

Learning to Teach in Large Classrooms: Training Faculty Members from Milano Bicocca University, from Didactic Transposition to Communication Skills

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Abstract : Relating to the recent researches in the field of faculty development, this paper aims to present a pilot training programme realized at the University of Milano-Bicocca to improve teaching skills of faculty members. A total of 57 professors (both full professors and associate professors) were trained during the pilot programme in three editions of the workshop, focused on promoting skills for teaching large classes. The study takes into account: 1) the theoretical framework of the programme which combines the recent tradition about professional development and the research on in-service training of school teachers; 2) the structure and the content of the training programme, organized in a 12 hours-full immersion workshop and in individual consultations; 3) the educational specificity of the training programme which is based on the relation between 'general didactic' (active learning methodologies; didactic communication) and 'disciplinary didactics' (didactic transposition and reconstruction); 4) results about the impact of the training programme, both related to the workshop and the individual consultations. This study aims to provide insights mainly on two levels of the training program's impact ('behaviour change' and 'transfer') and for this reason learning outcomes are evaluated by different instruments: a questionnaire filled out by all 57 participants; 12 in-depth interviews; 3 focus groups; conversation transcriptions of workshop activities. Data analysis is based on a descriptive qualitative approach and it is conducted through thematic analysis of the transcripts using analytical categories derived principally from the didactic transposition theory. The results show that the training programme developed effectively three major skills regarding different stages of the 'didactic transposition' process: a) the content selection; a more accurated selection and reduction of the 'scholarly knowledge', conforming to the first stage of the didactic transposition process; b) the consideration of students' prior knowledge and misconceptions within the lesson design, in order to connect effectively the 'scholarly knowledge' to the 'knowledge to be taught' (second stage of the didactic transposition process); c) the way of asking questions and managing discussion in large classrooms, in line with the transformation of the 'knowledge to be taught' in 'taught knowledge' (third stage of the didactic transposition process).

Keywords : didactic communication, didactic transposition, instructional development, teaching large classroom

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