

Teachers' Beliefs: What you do in classroom is the result of what you think

Creencias docentes: Lo que se hace en el aula es consecuencia de lo que se piensa

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Beliefs are poorly developed and subjective knowledge components based more on feelings and experiences than on rationality, which makes them very consistent and lasting (Linares, 1991, cited by Serrano, 2010). They are regarded as “personal truths” derived from perceptions of experiences, even when they are very biased, incorporating a strong affective and evaluative component (Solís, 2015). In general, beliefs are reflected in opinions, attitudes or actions that influence the decision-making processes (Pajares, 1992).

Some of their characteristics include: Beliefs tend to be widespread among people from a same group (Catalán, 2011). This fact can be explained if we consider that they are formed when their members interact, in the framework of the cultural environment in which this group operates (Rodrigo, Rodríguez & Marrero, 1993, Díaz, Jansson & Neira, 2012). This situation strengthens the perceptions of validity and suitability of these beliefs about facilitating the understanding of environments and the adaptation to them (Ferreya, 2012). However, and this is a second characteristic, beliefs do not need to be consensual in order to be valid, and do not require logical rules to determine their relationship with real situations (Carr & Kemmis, 1998). An

important third characteristic lies in the fact that beliefs are usually implicit, since people who hold them are not aware of them or their effects, at least not permanently (Rodrigo et al., 1993).

If we compare these approaches with the field of teacher training and practices, we can infer that teachers' beliefs about what their practice should be would be a synthesis of cultural consumption and personal experiences (De Vincenzi, 2009, cited by Cortez, Fuentes, Villablanca & Guzman, 2013) that influence their perceptions and opinions, and affect their behavior in class (Pajares, 1992), and that they are crucial when teachers assign roles to students, organize activities in class or put emphasis on contents and procedures, that is, that they are determining factors in the decision-making process (Kagan, 1992). Even it is stated that in certain moments, they have more influence than knowledge acquired in a formal way (Solis, 2015).

According to the previous research (Kagan, 1992), beliefs have also a positive effect since they help teachers to control the uncertainty in which their education practices are generally developed. However, this "positive effect" turns into inflexibility when there is a very big gap between the sense of beliefs and the needs of students given the characteristics of the specific learning environments (López & Basto, 2010).

Research on Teachers' Beliefs.

Teachers' beliefs are object of frequent research and have been spread beyond the limits of the Anglo-Saxon world to be established in Latin America. In Mexico Macotela, Flores & Seda (2001) suggest that generally, teachers consider the school to be an organization providing knowledge, and consider the student to be the receiver. In Peru, Ginocchio (2014) reports a very widespread perception among teachers about the constraints of the students, inherent constraints of their homes and surroundings, and that difficult learning and teaching. In Chile, Cortez et al., (2013) worked with a sample of exemplary young teachers and found that they have strong beliefs on topics such as teacher's professional identity, teaching and characteristics of students.

As for higher education, in a study with Spanish professors, Serrano (2010) reported higher levels of conservatism in class session planning, which is consistent with findings made by other Latin American researchers (Cruz, 2008; De Vincenzi, 2009), with respect to the fact that learning and teaching processes revolve around teachers, while students assume a receptive role. In Peru, Ferreyra (2012) reported that psychology teachers have a conservative and traditional perception of learning evaluation which prioritizes the result over the process or execution of a competence. While Díaz & Solar (2011) found that beliefs, among language teachers, also influence the importance of studying them as a way to figure out the factors that facilitate or obstruct the educational change.

Beliefs, Teacher Training and Educational Change.

Teachers bring their own beliefs into classroom on how teaching should be conducted and they often get embedded over time, making it difficult the introduction of changes or new ideas. However, in some cases, the previous research states that teacher's beliefs can change in not so long periods of time (Benarroch & Nicolás, 2011).

Learning from the most successful experiences in teachers' continuous training is due to the fact that there was collaborative work that allowed reflection and questioning of own ideas and beliefs (Park Rogers et al., 2007). Apparently, giving teachers the opportunity to question their own practices and beliefs allows them to assume reflective and open positions, necessary condition to produce changes (Chamizo & Garcia-Franco, 2013).

Training teachers in innovative methodologies using updated conceptual frameworks does not guarantee that these same teachers put in practice "what was learnt", introducing changes into their practices (Herrington, et al., 2011). For this to happen, this training should include questioning of ideas and beliefs, understanding that the adoption of any new methodology requires a basis of knowledge and of beliefs aligned with these approaches, as a previous condition. In other words, the professional development of

teachers should take into account the belief systems that teachers bring into the classroom, since as stated by Cortez et al. (2013), this information would be the basis for the generation of new proposals.

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