practicums draws on a list of organizations where students can carry out practice placements, and many of these are shared, accepting students from all three degree courses. From the quality assurance point of view, it was important to identify indicators which would embrace the specific features of each degree, since each has its own educational and organizational model. At the same time, the indicators needed to provide a coherent and comprehensive framework for quality assessment. The study vindicated the seven indicators that form the basis of the Faculty of Education Placement Centre Quality Regulation Model (MCP: Freixa, Vilà, & Rubio, 2015), with their corresponding sub-dimensions and relative weighting in the final assessment. The development of this model was based on three elements: the theoretical indicators, the official documents on the practicum, and the group of researchers made up of ten tutors, one quality management expert and the Vice-Dean, representing the Practicum Commission).

Once the criteria or indicators had been identified, the group of researchers define the degree of importance and value of each indicator. This process was carried out in two stages (Freixa, Vilà, & Rubio, 2015):

- In the first stage, the experts assessed the importance of the quality indicators (not very important, important, very important), and used the Kappa coefficient to estimate the degree of agreement between them.
- In the second stage, the experts assigned a numerical score to each indicator, depending on whether it was present or absent at the centre. The final score for each indicator was the average of the scores given by the experts.

Depending on the responses to the questionnaire, each centre was given a final score for the quality of its placements. Table 2 shows the details of the regulatory model indicators.

These placement centres display different features from those on the Social Work and Social Education degrees (Freixa, Vilà, & Rubio, 2015), as the study of the quality indicators found. These features are:

- A lower ratio of students to tutors in the Pedagogy placement centre. The average number of students carrying out the practicum in the last year of this course was 200, taking the practicum in an average of 120 centres. Thus, most centres only offered a single placement, the institutions mostly arguing that this number enabled the student to be better integrated in the organization, both in terms of material resources and attention to the trainee. Another feature of these centres is that they had a greater number of tutors with tenure.
- Greater autonomy on the Pedagogy practicum, with the exception of some organizations belonging to the Catalan Government Education Department's Educational Services, where participant observation is the prevailing practicum mode.
- The Pedagogy degree has a greater number of competences than the other two degrees, primarily developing the specific competences.
- Compared to the Social Education and Social Work degrees, there was a lower percentage of tutors qualified in Pedagogy. Tutors' qualifications were from a wide range of socio-educational backgrounds, consistent with the diversity of the organizations in which external practice is carried out.

TABLE 2
Quality indicators of the Regulatory Model (MCP)

QUALITY INDICATORS	Indicator 1. Extent to which the training activity is taken into consideration within the centre's activities. This quality indicator assesses three aspects: the induction of placement students, whether a placement plan is included in the centre's education project (or similar document), and whether the functions of the placement student are specified in this document.
	Indicator 2. Ratio between centre tutors and placement students This indicator includes two aspects: the number of permanent placement tutors at the centres and the tutor-student ratio for mentoring.
	Indicator 3. Type of placements offered. This indicator assesses the placement students' degree of autonomy.
	Indicator 4. To what extent the placement centre can provide career opportunities or offer students employment after completion of the placement, or whether they have employed students in the past.
	Indicator 5. Suitability and recognition of the centre's placement tutors. This indicator focuses on aspects such as whether the tutors are recognized by the placement centre, whether the tutors' qualifications match the student's training profile, and whether there is any differentiation between tutors for students on bachelor's degrees and master's degrees.
	Indicator 6. The centre's evaluation of the amount of work carried out by tutors. The aim of this indicator is to assess on a 1 to 5 scale how much work is involved in the different aspects of the placements, according to the centres.
	Indicator 7. Coverage of degree competences. This indicator focuses on the competences developed on each degree course. Each placement centre identifies whether the competences corresponding with the degree course are developed during the placement.

Source: Developed by the authors according to Freixa, Vilà and Rubio (2015).

2. METHOD

To address the objectives and purposes of the study we chose to survey students and tutors, and in relation to the Pedagogy Placement Centre Quality Model (MCP). The study was carried out during the 2015-2016 academic year.

Participants

Three types of population were included in the study, categorized according to the information which each could contribute. Firstly, individual perceptions of quality offered by UB students and tutors, and secondly, placement centre assessments obtained from the Placement Centre Quality Scale (Freixa, Vilà, & Rubio, 2015).

The Pedagogy degree student population in the 2012-13 academic year was made up of the 198 students enrolled on the final year of the course. The final sample was composed of 106 students who responded voluntarily to the questionnaire, representing a 53% response rate. The UB tutor population comprised the Practicum teaching staff, a total of 18. The definitive sample of tutors was composed of those who responded voluntarily to the questionnaire, a total of 15, representing a response rate of 83%.

The population of placement centres collaborating with the Pedagogy degree was made up of the 150 centres involved in the 2012-13 course. The final sample was composed of 106 centres, representing a response rate of 71%. The centres had a wide range of types and professional fields. 50% were private, while 39% belonged to the formal education field, 28% to the social field and 13% to the business field, there being also 20% which included various fields due to their size or complexity (Barcelona City Council, for example).

Instruments

In order to assess the quality of the practicum centres on the Pedagogy degree in accordance with the regulatory model of the UB Education Faculty, the Placement Centre Quality Scale was applied. This is a scale developed by the coordination of the Practicum at the Education Faculty, made up of 18 items in 7 different dimensions (Freixa, Vilà, & Rubio, 2015), with a Cronbach alpha of $\alpha = 0.704$.

In order to obtain the tutors' views on quality, the Quality Perception Survey (Vilà, & Aneas, 2013) was applied. This is a scalar questionnaire comprising 5 items with a Cronbach alpha of $\alpha = 0.944$. In order to obtain the students' views on quality, the Quality Perception Survey (Vilà, & Aneas, 2013) was applied, a scalar questionnaire comprising 14 items with a Cronbach alpha of $\alpha = 0.838$.

Procedure

Data analysis was performed using the SPSS 18 statistical programme. Firstly, the usual descriptive data was obtained, in line with nature of the data, percentages and measures of main tendencies and dispersion. Subsequently Student's t, ANOVA and chi square contrast tests were carried out in to determine significant differences between groups.

Lastly, to determine which parameters would best explain placement centre quality, a simple correlation test (Pearson's) was performed, along with a stepwise multiple regression analysis, in order to identify the main predictive variables for placement centre quality from the points of view of the UB students and tutors. Also, collinearity tests were carried out to guarantee the non-collinearity of results.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Pedagogy placement centre quality from the different points of view

Table 3 shows the results from the scores obtained from the students and tutors from the Quality Perception Survey, in addition to the scores obtained from the Placement Centre Quality Scale according to the Education Faculty Placement Centre Quality Regulation Model (MCP).

Three main conclusions emerge from these first results: a) the subjective assessments of the students and tutors were substantially better than the assessments from the regulatory model; b) the students showed the highest perception of quality; c) the results from the regulatory model had significantly higher dispersion. The results of the regulatory model placement centre quality assessment are shown in table 4.

TABLE 3
Theoretical and empirical scores obtained from UB students and tutors and the regulatory model

	THEORETICAL MAXIMUM SCORE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
Students' quality assessment	10	8.71	1.63
Tutors' quality assessment	10	7.15	2.17
Regulatory model assessment	100	58.48	16.30

TABLE 4
Theoretical and empirical scores obtained from UB students and tutors and the MCP regulatory model

	THEORETICAL MAXIMUM SCORE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
Consideration of training activity among all other activities	26	11.77	9.67
Relationship between the number of centre tutors and students	10	6.24	4.01
Type of practice offered	12	9.08	2.58
Employment prospects at the centre	10	4.57	4.13
Tutor suitability and recognition	15	4.84	3.32
Centre's internal assessment of tasks carried out by centre tutors	7	4.80	1.98
Coverage of degree competences	20	16.30	7.80
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>58.48</i>	<i>16.30</i>

Source: Developed by the authors.

Analysing this assessment of centres it can be seen that the worst-scoring factor is Indicator 5 (Suitability and recognition of the centre's placement tutors). This indicator enquires into aspects such as whether the tutors are recognized by the placement centres. Contrastingly, Indicators 3 and 7 (type of placements offered or level of independence in the placements, and coverage of degree competences) obtained the highest scores.

Turning to the relationships between the three different points of view (students, UB tutors and the MCP), a weak but significant correlation between UB tutors' assessments and those of the regulatory model can be observed. In contrast students' perceptions did not relate to either of the others; instead they had their own separate views on practicum centre quality.

3.2 Contributions to the model of quality from the students' point of view

Given the distinct views of placement centre quality found among the students, their concept of quality was analysed in greater depth. To achieve this, a multiple linear regression analysis was applied, in which the dependent variable is the quality assessment that students gave to the placement centres and the independent variables are the seven quality indicators of the regulatory model. The purpose was to determine which elements of the model could predict students' perceptions.

TABLE 5
Correlations between participants' quality scores and those of the regulatory model

		TOTAL QUALITY MCP	QUALITY ACCORDING TO STUDENTS	TOTAL QUALITY ACCORDING TO UB TUTORS
Total Quality MCP	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.037	0.357*
	Sig. (bilateral)		0.810	0.028
	N	91	44	38
Quality according to students	Pearson Correlation	-0.037	1	0.332
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.810		0.059
	N	44	45	33
Total Quality according to UB tutors	Pearson Correlation	0.357*	0.332	1
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.028	0.059	
	N	38	33	39

Source: Developed by the authors.

Note: * The correlation is significant at the level of 0.05 (bilateral).

TABLE 6
Model of multiple linear regression for placement centre quality from students' perspective

	NON-STANDARDIZED COEFFICIENTS		STANDARDIZED COEFFICIENTS	t	SIG.	COLLINEARITY STATISTICS	
	B	Typical error	Beta			Tolerance	FIV
(Constant)	3.871	0.650		5.953	0.000		
1. Consideration of training activity among all other activities	0.003	0.013	0.040	0.272	0.787	0.936	1.068
2. Relationship between the number of centre tutors and students	0.021	0.034	0.099	0.618	0.541	0.767	1.304
3. Type of practice offered	0.135	0.061	0.497	2.199	0.035	0.389	2.573
4. Employment prospects at the centre	-0.058	0.030	-0.299	-1.934	0.061	0.832	1.202
5. Centre tutor suitability and recognition	0.045	0.045	0.154	1.005	0.322	0.840	1.190
6. Centre's internal assessment of tasks carried out by centre tutors	0.029	0.066	0.064	0.439	0.663	0.949	1.054
7. Coverage of degree competences	-0.058	0.023	-0.552	-2.503	0.017	0.408	2.450

Source: Developed by the authors.

Note: Dependent variable: Quality according to students.

The results show an acceptable model of regression, with 31% prediction ($R^2 = 0.305$). The assumptions of linearity, normality, independence and homoscedasticity were tested. The collinearity tests (table 6) show that there was no exact linear relationship between any of the independent variables. None of the seven quality indicators for the placement centres were excluded from the regression model. However, two indicators, 2 and 7, stood out as statistically significant.

From the students' perspective, the two quality predictors were:

- Indicator 2: Type of practice ($r = 0.135$). This is the stronger predictive variable and indicates that the centres with the highest quality scores were those where students carried out autonomy-promoting practice.
- Indicator 7: Coverage of competences ($r = -0.058$). This is less strong than the previous predictive variable and indicates that the highest rated centres for students were those where a lower number of competences were worked on; specifically, a maximum of 9 competences of the 28 featured on the Pedagogy degree.

The assessments emerging from these results are consistent with the Pedagogy Practicum model, which fosters immersion in the organizations where the highest degree of students' working autonomy is promoted.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Concerning the first objective of this study we can conclude that the three actors involved in the Pedagogy Practicum all had a positive view of its quality, although the students were those who rated it most highly. Concerning the second objective, a positive correlation between the views of UB tutors and the Education Faculty regulatory model was shown.

Finally, turning to the third objective, the main variables indicating placement centre quality from the students' perspective were identified. The first of these two factors were the approach promoting student autonomy, and the second marked out the centres practising the lowest number of competences (a maximum of 9). We would interpret this as showing the need to design a type of practicum in which students can concentrate their efforts on applying and developing a limited number of competences, thus favouring better results in the application of learning and in working autonomy.

This study has gone into greater depth in investigating quality management in University of Barcelona Faculty of Education placement centres: a little-researched topic, despite its strategic importance. The first stage undertook the identification and validation of placement centre quality indicators based on the regulatory approach, developed on the basis of a review of literature on quality in training systems (Freixa, Vilà, & Rubio, 2015). The results of the second stage afford a complementary and enriched perspective on placement centre quality, featuring the views of students and tutors on the UB Pedagogy Degree Practicum.

This study is not exempt from limitations, one of which is the methodological design itself. However, this design has allowed us to introduce for the first time the vision of the different actors of the practicum. In the future, it should be complemented with their own voice, thus having the opportunity to deepen more in what the students and tutors live and feel during the internship.

Our study follows in a line of work, developed also by Daugherty (2011) and Crespi and Lopez (2009) amongst others, which analyses comparatively the perceptions of the various actors involved in the practicum. In our case, we found a slight correlation between the assessment of UB tutors and the regulatory assessment obtained from the scale of the MCP Model.

Also, we wished to go into further depth in one of the key debates concerning higher education quality assessment: namely the relationships between regulatory assessments and those based on the views of training programme participants. Regulatory assessments are those which validate or assure quality according to deductive and objectivized indicators, while the second type is more inductive and subjective. In our case, the authors wished to probe whether any relationship or concurrence could be found between students' assessments of placement centre quality and those obtained via a regulatory system of quality assurance, specifically the MCP. In this regard, an important conclusion of this study should be noted: i.e. that students hold their own, independent views on placement centre quality.

The literature has studied widely the value of student perceptions in higher education quality control (Bakx et al., 2015; Choudhury, 2015; Kashif, & Ting, 2014; Mourad, 2013; Voss, Gruber, & Szmigin, 2007; Xiao, & Wilkins, 2015; Zamberi, 2015). This study thus complements others which have analysed quality assessment outside the educational organization itself, such as those by Stukalina (2012) and Gallifa and Batallé (2010), which also focused their attention on placement centre quality. These opinions, collected from students rather than the institutions, are more positive than those of tutors and the regulatory model.

Various questions to be addressed by future studies emerge from these results, for example: Why do these differences in assessment exist? What lies behind students' more positive assessments of placement centres? Concerning the factors in placement centre quality highlighted by the students' viewpoints, our conclusion is that they offer pointers towards an inductive quality model which would emerge from students' practice and experience. Our hypothesis is that the Pedagogy Practicum model, which fosters immersion in the organization and autonomy under the centre's supervision (Millan et al., 2014), is a key element in students' assessments. We should take account of the importance of the two predictive indicators for quality

assessment that students' views marked out in the regulatory model, and the fact that both, especially the second indicator concerning the number of competences developed, are aimed at directing the graduate profile towards specialization instead of multi-functionality (the current orientation).

Implications for university practice

Various conclusions can be derived from this study. The first and most important is that students should not simply be objects of the learning process, but should become active agents in the relationship between the university and the placement centres. This conclusion bases its premises on students' technical skills and social value, amply backed up by the literature. Regarding their technical proficiency, in our view the University of Barcelona Pedagogy Degree Practicum model provides students with the competences they need to achieve this. This model enables students not only to develop and apply the whole set of necessary technical and social competences but also to understand the centre more globally, from its culture to its organizational structure and management model. In our view this is possible because the contents of the module provide students with the conceptual and methodological equipment required to develop a critical assessment of their workplace (the placement centre) and to be key actors in quality assessment (Aldridge, & Rowley, 1998; Oldfield, & Baron, 2000).

Concerning the social value of students' engagement, the current trend towards service user participation cannot be ignored; in our case, this means taking students as key actors. This role, within the engagement and partnership model, is consistent with current organizational perspectives and with the values of the society of our time (Kezar, & Kinzie, 2006; Simons et al., 2012; Vickers, Harris, & McCarthy, 2004). Here we would like to underline the importance of involving students in conceptualization of quality and its indicators, going beyond the passive approach which deals only with client satisfaction. Our results indicate the need to revise the Pedagogy Degree Placement Centre Quality Regulation Model in order to take students' views into account.

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NOTES

1. The University of Barcelona Pedagogy Degree is taken at the Faculty of Education, formed in 2014 when the Pedagogy and Teacher Training Faculties merged.