

A development program for novice teachers: the UnB ISF NUCLI experience

Um programa de desenvolvimento para professores em formação: a experiência do Nucli IsF da UnB

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ABSTRACT: This article is the result of a study carried out at the Núcleo de Línguas do Programa Idiomas sem Fronteiras (IsF Nucli) or Language without Borders (LwB) at the University of Brasília (UnB) in 2018. This research investigated the teacher development program at the UnB IsF Nucli by means of two questionnaires answered by former and by current student teachers, which contained questions about novice teachers' perceptions of the teacher development program and its impacts on their professional lives. Former student teachers' answers refer to the period 2014-2016; current student teachers' answers refer to the period 2016-2018. In general terms, the answers of former and current student teachers were similar. Despite being designed for novice teachers, this program is not limited to the development of basic, daily teaching skills. It is actually a teacher development or teacher education program, which focuses on long-term professional development and on equipping novice teachers with tools that will aid them in decision-making processes along their careers.

KEYWORDS: Novice teachers. Professional development. LwB Program.

RESUMO: Este artigo resulta de um estudo conduzido no Núcleo de Línguas do Programa Idiomas sem Fronteiras (Nucli IsF) da Universidade de Brasília (UnB) em 2018. A pesquisa objetivou investigar as ações de formação de professores no Nucli IsF da UnB por meio de dois questionários enviados a bolsistas e ex-bolsistas, que continham perguntas a respeito das suas percepções sobre o trabalho de formação profissional desenvolvido e o impacto desse trabalho na sua vida profissional. No caso dos ex-bolsistas, as respostas referem-se ao período de 2014-2016; no caso dos bolsistas, as respostas referem-se ao período 2016-2018. Em termos gerais, as respostas dos bolsistas e ex-bolsistas foram semelhantes. Apesar de ser destinado a professores em formação, as ações do programa não se limitaram ao desenvolvimento de habilidades de ensino básicas e cotidianas. Portanto, trata-se de um programa de formação ou de educação de professores, cujos objetivos são o desenvolvimento profissional a longo prazo e a instrumentalização do professor em formação, de modo a auxiliar os processos de tomada de decisão ao longo de sua carreira.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Professores em formação. desenvolvimento profissional. Programa IsF.

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1 Introduction

This work stems from research done in 2018 whose objective was investigating novice teachers' perceptions of the teacher development program offered by the Programa Idiomas sem Fronteiras¹ (IsF) at the University of Brasília (UnB). By means of weekly meetings and various pedagogical tasks, student teachers develop their skills while teaching EFL classes to undergraduate students, graduate students, professors and/or university staff. One of the objectives of the IsF Program is to complement and strengthen the qualification of teachers during their undergraduate studies.

According to Pennington (1990, p. 134),

a teacher preparation program oriented to developing teachers as professionals will have as central goals (1) to engender an attitude favorable to continued growth and change, and (2) to provide the skills necessary for analyzing teaching performance, for evaluating new ideas, and for implementing those ideas deemed worthy of putting into practice as part of the individual's career growth.

The teacher development program designed at the UnB IsF NuLi aims at both goals mentioned by Pennington. Through continuous teaching practice and reflection upon their own and their peers' experiences, prospective teachers² are invited to develop teaching skills as well as analytical skills that will enable them to think critically when making decisions along their careers. Pedagogical meetings are supported by readings on language teaching, but the bulk of teacher development is done through putting ideas into practice, reflecting upon results, making changes, and putting ideas into practice again, in a hypothesis-testing cycle that aims at developing teachers' confidence and critical thinking skills as well as their teaching skills. This cycle aims at giving teachers immediate means to plan and teach classes as well as providing tools for them to make autonomous decisions and to think independently in virtually any teaching environment. For that to happen, teacher development is based on collaborative work and on a supportive network: prospective teachers have weekly meetings to share experiences and discuss questions, and have daily access to peers and supervisors. This intends to give student teachers a feeling of reassurance and hopefully the certainty that alleged mistakes are no more than steps towards a successful path in their teaching careers.

¹ Translated into English as 'Languages without Borders' or 'LwB' Program, it is a program created by the Brazilian Ministry of Education to enable the Brazilian academic community to interact in a foreign language both in spoken and written media and both locally and internationally.

² In this article, the terms 'novice teachers', 'student teachers' and 'prospective teachers' are used interchangeably for the sake of variety along the text.

In the words of Brown (2007, p. 485), 'Every successful teacher knows that the pursuit of excellence is a lifelong journey. From the first days of apprenticeship and training to the final stretches of experience perhaps decades later, we're in a constant state of change.' Understanding that teaching and learning about teaching are ongoing, never-ending processes may be very encouraging for some, but extremely frustrating for others. Therefore, one of the goals to keep in mind when working with professional development for novice teachers is trying to strike a balance between assigning tasks that will keep student teachers' eagerness for growth and showing that continuous effort is necessary for one to keep growing. Furthermore, it is important to show novice teachers that their experiences count as much as their peers' and their supervisors', and that this should be the starting point for their professional development. As Ur (2012, viii) wisely discusses,

If you ask experienced English teachers how they became good at their job, the majority will tell you that most of their learning came from actual classroom experience. This is not very helpful to a new, or trainee, teacher, who does not yet have much experience but urgently needs to acquire the basic professional ability to walk into a classroom and teach a lesson.

As a result, relying on their little experience may be frightening for novice teachers, since most of their practice is often based on intuition and beliefs they have as learners. The supervisor's role in helping build confidence in prospective teachers' judgment is crucial and should be done by encouraging them to trust their intuition and explore their beliefs while teaching so that they can later reflect upon a certain teaching event and analyze the decisions they have made. In Scrivener's words,

Learning teaching is a desire to move forward, to keep learning from what happens. It involves feedback from others and from ourselves about what happened. It involves reflection on what happened, together with an excitement about trying a slightly different option next time. Learning teaching is an aware and active use of the experiential learning cycle in one's life and work. Learning teaching is a belief that creativity, understanding, experience and character continue growing throughout one's life. (2011, p. 386)

However, care must be taken so as to ensure a safe and receptive atmosphere is created. If novice teachers feel there is competition or disapproval of their actions or beliefs on the part of their peers or their supervisors, the sharing of experiences may become a threat instead of a moment of personal and professional growth. It is important that prospective

teachers be encouraged to evaluate each other's comments from a supportive standpoint and that they interpret the supervisor's comments as constructive feedback. Otherwise, sessions for collective reflection and sharing experiences may become undesirable moments for teachers however experienced and confident they are. This is clearly stated by Harmer (2007, p. 418).

Teachers, like anyone else, need chances to discuss what they are doing and what happens to them in class so that they can examine their beliefs and feelings. However much we have reflected on our own experiences and practice, most of us find discussing our situation with others helps us to sort things out in our own mind. The question, however, is how 'the others' – that is the people we are talking to – should behave. Do we want them merely to listen to our stories and thoughts, or are we expecting them to give us suggestions and advice? We are all familiar with occasions when we think we want people to advise us and then resent them when they do.

Therefore, in order to build a supportive environment, in which student teachers see their peers and supervisors as trustworthy and helpful, a few actions are taken when assigning pedagogical tasks at UnB IsF NuLi. For example, one of these actions concerns class observation. During their first month in IsF, student teachers do not teach and only observe their peers' classes so that they learn more about communicative language teaching and teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). At pedagogical meetings, student teachers are encouraged to give their peers feedback and ask questions which may have arisen during observation. This gives student teachers the opportunity to build mutual trust and help each other.

Another example is the design of courses and the creation and/or adaptation of materials. The guidelines and course contents provided by IsF are analyzed and the syllabus of the course is decided by the whole group at a pedagogical meeting. After that, student teachers work in pairs to plan classes and produce materials. They create parts of courses so that the whole group has a sense of ownership towards the courses offered. After each pair has finished their part, their work is presented to the whole group and peers and supervisors give feedback to the pair that is presenting their work. This ensures a productive and helpful environment since the pair that gives feedback at a given meeting will also receive feedback at another meeting, so student teachers know that they will play different roles and that learning to play both roles contributes to their professional development.

At this point, it is important to discuss the terms ‘teacher training’ and ‘teacher development’ or ‘teacher education’. Much has been written and said about the difference between both and the implications of adopting a more guiding stance when doing the former and a more independent stance in the case of the latter. As Gaies and Bowers (1990, p. 168) discuss,

As trainers, supervisors are concerned with technical improvement: that is, in showing teachers that what they are doing can be done better. As educators, supervisors must be concerned with strategic change: that is, in showing teachers that what is done in the classroom might be done differently and in sensitizing teachers to alternative classroom practices.

Thus, supervisors play two simultaneous roles in teacher education: that of a guide and that of a strategist. As guides, supervisors often act as role models, showing novice teachers the best practices to be adopted. These usually concern the practicalities of daily teaching, that is, more hands-on skills: how to correct errors, how to organize board records, how to use visual aids effectively, how to explain a language point, and so on. When playing this role, supervisors usually establish a more asymmetrical relationship with novice teachers, as their actions are taken as references to be followed or mimed. As strategists, supervisors act as more experienced peers, sharing knowledge with novice teachers and discussing different solutions to problems, helping novice teachers make informed decisions and evaluate the effectiveness of the decisions made from a critical standpoint. These processes tend to require a more reflective approach to self-assessment, in which novice teachers are invited to analyze their own, their peers’ and their supervisor’s teaching practices. To some extent, the second role, that of a strategist, requires more confidence and a richer repertoire on the part of the supervisor, since it will probably entail a less asymmetrical relationship with novice teachers in the sense that all experiences shared are equally important and liable to scrutiny.

In the case of the UnB IsF NuLi, a hybrid approach to teacher development is adopted, and supervisors tend to play both the role of a guide and that of a strategist. Although student teachers have the opportunity to learn the basic, daily skills of teaching, such as classroom management and lesson planning, the teacher development program does not encompass only such skills, so it cannot be called ‘training’ in a pure sense. Student teachers also learn about assessment and course design, for example, besides developing critical skills through reflection upon their own and their peers’ practices, so it is also a

teacher ‘education’ program, as more complex and demanding tasks are assigned to novice teachers.

2 Context

The UnB IsF NucLi started working in September 2013. At that moment, it had eight teachers, one pedagogical coordinator, and one general coordinator. Student teachers received a monthly grant for two years to teach three groups of students, take part in pedagogical meetings, and perform other pedagogical and administrative tasks. Coordinators received a monthly grant for four years to settle the IsF NucLi both in physical and pedagogical terms. In a row, the UnB IsF NucLi had thirty student teachers from September 2013 to September 2018.

In the initial phase, student teachers were chosen among those with the best performance in the undergraduate classes of English teaching as a major. They had to take the TOEFL ITP test if they did not have another certificate of proficiency in English. They could have other jobs as teachers provided that they worked 20 hours a week in the IsF Program and performed the tasks assigned satisfactorily. Their ages ranged from 18 to 21 years old. The age range is still the same for the current group of student teachers. However, as of May 2015 student teachers have gone through a selection process which includes a written test, a short class demonstration, and a brief interview besides a minimum B2 proficiency level of English. As of October 2015, student teachers can no longer have a job if they are willing to take part in IsF.

The main focus of the Program, then called ‘Inglês sem Fronteiras’ (or ‘English without Borders’) was to help undergraduate students reach the required English level to receive a one-year grant to study at a partner university in an English speaking country.³ The goal of most students was, therefore, scoring the ideal grade (which varied according to the partner university) in a proficiency test. Thus, the role of IsF classes was developing students’ language skills and test-taking skills.

With that in mind, the classes offered had an emphasis on proficiency exams in general and more specifically on the TOEFL test; textbooks were adopted to teach TOEFL

³ Grants were given through the ‘Ciências sem Fronteiras’ (Sciences without Borders) program, whose name inspired then ‘English without Borders’ and later ‘Languages without Borders’ program.

ITP and TOEFL iBT courses. The teacher development program focused on developing student teachers' language skills to teach preparatory classes for proficiency exams and on planning lessons designed to balance the development of different macroskills and their microskills alternately in order to cater for different students' needs and levels. At UnB, preparatory courses were offered to A2, B1 and B2 levels (according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) and student teachers' had C1 language proficiency level.

In July 2014, the types of courses offered changed and so did the teacher development program. UnB IsF NuLi started offering courses which focused on teaching EAP and ESP. The TOEFL preparatory courses were kept, but their emphasis was reduced. Due to this change, the teacher development program included course design, which entailed readings and discussions on curriculum development, communicative language teaching, teaching skills and teaching language.

Due to this change in focus, since then student teachers have designed course contents. It is hard, and at times impossible, to find published materials for the specific needs of students and the scope of the courses. For that reason, student teachers also create, adapt and complement materials. After the planning stage, different student teachers pilot courses and materials; they share their views and improve their own and each other's work under the supervision of the coordinator during pedagogical meetings to evaluate and adjust course contents and materials.

3 Methodology

This research used qualitative data collection and analysis to answer the research questions, 'What is the perception of novice teachers of the teacher development program after they leave IsF and have other work experiences?' and 'What is the perception of novice teachers of the teacher development program while they are in IsF?' For this study, two short, open-ended questionnaires with 'attitudinal questions' were designed. According to Dörnyei (2010, p. 5), 'attitudinal questions are used to find out what people think. This is a broad category that concerns attitudes, opinions, beliefs, interests, and values'. Although Dörnyei (2010, p. 7-9) warns about some of the disadvantages of using questionnaires as research tools such as 'respondent fatigue' and 'superficiality of answers', this data collection tool seemed to be the most appropriate for this study because of one of its greatest advantages: they can

‘tap into attitudes that the respondents are not completely aware of, and a well-constructed questionnaire can reduce the bias of interviewer effects and thus increase the consistency and reliability of the results’ (DÖRNYEI, 2010, p. 6).

Taking these comments into account, both questionnaires contained few questions so as not to fatigue respondents. There was no word limit for respondents to answer the questions so that qualitative, content-rich data were collected. The assumption was that giving respondents options could have guided the final answers, so open-ended questions were designed. The questions were originally asked and answered in the participants’ native language, Portuguese. The assumption was that they would feel comfortable and write freely about their impressions in their first language if there were no concerns about language correctness or about being judged by the researcher.

The first student teachers had left IsF at the end of 2015 or beginning of 2016 and were sent a questionnaire with the questions below. The time lapse between leaving the program and answering the questionnaire was relevant because there would have been enough time for former student teachers to work in other environments and to assess the impacts of the IsF teacher development program with the benefit of hindsight.

1. What is your current job and position?
2. What was the relevance of your participation in the IsF Program for your professional qualification?
3. Which aspects of the IsF teacher development program are relevant for your current job?
4. What do you think should have been included in the teacher development program so that it had more impact on your current job?

Question 1 aimed at recording the current job of the former student teacher because in case the respondent were no longer working as an English teacher, the following answers would not be relevant. Question 2 aimed at investigating the participant’s general impression of the experience in IsF and at discovering whether positive experiences would lead student teachers to use the knowledge shared in their teaching practice, whereas negative experiences would lead them to avoid using what was learned. Question 3 aimed at identifying which contents addressed in IsF were the most relevant for teaching practice after graduation. Question 4 aimed at identifying contents that were not addressed in IsF and that should be included thenceforth.

The second questionnaire was answered by current student teachers. The questions are listed below.

1. Do you plan to keep working as an English teacher after you leave the IsF Program?
2. What is the relevance of your participation in the IsF Program for your professional qualification?
3. Which aspects of the IsF teacher development program have been or will be relevant for your teaching practice?
4. What do you think should be included in the IsF teacher development program so that it has more impact on your teaching practice?

Question 1 aimed at recording the future plans of the current student teacher because in case the respondent did not plan to keep working as an English teacher, the following answers would not be relevant. Question 2 aimed at investigating the participant's positive and negative experiences in IsF. Question 3 aimed at identifying which contents addressed in IsF were the most relevant for current student teachers. Question 4 aimed at identifying contents that had not been addressed in IsF and that should be included thenceforth.

The analysis of the data and the comparison of answers from both groups would help answer the research questions by mapping out similarities and differences in student teachers' perceptions of the IsF teacher development program. The similarities would probably reveal the most salient features of the program since they would be readily mentioned by current participants and have remained in the former participants' minds after leaving IsF. The differences would probably make it possible to identify deficiencies in the development program and areas for improvement so that it becomes more relevant as a long-term professional qualification program.

4 Results

All former and current student teachers received the questionnaires. Eleven former student teachers answered the first questionnaire, and ten current student teachers answered the second questionnaire. If one takes into account the total number of 30 student teachers at the UnB IsF NuLi from 2013 to 2018, be they former or current, 21 responses to the questionnaires can be considered significant. Out of the 11 answers to the first questionnaire, 10 were considered valid for this study, since one of the respondents no longer works as an

English teacher and does not intend to do any kind of teaching in the future. Due to length constraints in this article, the answers will not be shown in extended form, but as a summary.

The answers to the first questionnaire were the following.

1. What is your current job and position?

Seven respondents work as teachers at private language schools; one respondent works as a temporary teacher at a state school for primary and secondary students. One respondent is an MA student of Brazilian literature in the US; one respondent is an MA student of literature in Brazil.

2. What was the relevance of your participation in the IsF Program for your professional qualification?

For respondents, it was a period of much development, the most relevant experience they had in their undergraduate studies and the period of most intense professional growth in their lives. They had learned what it means to be a teacher, how to become one, and they had developed a teacher identity. IsF prepared them in personal, pedagogical, and institutional terms to become teachers. Some of them had never taught before and had no practical or theoretical knowledge about language teaching methodology, so it was a very rich period in terms of learning and putting the contents learned into practice. After two years in IsF, some got jobs in some of the biggest language schools in Distrito Federal (the Brazilian Federal District).

For them, some of the most relevant areas worked in teacher development were: sharing ideas; receiving feedback; self-assessing one's professional performance; designing courses on ESP; collaborating with peers; learning about classroom management; feeling confident to make decisions in class; developing language proficiency and teaching skills; having access to state-of-the-art information on language teaching; having committed coordinators and peers; having the opportunity to have accessible trainers; and attending weekly meetings.

3. Which aspects of the IsF teacher development program are relevant for your current job?

Former student teachers provided longer answers to this question, many of which common to most respondents. The complete list of the aspects mentioned is the following: having frequent pedagogical meetings; theoretical studies on communicative language

teaching and other approaches / methods; discussing various aspects related to the English teaching profession; classroom management techniques; planning classes in group; designing, editing and compiling communicative materials with a critical view; designing different types of EFL courses; designing, applying and correcting written and oral tests; administrative tasks such as recording grades and attendance; and predicting problems and dealing with students and peers in a professional and ethical manner. Most respondents mentioned the importance of working in a collaborative way for them to learn to work in groups and to give and receive feedback. One respondent added that becoming aware of the differences, possibilities, opportunities and constraints of the role of the teacher makes one feel more prepared, skilled, experienced and confident to teach.

4. What do you think should have been included in the teacher development program so that it had more impact on your current job?

Some of the answers included aspects which are not and will not be covered by IsF, such as teaching children and adolescents in 40-50-student groups or taking care of one's voice and health in general. Most answers revealed that in the respondents' views the teacher development program covered the most important aspects in English language teaching, such as classroom management, methodology, and lesson planning, and therefore it was not necessary to include more information. One respondent suggested including more information about what other NuLi in Brazil are doing in terms of materials development and course design. Three respondents suggested having more peer observation and more observation from supervisors.

The answers to the second questionnaire were the following.

1. Do you plan to keep working as an English teacher after you leave the IsF Program?

All respondents answered affirmatively.

2. What is the relevance of your participation in the IsF Program for your professional qualification?

The most common answers concerned the development of teaching and language skills, having experience not only teaching EAP but also in planning classes and designing materials. They also mentioned learning how to solve problems quickly, speaking in public, dealing with relatively big groups, having freedom to make decisions but also counting on the

support of supervisors, and developing critical thinking skills. Besides, pedagogical and administrative meetings were considered important for their professional development. Most respondents considered that IsF has prepared them to the job market in a way their undergraduate studies have not, with experiences, readings and teaching opportunities, which have made them more confident about their performances as teachers. Most did not have any teaching experience and wrote they felt ready to take part in any selection process. Some have had other working experiences; even so, they consider IsF 'a turning point', having been the greatest learning opportunity they have had since they started working as teachers.

3. Which aspects of the IsF teacher development program have been or will be relevant for your teaching practice?

With current student teachers this was also the question with longer answers. The compilation of the aspects listed is: working in groups; planning detailed lessons; learning more English; error correction and classroom management; designing courses; designing and adapting materials; learning more about different methodologies and approaches; discussing the assessment and correction of speaking and writing; being observed and receiving constructive feedback from peers and from supervisors; developing critical thinking skills; having meetings to exchange knowledge and discuss successes and failures with peers and with coordinators; putting into practice what is learned in theory; getting feedback from coordinators on materials and lesson plans produced with a peer; doing research and writing academic articles; collaborating (sharing materials) with other NucLi.

4. What do you think should be included in the IsF teacher development program so that it has more impact on your teaching practice?

Most respondents answered that they had nothing to add because IsF is very effective and should be kept as it is. Two respondents suggested receiving previous guidelines and/or having workshops on lesson planning, materials development and assessment before actually having to do it since these were skills they did not develop in their undergraduate studies. Two respondents suggested creating more courses to offer more choice so that the NucLi would not lose students. One respondent suggested having class observation between peers.

5 Discussion of results

The answers to Question 2 in both questionnaires reveal that the IsF Program has had a relevant role in these novice teachers' education. Taking into account that they are beginning their careers, this experience has helped them develop a teaching persona and have a clearer idea of what teaching a foreign language encompasses. Besides, relying on peers and on trainers, both in linguistic and in methodological terms, and having the opportunity to share ideas and learn from each other has helped student teachers become more confident in their practice. Here it is important to highlight that current student teachers see the development program offered by IsF as more effective than their undergraduate classes. This may be due to the fact that in IsF teaching practice is included from the very beginning, along with readings and reflective sessions, which probably has more impact on novice teachers' perceptions of how to learn about teaching. In their undergraduate studies at UnB, they have six semesters of theoretical classes and observe few different teachers before they actually teach in the last year. Thus, it is possible to infer that the hypothesis-testing cycle experienced in IsF provides more powerful insights than discussing theory first and then having delayed practice.

The answers to Question 3 reveal a significant difference between the two groups of respondents. Current student teachers mentioned classroom observation and studying English as relevant elements in the development program. This may be due to student teachers' not being allowed to work as teachers except in IsF as of October 2015. An immediate consequence of this constraint was the selection of undergraduate students with lower language levels and with little or no teaching experience. As a result of this change, actions were taken to help student teachers improve their language performance, and class observation from peers and supervisors was intensified.

Furthermore, the answers to Question 3 give us a clearer view of the twofold character of the development program. The relevant points most often listed by respondents in both groups range from more abstract aspects such as nurturing an ethical behavior at work and developing critical thinking skills, to more theoretical aspects such as language assessment and course design, to more daily, hands-on aspects such as lesson planning, classroom management, and office / administrative work. Here it is possible to identify typical 'training' activities and more 'developmental' activities, both of which are part of the program from the first to the last month. The rationale behind this design is that all levels of tasks are equally

important for professional development and are present in any work environment without any grading or phasing. Consequently, for a teacher education program to be effective, it should incorporate these elements into the teaching practicum as simultaneous, intertwined aspects.

Question 4 sought suggestions for the improvement of the teacher development program. Most responses were very positive and confirmed the formative value of IsF. The most important point to be mentioned is the classroom observation as a tool for teacher development. Be it peer observation or observation by a supervisor, respondents felt the need to have their individual performances analyzed more closely and more often. The fact that no serious deficiency was mentioned may allow for the conclusion that IsF has been able to cover most relevant areas in teacher development. What was not at all covered is not really part of the program such as teaching children and adolescents, and teaching big classes of 40 students or more.

Current teachers added the suggestion of creating more courses, probably because they have less experience than former student teachers and because they are in IsF and can still perform this task⁴. They also suggested receiving more input before planning classes and designing materials. Here we are left with the question of whether former student teachers did not mention these points either because they feel they have been well prepared to do so or because their current practice has bridged the gap in these areas after they left IsF. Another possibility is that they do not design classes and create materials in their current jobs, so this is not a gap they identify in IsF.

From the analysis of the answers given by both former and current student teachers, the hybrid approach adopted at the UnB IsF NuLi seems to have been effective. In general terms, research participants seem to have grasped most concepts concerning the basics of second language teaching at the same time they were developing skills to evaluate their experiences through reflective and critical lenses. It is noteworthy that it is not necessary to break this process into two distinct steps, in which basic skills are developed first, followed by the next, more demanding or complex skills. On the contrary, reflection and analysis were part of the teacher development program since the beginning, so it is truly a teacher education program.

⁴ Former student teachers in this study participated in the IsF Program for two years. Current student teachers are still part of the program and have been in it for different time lengths: almost two years; one year; ten months, five months or two months.

6 Conclusion

As Underhill (1992, p. 71) discusses, despite taking multiple forms, teacher development has ‘an underlying common core, focusing on self-awareness, on which practical models may be built’. The results of this study indicate that this is possible to be done among teachers with little or no experience, provided that there is a supportive environment for sharing ideas and a feeling of accomplishment in the team. In the words of Head & Taylor (1997, p. 18),

This kind of development involves the teacher in a process of reflecting on experience, exploring the options for change, deciding what can be achieved through personal effort, and setting appropriate goals. It is based on a positive belief in the possibility of change. Development is not only a way forward for experienced teachers who believe that they have unfulfilled potential and who want to go on learning. If its attitudes and beliefs can begin in pre-service training, where trainees can be encouraged to learn from their own developing awareness and reflection alongside feedback from tutors and fellow trainees, then it can continue as a basis for career-long learning.

Therefore, if there is an ideal moment to start a complex professional program with novice teachers, it seems to be right at the beginning. What determines the success of such an approach is not the grading from simpler to more complex tasks, but the support given by supervisors and the trust built within the group. The effectiveness of teacher development at the UnB IsF NucLi seems to result from constant work on teachers’ skills with a focus on self-awareness and collaborative work. For the program to be even more effective, the results indicate that classroom observation from peers and from supervisors should be used more often as a tool for mutual development. Debriefing sessions after observation and opportunities to try new solutions to a problem seem to provide novice teachers’ with powerful insights even if they have no previous teaching experience.

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