



**Joint Efforts for Innovation:  
Working Together  
to Improve  
Foreign Language  
Teaching in the  
21st Century**

**Dolors Masats, Maria Mont  
& Nathaly González-Acevedo (Editors)**

## **A book for the curious and passionate 21<sup>st</sup> century language teachers and teacher trainers.**

Tired of reading about the wonders of technology enhanced project-based learning but not knowing where to seek inspiration to start to adopt this teaching approach? A team of in-service teachers, teacher trainers, pre-service teachers and researchers have worked together to present a simple, engaging and practical book to offer fellow education professionals stimulating ideas for their teaching practice.

### **Joint efforts for innovation: Working together to improve foreign language teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century** offers:

- Inspiring classroom projects and innovative teaching experiences.
- A compilation of digital tools and resources for the foreign language classroom.
- Pioneering proposals to open up the classroom doors.
- Problem-solving and inquiry-based tasks that promote team work.
- Honest reflections from practitioners on their classroom practices.

This book includes

- accessible examples of teacher-led classroom research small-scale studies.
- calls for teachers to do research in their classrooms.
- personal accounts on the importance of school internships for pre-service teachers.

This book is an invitation for practicing teachers and teacher trainers to be creative and to develop learning skills, literacy skills and life skills.

Are you ready to become an innovative 21<sup>st</sup> century educator?



**JOINT EFFORTS FOR INNOVATION:  
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# The benefits of hosting an intern student

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## Introduction

*Do you want to have an intern student?* This is the typical question that headteachers ask the teachers at their school. Sometimes, they already know who they should address or not, because, in many cases, the answer is NO. Luckily, however, there is always someone who says YES. In my school, I am that person. It is also true that I have colleagues who say YES, but unfortunately there are not many.

For some years now, the headteacher in my school no longer asks me if I want to have an internship student, she takes it for granted, and now her question is different: How many do you want? And there have been years in which I have had three student teachers in my class. The reasons why I want to have intern students in my classroom are several and all are good, of course, but I think I should start this article by reflecting upon why I think some fellow teachers do not want to have student teachers in their classrooms. Then I will provide arguments to prove that school internships are worthy for all parties involved: mentors, interns and primary pupils. Finally, I will support my viewpoint with the account of my personal experience both as an intern student and as a mentor.

## Why don't all teachers want to host interns students in their classrooms?

In Catalonia, the process of selecting schools that can host student teachers and the tasks expected from the practicum coordinators and school mentors are regulated by the Policy Act of 17<sup>th</sup> October 2017 (ORDRE ENS/237/2017) created by the Generalitat de Catalunya. The document established that school mentors must have a minimum of three years of teaching experience, should have taken part in projects developed at the host school and need to be in possession of a teacher qualification in the same areas of expertise of the potential student teachers under their mentoring. School mentors are expected to conduct the following tasks:

- To welcome and guide student teachers throughout their internship.
- To determine whether the educational project designed by universities for student teachers is adequate to the school mission.

- To offer trainees teaching and professional models and opportunities for observing good educational practices.
- To observe and evaluate the actions taken by student teachers and share with them reflections on teaching and learning.
- To encourage student teachers to take initiatives and value the viability of their teaching proposals.
- To promote the participation of student teachers in the activities organised at the school and offer them guidelines on how to conduct the various teaching tasks in a classroom.
- To collaborate with university practicum tutors to evaluate student teachers.

If we review those tasks, we can easily understand why some teachers say NO to having an internship student. We, teachers, already have too many regular duties to be able to take on extra tasks during the same working period. This is why they say NO to have one more student in the classroom. And I say ‘one more student’, because this is how they see a pre-service teacher: someone they would also have to teach. In short, more work. Many teachers feel they do not have time to guide the learning process of another person, to coordinate with university tutors, to adapt their own planning and agenda to the needs of the student teachers. Those tasks can really be overwhelming.

Other factors that explain why some teachers are reluctant to have intern students relate to the constraints set by universities, especially those related to what students should do and when. Sometimes it is complicated to combine our class schedule with the agenda of internship students. Some universities set which is the day of the week in which trainees must be at school, without asking school teachers whether they have lessons on the subjects student teachers must observe. This, sometimes, forces teachers to change their schedule, but that is not always possible. The educational programme set by universities for their student teachers establishes that they should plan and implement a teaching unit. This work is supervised by university tutors. Ideally, they should contact school mentors first to come to an agreement with regards to the contents to be taught and the methodology that student teachers would use, but this is not always the case. Having to alter one’s schedule and syllabus is not easy and acceptable for all teachers.

### **Why do we have to say YES to have an intern student?**

Despite these drawbacks, having an internship student in the classroom is beneficial for all the parties involved.

### *Advantages for schools*

Schools which participate in internship programmes are in constant contact with universities and therefore they have easy access to new methods, teaching materials and resources, and to updated knowledge on how to enhance learning. This is an element of transformation and improvement for schools.

### *Advantages for mentors*

Mentoring someone means putting your skills to the test as you need to let student teachers observe good practices. This triggers your motivation to continue learning, to expand your knowledge and understanding of the contents you teach and how you teach them. You learn to look at your subject from a different perspective, with a different attitude and that is rewarding for your growth as a teacher, but it also benefits your students. And, of course, helping others learn is a great satisfaction.

In addition, having an intern student in your classroom offers you opportunities for conducting tasks you could not do if you were by yourself. You learn to collaborate with another teacher and being able to take joint decisions empowers you both.

### *Advantages for intern students*

Being able to learn to teach under the guidance of a skilled educator is self-assuring. Student teachers have a hands-on personalised and structured learning experience that allows them to put theory into practice, observe good practices and become familiar with what really occurs in the classroom. It is a valuable opportunity for their personal and professional growth, one that increases that increases their self-esteem.

### *Advantages for primary students*

Having two teachers in the classroom is a luxury that, unfortunately, not all schools can afford due to lack of sufficient staff. When class teachers can work hand in hand with intern students, they can adopt more student-centred methodologies, which will undoubtedly be beneficial for the students in that group. There is greater attention to diversity, the space is democratized, students do not need to be engaged in the same tasks, managing group work is easier, etc. In short, an intern student reinforces learning.

### **My experience as an intern student**

I am part of the 2000 promotion of teachers of the Faculty of Education at

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, the teachers of the new millennium. I remember that at our graduation ceremony we were told that we were the generation of teachers that could end the era of traditional teaching practices because we had been trained to put into practice new methods. Unfortunately, that was not what I had experienced.

I still have bad memories from the time spent at a school during my first practicum internship. During the two-month period I stayed at the school, my only job was to make photocopies, paint murals in the corridors (alone, without students) and be seated in a corner of the classroom observing how my mentor taught her master classes, in which I never participated. Those practices were so boring and unfulfilling that I even questioned whether I wanted to complete my studies. There was one thing I learnt: what I do not want my intern students to experience in my classroom.

Fortunately, during my second and last internship I lived a completely different unforgettable experience. I learnt a lot with my mentor. She helped me understand how I could cater for the needs and interests of the students in the group, to treat them equally, value them all and myself, too. She made me love the profession I had chosen and be confident with my personality qualities and my teaching skills.

### **What does it take for me to have an intern student?**

I have been a primary teacher and English mentor for more than 10 years. As I said earlier, I typically host two or three intern students in my classroom. I consider that intern students are a great support for me and for the students in my group. The experience is worthy because we co-teach. To me, they are already teachers, still being trained, but teachers who come to our classrooms to help us all.

I consider myself a flexible teacher who easily adapts to changes, who loves to experience new teaching methods and to try new things. I am fascinated by new technologies and am always keen on taking risks to explore how they can be turned into learning tools. Having younger teachers in my classroom helps me keep updated on the latest teaching methods and the trendiest digital technologies. As a counterpart, I share with them what I do. I put my experience and my advice at their service, and above all, I try to transmit them my passion for this profession.



## **Concluding remarks**

I encourage all my colleagues to welcome intern students in their classrooms. The experience will be enriching as pre-service teachers bring fresh air, change the classroom dynamics, inspire new teaching practices and share updated resources and materials. The only dull task they would be asked do is to fill out the documentation required to take part in an internship programme as a mentor. Everything else is personal enrichment.