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ORIGINAL

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT SELF-ASSESSMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF P. E. TEACHERS

PERCEPCIONES SOBRE LA AUTOEVALUACIÓN EN LA FORMACIÓN DE PROFESORES DE EDUCACIÓN FÍSICA

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SUMMARY

The article analyzes perception of students in the Major of Physical Education Teachers (1st and 2nd), regarding the self-assessment process lived during this pedagogical project "To democratize the university classroom: preparing teachers, preparing people". The research is framed within Phenomenology as study method, respecting those principles of the interpretative paradigm. Procedures used for qualitative data analysis were in agreement with the proposals of fragmentation and articulation from the "grounded theory". Total of participants contributing with narratives was 38; 11 of them were interviewed. Findings obtained stand out emotion as the cornerstone of the self-assessment process, transcendence of generated learning and the importance of unveiling those values implicit in our actions.

KEY WORDS: teacher preparation, physical education, self-assessment, democratic education, critical pedagogy.

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza las percepciones de los estudiantes de Magisterio de Educación Física (1^o y 2^o), en relación al proceso de autoevaluación vivenciado durante el proyecto pedagógico "Democratizar el aula universitaria: formar docentes, formar personas". La investigación se enmarca en la Fenomenología como método de estudio, respetando los principios del paradigma interpretativo. Los procedimientos para el análisis de los datos cualitativos que se emplean, se ciñeron a las propuestas de fragmentación y articulación de la "grounded theory". El total de participantes que aportaron una narrativa ascendió a 38 y 11 de ellos fueron entrevistados. Los hallazgos obtenidos hacen referencia a la emoción como piedra angular del proceso de autoevaluación, la trascendencia de los aprendizajes generados y la importancia de desvelar los valores implícitos en nuestras acciones.

PALABRAS CLAVE: formación de profesores, educación física, autoevaluación, educación democrática, pedagogía crítica.

1. INTRODUCTION

Convergence process in European higher education is giving birth to different agreements; though, at the same time, it is also producing some disagreements regarding teachers' preparation, both in education in general and, specifically, in Physical Education (hereinafter PE) (Barbero, 2007; Devís and Peiró, 2007; Martínez, 2004). Arguments arouse concerning the necessity that proposals to be established must be accompanied by strong structural changes; even more, it is analyzed how the new system of competences is nothing more than a new discourse anchored in the business logics dominating the present formal education systems and whose intentionality is centered in homogenizing initial preparation of teachers throughout Europe (Martínez, 2004). Pedagogical innovation in the initial preparation of primary school teachers and other professionals (Gimeno and Gallego, 2007; Hernández, González and Guerra, 2006; López, 2009; Sáiz and Román, 2011) is not an issue belonging only to present times, generated from the European convergence process; rather, for long time, there have existed a number of professors and academics working based on pedagogical logics and ethical, political and education principles to overcome the knowledge reproducer model (technocratic), trying to transform the initial preparation of primary school teachers into an education space, able to not only form professionals possessing appropriate technical and instrumental knowledge, but also possessing a vision of social, ethical and pedagogical compromise contributing to improve the society we live in (López, 2009).

This last intention we are bringing into light is born, in the formation of primary and secondary school teachers, from what was called "Critical Pedagogy", also known as the new education sociology or the education critical theory (McLaren, 1999). Critical Pedagogy, according to Derridá (2001; in Giroux, 2009: 17) *"it opens a space in which students, both men and women, should be able to assume their own power as critical agents; it provides with a sphere within which unconditioned freedom, a freedom to question and affirm, turns out to be essential for university objectives, or even for democracy itself"*.

In the field of formation of PE primary and secondary school teachers, Critical Pedagogy has experienced a strong development, both national and international. According to Kirk (2007), our area has been characterized by a lack of ideological analysis helping to analyze those conditioners limiting professional formation in the area of PE; a reason why reproduction theories have been so successful in the discipline.

Although it is true that technocratic practices have been, and continues being, strongly present in the area, it is also true that there have existed alternative movements studying, analyzing and proposing different options in this regard (Devís and Peiró, 1992; De la Torre, Rivera and Trigueros, 2007; Fernández, 1997, 2004; López et al, 2007; López, 2009; Lorente and Joven, 2009; Muros, 2009; Rivera and De la Torre, 2005; Sicilia and Dumitru, 2009; Rivera, Trigueros, De la Torre and Moreno, 2010)

Coherently with the before mentioned proposals, the Pedagogical project “*To democratize the university classroom: preparing teachers, preparing persons*” (DUC) has been under development in the Education Sciences Faculty of Universidad de Granada, Spain for 8 years; it is supported on the postulates of Critical Pedagogy and, therefore, on the democratization of formation processes, thus contributing to an education process seeking for people humanization and social justice. Hence, to emancipate people and to democratize education practices are seen as indispensable (Moreno, 2011; Muros, 2004).

Democratization of education time and spaces needs, among other things, to be cautious about assessment ways understood as processes of dialogue, comprehension and improvement (Santos, 2001). The Pedagogical project “DUC” starts from two key ideas and four sections defining it. The first idea is related to understanding that education is not neutral; rather, on the contrary, it possesses strong ideologies conditioning the whole formation process. Regarding the second idea, education makes sense only if projected to the community sheltering it, thus keeping as a utopia the achievement of transforming society into progressively more democratic and participative models, permitting justice and opportunity egalitarianism.

The four essential sections defining it are: transdisciplinarity, classroom democratization, a collaborative methodology identified with socio-constructivist principles and self-assessment processes (Rivera y de la Torre, 2005; De la Torre, Rivera y Trigueros, 2007).

a) Transdisciplinarity. The Project links three courses: Physical Education and its Didactics II (main), Didactics of Motor Games and Sport Initiation (compulsory) and Dance and Popular Games (optional). The two first share pedagogical times and spaces, methodology and evaluation; whereas the third uses the same methodology, shares some pedagogical times and spaces and, though it uses the same evaluation model, this action is done separately from the other two subjects mentioned hereinbefore.

b) Principles. Democracy is the fundamental principle, transversally crossing all actions. When democratization of the university education space is stated within the project, it is understood as a space based on collegiate participation in decision making, social commitment and emancipation. Values associated to that democratization principle are freedom and equality and those arising from them: tolerance, solidarity, dignity, justice, autonomy and responsibility.

c) Methodology. Being coherent with the previous two aspects, (a and b), methodology is oriented by the constructivist perspective and characterized by working from what has been called collaborative learning among teachers, students, work teams, and class group. This collaborative learning sustains its existence in the intentionality of carrying out a job inviting to develop a set of competences related to: to know how to be, to know how to do and to know (Rivera, De La Torre and Cervantes, 2009)

d) Self-assessment. This process is a way to incentivize reflection and criticism appraisal of the whole knowledge building process. It ends with the self-assessment process. The self-assessment process is divided into three big moments: 1) centered on awareness; 2) commitment and criteria definition for self-assessment; 3) final public session for self-assessment and self-qualification.

It is from here that the general goal of our work has been to visualize those implicit beliefs and theories of students taking part in DUC project.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The work is a phenomenological study and we are inside what has been called, in social research, the interpretative paradigm. To develop it we will support on qualitative methodology, since the study has a descriptive, relational and interpretative character (Fraile and Vizcarra, 2009).

What has been its self detonative? Questions arise from the element identified as the most controversial or polemic of the whole proposal: leave the power of assessment in the hands of the students. Hence, the following research questions are stated:

- How would you rate the followed self-assessment process?
- Which are the strengths and weaknesses that you detect in it?
- What is the meaning you give to having the obligation to be responsible for your own learning process through the active participation in decision making during the evaluation process?

From these prior questions and from our general purpose, we decided three research goals:

- To identify and describe meanings given by students to the self-assessment process lived from the Project DUC.
- To analyze and interpret student perceptions contrasting the existing theories regarding assessment processes.
- To make the main substantive theories emerge; those constructed from the meanings given by students to the developed process of democratic evaluation.

2.1. PARTICIPANTS, INSTRUMENTS AND CARRIED OUT ANALYSES

Participants in the research are students from the major of PE Pedagogy from first and second year from a Faculty of Education Sciences where the Project DUC is implemented.

Instrument used were written narrations and deep interviews. With the first instrument, students evaluated the project "DUC" in general, and the followed assessment process, specifically. With the second instrument, the students

were permitted to deepen into the evaluation they make of the experienced self-assessment process and the meanings this process has had for them. Written narrations were received from 38 participants and 11 students were interviewed. Students' selection for the interview was carried out based on two important criteria: class attendance and scores, since it was important to consider the level of commitment and knowledge lived from the self-assessment process to be able to give an opinion about it.

All data gathered during field work were transcribed and submitted to a first discourse analysis following those guidelines marked from the "*grounded theory*" (Strauss and Corbin, 2002) and supported on its execution by the computer program Atlas Ti 5.0. The first step was to make substantive theories of participants visible; for this, an open codification was made, which permits to make the first categories emerge. Afterwards, a first exploratory model is built by means of grouping the emerging categories into category families; a selective codification is carried out, which permits to move from description to interpretation and confrontation of substantive theories with formal theories.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSION

To help identify the main axes built from the participants' substantive theories, we are going to expose from the conceptual map of **figure 1**. The main topics and concerns emerging in the study carried about self-assessment fit in the corner stone of students' emotions as actors in the process. Three key elements defining the whole process appear from them. First, the rupture assumed when living self-assessment facing traditional models, which makes many of prejudices and beliefs of students stumble and fall. Secondly, partly produced by the previous one, the door is open to willing learning; not the reluctant learning they are used to, which produces in parallel a critical beginning towards awareness. Finally, both previous processes are enriched through an ethical glance of the students about education in general and about their own process in particular.

Where does this emotions stream lead? Logically, in the relationship between docents and their students. Trust makes its way, starting point of any learning process since the discovery, by students, of pedagogical coherence.

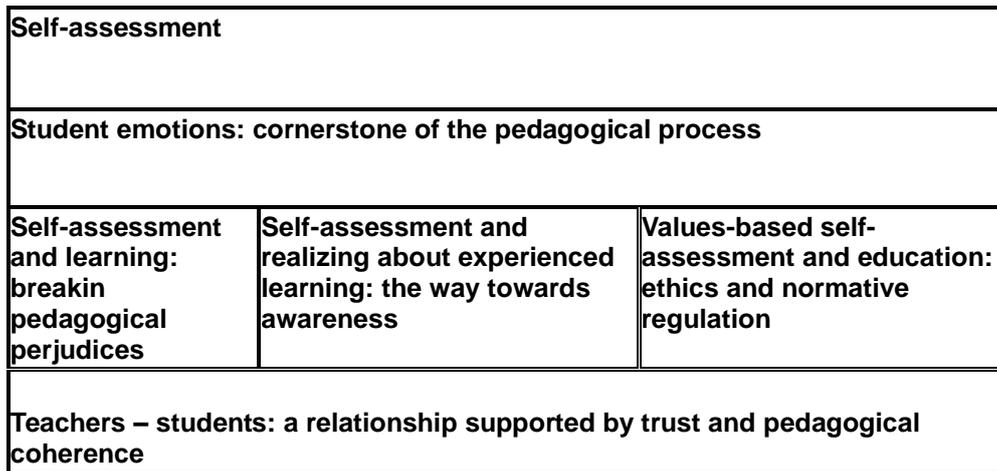


Figure 1. Self-assessment and emotions

But, let us go step by step; let us unstring and analyze all these theories and beliefs built from the participants to deeply understand what their experience in the Project of democratization of university classroom has meant for them.

“It is a very humane way, I think. Personal relationships are strongly worked during self-assessment... Then one person raised his hand to point out that he deserved a higher score. I think it is the best that can happen to anybody... I think he deserves more due to this and this..., it must be exceptional” (P1: 069).

We started with this quotation of an interviewed student because, somehow, it reflects the cornerstone of the self-assessment process experimented during the Project. The cornerstone, which undoubtedly has notoriously influenced over the other characteristics that we will expose later, is the emotions experienced by students during self-assessment. Those emotions have been mainly positive, that is to say, of acceptance and not negative or of negation.

As Maturana indicates, students in this project feel that relation of ‘accepting the other as a legitimate other during coexistence, in front of their peers and, specially, between learners and docents, lead them to not only accept the DUC proposal and the self-assessment process proposed by it, but also, and this is the most relevant to us, to be actively, responsibly and ethically involved in it.

<<...it is another value given by this course... It is a course that makes you feel important since you have to be completely responsible...>> (P7: 058).

Maturana reminds us that the emotional process is what constitutes beings as ‘human beings’ and that moved by that emotion, different rational and irrational processes emerge. According to him, the emotion permitting coexistence with the other is love.

“Love is the dominance of those relational behaviors through which another raises as legitimate in coexistence with oneself under any circumstance. Love does not legitimate the other, love let the other in

peace though seeing him and implies acting with him in such a way that his existence in the relation does not need justification”
(Maturana, 1999: 45).

Based on what has been previously commented, we decided to start our results analysis emphasizing the importance of emotions in the construction of learning of students being prepared during the process of self-assessment.

“... with feelings, with emotions, with sensations, as when you work in the practice... there, emotions arise... That is significant because you remember emotions and link them with learning” (P1: 057).

Unfortunately, these emotional processes are hidden, eluded and even criticized in a number of education proposals proclaiming themselves as innovative. The interviewed students themselves compare the traditional evaluation processes and the process of self-assessment they have been involved in, regarding this emotional criterion we are speaking about.

“I consider that people are more involved with this evaluation system, ... you learn more, because exams are not compulsory...; some persons present innate capacity to learn or memorize and are approved, and some others do not” (P10: 088).

The possibility to experience the evaluation processes as a learning instance is what drives this self-evaluation process and forces it to build pedagogical times and spaces where to share, with others, personal and common value judgments; analyze them and reflect about them, criticize them and thus continue building the pedagogical knowledge.

This process centered on emotions, of accepting the other as a legitimate other in the coexistence generated during the process of self-assessment, is what has determined the other processes characterizing it according to the students participating in the project.

Self-assessment and learning: breaking pedagogical prejudices.

Commonly, and after accepting the constructivist discourse in pedagogy, the concept of evaluation has become a trite idea, hence ending up completely distorted; used by everyone, though each one giving it a different meaning and actual dissimilar practice. This has led to, on behalf of democratic evaluation, self-evaluation, formative evaluation, etc...., the emergence of a high number of proposals, contradicting one another (Álvarez, 2001).

This happens, mainly, in the context of professional preparation in the area of PE, where progressive and novel proposals, holding pedagogical intentionality and focused on the development of critical thinking end up in a traditional assessment process. This brings as a consequence that actual students participation ends when the evaluation process begins, instance when the docent again assumes the whole responsibility of the pedagogical process and

transforms students, again, into passive entities whose only obligation now is to give stereotyped answers to questions built by someone else.

This is the way it was commented by one of the interviewed students:

“Well, I was quite skeptical this year, as last year I had had supposedly novel experiences and ...fatal... You are asked to record yourself on a video, participate in classes, take decisions..., that you have to do this and that...,but when the moment of truth came you ended up answering a test where your final score was at stake..” (P6: 007)

In spite of advances in pedagogical theories, in general, and in assessment practices, in particular, a pedagogical prejudice appears to be, at least concerning doцент practice, connecting self-assessment and self-qualification with lack of thoroughness to test built learning. This pedagogical prejudice is starting to fall down after analyzing what students under preparation to become teachers, major PE, pointed out regarding the relationship between self-assessment and learning pursued in the project “DUC”.

“Readings teach and make reflect about some aspects I never cared about before... though I see practice as the most important factor to understand, to correctly react when facing problems, to reflect and learn about your own mistakes. I have come to realize that you can better visualize your mistakes in a real class, hence you are able to share them during self-assessment to continue learning” (P12: 088)

Mistake has always been the seed for new questions driving the construction of new learning. Unfortunately, formal education, in this case teacher preparation, continues generating evaluation practices punishing mistake and, therefore, paralyzes students regarding pedagogical knowledge building, thus breaking one of the criteria intrinsic to any evaluation considered as formative.

“Assessment must be, always and in all situations, to the service of the protagonists of the teaching-learning process, and especially to the service of those individuals under the process of learning” (Álvarez, 2001: 14).

Nonetheless, the learning we mention here, appearing thanks to the process experienced during self-assessment, bears no relation with learning exclusively for those courses included in the Project “DUC”; rather, students point out to the generation of learning transcending the university classroom and addressed to life, to the real context of personal and professional performance.

“Logically, the way you are accompanies you in all scopes, not only regarding professional or university activities; all that goes shaping the way you are ..., all those sensations you have lived, that increasing in self-esteem in your daily life is reflected here; you cannot say I reserve this for my working life. That is a part of you. In self-assessment, self-

esteem produces better human relationships... it gives you more security, personally and professionally” (P1: 075).

This means that learning coming from the experienced self-assessment process is not limited to a specific time, it is not for a test bound to be taken on a determined date; rather, it is a learning lasting in time since it is based on the complexity of a deep understanding and not on a determined memorization. For the learning generated from the experienced self-assessment process to be the way we have just described, namely an everlasting learning, it must have, somehow, generated meta-cognitive processes, in response to thinking about thinking, given the way students have been building their own learning.

“I think that realizing about what you have done, what you can do, what you can improve, about your weaknesses and your strengths has to do with thought processes that can be extrapolated to real life and that will be forever useful...” (P5: 057).

If we try to relate the self-assessment process followed to the learning generated, based on the vision of the students participating in the pedagogical innovation project, worthy to be stood out is the vision the interviewed students themselves have regarding how the self-assessment process has allowed them to generate truly humane dynamics.

“It is very humane... To verbalize all the positive things we think about the others, for example, is something founded on trust we have generated in the others rooted in the self-assessment work. Experiencing such a pedagogical process, possessing these characteristics, is wonderful” (P1: 092)

Self-assessment and realizing about the experienced learning process: a way towards awareness. When we speak about awareness we refer to what Freire (2002, 2005a, 2005b) asserts regarding the process through which education gets --by living in community with the others-- to make all those involved in it be restless beyond their own survival. As Libanio (2005) would affirm, absence of commitment is expiring. Though, before getting to that state of critical awareness, Freire poses the existence of transitive conscience and semi-transitive awareness.

Transitive conscience is related to the naive conscience, of who considers himself as superior to facts; hence they do not affect him. Semi-transitive conscience belongs to the person in movement towards an understanding of the world where he realizes that he cannot control everything and that reality is independent from his wishes. This person has entered into a process of mediation. Critical conscience is where we have to get to be able to transform the world.

To criticize this conscience state in students appears as possible, though it is an ineludible step towards critical conscience, the one that permits the dialogic reflection, which generates social and political commitment.

In this pedagogic trip, one starts to comprehend that absolute truth does not lay on oneself and that there are different realities worthy to be questioned, reflected upon, dialogued and criticized. In this sense, the self-assessment process that is being researched shows us the beginning of the journey, of this ingenuous conscience that would lead us to the longed critical consciousness yearned in the higher education systems.

The journey we describe, possessing self-assessment as the cornerstone of the education process experienced in the project "DUC", is a contradictions trip, lived in first person and generating learning. We want to depict it through the following quotations:

"Being at home working in the readings to be able to criticize and really reflect and say; this is the way I think; well not...; this is the way how you really learn. Personally, this is a method I have experienced at university and which is very appropriate" (P1: 066)

"I think the most important I have learned in this course, besides from all knowledge gained from readings, is the kind of teacher I would like to be in the future, disregarding teaching models experienced at school during my infancy" (P13: 081).

The method from which students begin to identify, understand and appraise complexity involved in the self-assessment and self-qualification process is relevant; assuming that this is a practice in which, principally, there is a relationship with the other; a relationship of trust on the discourse of the other, of what he describes as working and of what he describes as wanting, etc.

"As the student role is very different; in the role of student if you say: I think your score is not in agreement with your work, how can you say it and how can you justify it? What do you really know? Can you know if that person has worked in group? If he has contributed? If he has volunteered for a practice? You do not know what that person has done at home or in his group, or how he has worked" (P1: 033).

Self-assessment and education in values: ethics and normative regulation. The process of self-assessment has also been characterized by the recognition of those persons involved in it, of the importance of those implicit and explicit values driving the decisions that each student has been taking during the development of self-assessment sessions.

The importance of this aspect does not mainly lie in recognizing that the values we possess, or we think we possess, drive our actions; instead, it lies in understanding that students' actions, both individually and collectively, have been self-regulating due to critical criteria not imposed by teachers, but criteria emerging during the pedagogical process. It appears as interesting to meditate here about the importance of the fact that values shared by a group should be created and recreated by the contextual reality that group is experiencing. What

happened and was lived by students during the self-assessment process is coherent with everything stated in the project “DUC”, since spaces and times of value conflicts have been generated by teachers, and self-generated (by students) with the intention to reconstruct and reformulate pedagogical principles that can guide our professional responsibilities in the school scope.

An example of value conflict is the one I show next:

“...I knew he was fooling me [he thinks that a classmate qualified himself with a score he did not deserve]... I think people do not do that due to pressure from the rest, I mean, I think there are some persons that have done it, but it is their problem, the students, if there is a classmate, the others do not say anything and if that classmate gets a good score, it is ok; the bad classmate, normally we are classmates in a course and we will back each other... it is very difficult” (P2: 020).

Another process symbolized by values deals with the recognition of own limitations, as that recognition may and must lead self-learning towards new paths. In the following quotation it is possible to appreciate that there is no intention to justify lack of commitment; on the contrary, consequences produced by lack of responsibility are taken on.

“I know that someone [a fellow student] knows a lot more than I do, he has shown it and has contributed to the class much more than I have, it upsets me very much [having a lower score] but I see it as logical, if you are not following a process, either you are in or out of it” (P2: 035).

It looks as if the typical problems linked to self-qualification processes start to crumble down with this way of working. Does it make any sense to compare with the others if I have had the opportunity to organize my own work, and if I have demonstrated, throughout the year, all I have been doing? How can I cheat myself?

“No, because even when it is over estimated you must have a clear conscience, hence you have to qualify yourself without comparing you to anybody else; I have never intended to score myself higher than I deserve” (P5: 039)

Professors – students: a relationship based on trust and pedagogical coherence. The creative process needs, according to Briggs and Peat (1999), enough liberty degrees. Though, freedom by itself does not generate knowledge construction, it must be accompanied by and requires of a strong emotional charge based on trust. Trust in that the other can learn since, furthermore, we are predisposed to learning; it is something consubstantial to the human being (Calvo, 2005). This trust is related to encouragement for curiosity (Moreno and Calvo, 2010). These three aspects have characterized the self-assessment process carried out in the Project “DUC” and that has brought as a result that

students participating in this research appraise very positively the experienced process.

“I evaluate it positively since I like knowing, teachers encourage students and allow them to participate..., and responsibility multiplies in the sense that, gosh, they trust in me in the sense that they have a kind of double responsibility for, I mean, I have done the work, I have done it right, I appreciate what I am doing, I see the process as positive due to that sense” (P10: 04).

Trust becomes responsibility when it is true and is not rooted, solely and exclusively, on a discourse legitimating it, rather on an action supporting it and giving coherence to that discourse.

“A spot, a faint light; I don’t know, maybe there are people that really fight, that is what I have liked the most. They have a clear mind, they know what they want and fight for that, and they do it; that is remarkable, respectable, incredible...” (P9: 019).

Pedagogical coherence shown by docents participating in this self-assessment process becomes the proof; the example that discourses of Critical Pedagogy -- most times infra-estimated by students themselves arguing that they are very interesting though the world works in a different way-- generate commitment and responsibility in the others

4. CONCLUSIONS

Emotion, understood as the acceptance of the other as a legitimate other in coexistence, has been the cornerstone of the experienced self-assessment process, since it has induced to the active, responsible and ethical implication of that process; thus permitting the contextualization of the different pedagogical knowledges built.

Self-evaluation complexity has been lived and experienced thanks to the freedom students have had to make autonomous decisions, despite the fact that they may be making mistakes. Error has been assumed as one of the most relevant source of learning, which has permitted students to generate their own questions to drive their own learning.

Learnings, generated during the self-assessment process, transcend the university classroom to become learnings for life, for the real context of personal and professional performance, thanks to the fact that the self-assessment process has permitted to encourage meta-cognitive processes -- to think about thinking -- thus building its own learnings.

Self-assessment has been experienced as a journey to responsible freedom, generating the desire to be actively and responsibly involved in the process of pedagogical knowledge building.

Self-assessment has become an acknowledgement process about the importance of unveiling those implicit values driving all our actions and that, somehow, condition our mission in the world, regulating itself based on some emerging ethical criteria and recognizing one's own limitations, inviting to think about oneself and about our responsibility in our daily obligations.

Trust between teachers – students and among students has permitted a strong responsibility regarding decisions taken by each student during the self-assessment and self-qualification process, assuming consequences, either positive or/and negative, brought about as consequence of those decisions.

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