

TEACHER EDUCATORS and TEACHERS as LEARNERS

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

EDITED BY

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CHAPTER 4

Advancement of Teaching in Higher Education: a Portuguese Project

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Abstract

The paper presents a pedagogical intervention project, originated at the College of Education of the Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra, Portugal, in 2007. The ultimate goal of this project is to promote innovation, quality and excellence in higher education. Currently, the project has several activities and resources, available for higher education teaching staff and researchers who wish to improve their pedagogical skills. These include workshops, publications, teaching tips, and consulting services that address subjects as diverse as: teaching in the classroom; tutorial teaching; e-learning; assessment methods; motivation; and diversity of students. Besides being an important means of pedagogical support, these resources are also seen as an important way to disseminate pedagogical methods, strategies and innovative ideas for higher education. The project is informed by and connected to the recent literature and research on college teaching.

Key words: College teachers, Higher Education, Pedagogical support, Pedagogy

Some thoughts about the redefinition of teaching and learning

In recent decades, higher education institutions all over the globe have been redefining their view of teaching and learning, responding to advances in educational and psychological research on one hand, and to economic and social challenges on the other. Higher education institutions have been subject to the pressure of a competitive market place, which demands from them a proper preparation of undergraduate and graduate students and citizens.

This redefinition, that was greatly pushed forward by The Bologna Accord, resulted in a consequent shift in the way roles were being redefined, and educational practices were being planned and executed.

In Cross (2001) and Pinto's (2008) perspectives we were, and still are, watching a paradigm shift, concerned to foster more learning and less instruction. As Evans and Nation (2000) put it, on regard to the contemporary universities "change is the name of the game" (p. 160). Because of these transformations, more or less imposed on the system, the enhancement of meaningful and useful learning became the pedagogical focus.

Traditionally, it was expected that a teacher in a higher education system would instruct students in a certain discipline or domain. The most common pedagogical approaches were meant to convey information and this was confined to the classroom. The student was expected to attend classes, listen, study and reproduce the information imparted, usually in a written exam.

But, the change from a traditional on-campus teaching, with an exclusive system of teaching and learning to one of an open university, without walls and with an inclusive system of teaching and learning has been set (Peters, 2000), and demanded some shifts and posed a few challenges.

Teaching in higher education is nowadays a more complex endeavor (Beckerman, 2010) in which the teacher has to build educational experiences, sometimes settings, guided by the goal of enhancing students' knowledge, cognitive and psychosocial skills and learning engagement. The creation of such educational experiences is no longer confined to the classroom or instruction. Several other educational activities (such as mentoring, guiding and advising), or settings (classroom, surrounding community, enterprises, organizations) are equally part of the equation. Teachers' and students' roles are, by definition, in a major and continuous flux. Students are expected to become active, engaged and autonomous in the learning process instead of being mere passive receptors and reproducers. The teacher is expected to facilitate or promote active learning, rather than just impart information and assess its acquisition by students on a final exam. Accordingly, learning is not just receiving and remembering new information, but rather understanding what the new information means and integrating it to what one already knows, it's connecting new information to a learner's former or existing knowledge thereby creating something new and learning is also viewed more as a process where the learner keeps learning on a continuous basis.

Some researchers consider that the process of using new knowledge to interpret experiences and enhance understanding is a social process, resulting from social interaction, rather than solely an individual process. According to Vygotsky (1962; 1978), individuals' development occurs in two mutually dependent levels: the social level (social interactions between individuals) and the intrapersonal level. To this author, the interpersonal process is converted into an intrapersonal one. Social discourse is used to interact with others, and internal discourse, with a self-regulating function, is used to talk to one's self, to think about, to reflect critically.

Inspired by Vygotsky's work, more recent researchers such as Goldstein (1999), Levine, Resnick and Higgins (1996) and Wenger (1998), came to claim that environments are a fundamental part of thought and emotional growth and development. According to these authors, environments can't be regarded as a set of circumstances in which cognitive and emotional processes function independently. Environment seems to matter.

From these researchers two main ideas arise. Firstly the learning process is active and constructed. Secondly, the building of new knowledge and meanings are closely connected with learning contexts and environments. In order to enhance individuals' higher order thought skills such as analysis, synthesis, reflexive judgment, critical thinking, and problem solving skills these contexts and environments must be necessarily rich and engaging (Astin, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Braskamp and Ory (1994) also argue that a learning environment that promotes cooperation rather than competition, and proficiency rather than social comparisons, will encourage students to develop the important skill of self directed learning.

From all that has been written, the teacher's responsibility looms largely in the task of creating rich and engaging educational environments. This change in emphasis from instruction towards learning, demands from the teacher a whole new set of pedagogical skills.

Pedagogical approaches must also answer to a public becoming more diverse each day, which poses more challenges on us about teaching and learning processes (Pinto, 2008). Cannon and Newble (2000) also call attention to the diversity of student population, the consequent greater flexibility in learning and teaching and the concern to ensure equity in the education provided for all students. They address other challenges that are also important in our perspective and work, including strategies to internationalize higher education, a growing recognition of emotional

aspects, the enhancement of lifelong learning, and the use of technology as a tool in learning and teaching.

According to this, we believe that such responsibility demands institutional support systems and opportunities that can assist teachers with these overwhelming and continuously evolving tasks. This assumption explains the beginning of Project OPDES (Orientações Pedagógicas para Docentes do Ensino Superior - Pedagogical Guidelines for Faculty), a pedagogical intervention project, originated at the College of Education of the Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra, Portugal, in 2007.

For the purpose of the project presented here, the redefinitions of teaching and learning and the provisions of support for advancement in teaching must necessarily be framed within a conceptual model for a better understanding of teachers' training needs, their perceptions of teaching and its enacted practices. Our choice falls on Kuh and associates (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Kuh & Hall, 1993) approach of institutional culture. According to these researchers, in order to understand how teachers behave, one must know and describe its culture. Higher education institutions are more than buildings, resources, politics and practices. They are also social communities, with a culture of its own. For this point, as stated by Fanghanel (2004, p. 578), "context is all important in making sense of an initiative of this nature".

Institutional Culture: a framing reference for a better understanding of OPDES experience

According to Kuh and Hall (1993, p. 12–13), institutional culture is defined as "the collective mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs and assumptions which guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an institution of higher education and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus." According to these authors, institutional culture can be regarded as a lens through which members of a higher education institution (e.g. teachers or lecturers) observe and evaluate their academic experiences. This lens, as they call it, can become very useful tool for shedding light on how teachers interact with their institutions' disciplines' and departments' various characteristics and properties, concerning their approach to teaching and learning.

Four levels of analysis are possible: artifacts, perspectives, strategic values and beliefs (Kuh 1996; Kuh & Hall, 1993). Artifacts, considered the most

visible properties of an institutional culture, include physical, verbal and behavioral features that identify participants as members. All higher education institutions have physical (e.g. buildings, surrounding landscapes or other physical attributes of reference), verbal (e.g. language, stories, myths associated with its own culture) and behavioral artifacts (e.g. activities, events, daily rituals and ceremonies) that bind its members.

Perspectives refer to behavior rules and social norms that have become widely shared inside the institution. These keep its members aware of how things should be done and determine what is acceptable considering the different institutional settings.

Strategic values, the mirror of an institution's ideals, guide its members in the judgment of situations, actions, objects, people, or at problems resolution. Kuh and collaborators (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006) refer to these as the declared/ espoused missions and philosophies. However, not always the declared values necessarily correspond to what it's actually done (the enacted mission and values).

Institutional culture also includes the beliefs used by its members (e.g. teachers) to define their roles, their relationships with others and the nature of the institution in which they work. These beliefs are connected to their praxis. An interesting study conducted by Fanghanel (2009) reveals us that teachers' ideologies about their field play a very important role in their discipline conceptions and practices.

Most of higher education institutions have different subcultures, which may differ in terms of its values and beliefs (e.g. students, teachers, and staff belong to different subgroups). Even between teachers' group, several subcultures can be identified according, for example, to their field of expertise or discipline, to the department to which they belong, etc.

In sum, culture is entangled in institutional' mission and philosophy, policies and practices, traditions and interactions between its members. It's worth noting teachers' representations or conceptions of teaching and learning are closely attached to the context and to the meanings they give to their experiences. According to Fanghanel (2004, p. 579), because human activity is rather complex, its comprehension requires necessarily analyzing the context, i.e., take into account the interactions between people involved in the activity, in which structures such interactions occur, its underlying conventions and artifacts being used.

The Polytechnic of Coimbra has presently six colleges that offer undergraduate and post-graduate studies in the field of hard applied and soft applied disciplines. Each college has its own teaching and learning culture. Even sometimes, inside the same college, different perspectives and praxis coexist, because different fields of expertise are organized into departments, each with its conceptions and values (espoused and enacted).

Recently, a study conducted by Silva (2012) with teachers from one of these colleges confirmed, within this context, interesting issues, of importance for the project. In order to know teachers' perspectives about institutional mission and values and beliefs about teaching and learning and how those conceptions reflected on their teaching practices, Silva (2012) conducted a qualitative study with 21 teachers from one of the colleges of Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra. Afterwards, 31 students from all undergraduate courses were interviewed in order to understand if enacted practices were consonant with "espoused practices". For a better understanding, teachers from different disciplines (performing arts, social sciences, engineering, education) were selected.

For the most part of the teachers, the main mission of higher education was teaching. Only a few mentioned research. This conception reflects Portuguese history about the two existing systems of higher education: university, historically more concerned about research, and polytechnic more focused on vocational training/teaching and on applied science. Another interesting data allowed us to realize that teaching meant two things, mainly for teachers whose disciplines were in the domain of social sciences and education: to prepare students to become good professionals in their domain of expertise and to guide them towards their full potential as individuals, i.e., to foster their global development, further than just intellectual development. To teachers from engineering, teaching was more focused on vocational training. Accordingly, teachers conceived their role and pedagogical enactments: the first group of teachers was fonder of using a great diversity of pedagogical methods (e.g. active learning strategies, collaborative learning, researching and analyzing, reflexive portfolios, oral presentations and discussions of students findings, experiences resembling working experience, prompt feedback about students learning process and results); the second group focused their efforts on getting students into the subject through lectures and providing students with learning experiences similar to professional

contexts, stimulating them so solve problems, and always being present to support their learning.

Because espoused conceptions and values don't necessary mean they are enacted, students were also asked to talk about classes dynamics, confirming and validating teachers' conceptions and practices inside and outside classes. This lead us to the perception that teachers' conceptions and values of teaching and learning are a strong guide of their pedagogical behavior inside and outside class.

This study was also important by the fact it supported an assumption present since the very beginning of the project OPDES, when the first contact was made with different teachers coming from all the colleges of Polytechnic Institute: they all had different perspectives about teaching and learning, partly resulting from their experiences as teachers in a particular cultural context and their expectations towards the project reflected exactly that. One important implication for the project, if we wanted it to become successful was that any initiative/activity taken should take into consideration each teaching subculture. Another was for the need of constantly getting on feedback about their teaching needs, considering their institution mission and values in order to provide with proper and prompt support.

The organization's culture is not immune to external influence. On the one hand, if institutional culture influences the way an individual thinks and behaves, on the other, new students, teachers, other institutions or agencies outside also present its influence by bringing different perspectives and fostering different attitudes. These differences can stimulate productive disagreements and force the institution to examine its practices.

Higher education pedagogy: beginning and evolution in Portugal

Despite the fact that research about pedagogical issues and practices at Portuguese higher education institutions is still relatively new, "scarce, incomplete and fragmentary" (Esteves, 2012, p. 56), there have been some developments over the last years, revealing that the recognition and interest in this domain is growing (Alarcão & Gil, 2004; Esteves, 2012).

Esteves (2012, p. 63) tell us about some "pioneering" experiences in Portugal, examples that this author considers "paths to a fruitful alliance between research - teaching - quality". Such experiences include the engagement

of teachers from different academic disciplines in group research projects, guided by the need to understand the phenomena, to introduce innovations and assess its effects.

This increased interest in the improvement of pedagogical skills among college and university teachers has led some researchers in our country to talk about a movement, whose main intention is to raise the profile of higher education pedagogy through its discussion and dissemination (Vieira, Silva, & Almeida, 2010). The Project OPDES is a purposeful contribution to this movement since it highlights pedagogical knowledge and skills as a central aspect of faculty activities.

Over the last decade, the redefining of the higher education system and faculty activity has been a reality we cannot deny (Ramos, 2010). From a system focused on research and knowledge reproduction, we have been gradually redefining its role to one more focused on vocational and professional qualification along with the student's psychosocial development. Since the Bologna Process, these changes have become clearer and inevitable. In fact as Cunha, Amaro and Marques (2010) note, the organization of a European Education Area brought us new responsibilities concerning among others, new ways of curricula management based on the development of competences, and teaching and learning approaches different from those of a very recent past. The current European educational space, more uniform thanks to the Bologna accord, also demands that higher education institutions rethink faculty pedagogical training to adjust to this new European project aligned with the local needs.

It is assumed that in order to be or become a good teacher, a solid background within the scientific domain is no longer enough. Pedagogical knowledge and skills are also needed, and these can be promoted, learned, researched, and shared. There is a large group of researchers that pinpoint the importance of certain pedagogical practices and methods for students' learning, engagement and academic success (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Tinto, 1997, 2002, 2003, 2006–2007).

Quality in Higher Education demands great investment in pedagogical activities (Marques & Pinto, 2012). We consider traditional punctual, unarticulated pedagogical training, most of the time exclusively supported by the teacher alone, as neither adequate nor sufficient. Additionally, in agreement with Ambrósio (2001), we believe that faculty pedagogical training should

surpass or go far beyond the mere improvement of technical skills needed for the management of the pedagogical act, and also focus on the building of teachers' and researchers' pedagogical knowledge and teaching/training skills, underlining here a double role: teaching and researching on teaching and learning. In order to achieve this double function, spaces of shared discussion, learning opportunities that allow teachers to experiment and solve problems in action research modes (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000), must be fostered and aligned, as previously stated, with the institutional mission and values of higher education institutions (Kuh et al., 2005). As Huba and Freed recognized "few of us have had opportunities to study teaching the way we study topics in our own disciplines" (2000, p. 2).

To find a synergy between teaching and research (Kember & MacNaught 2007, p.139) we may present three examples:

"The first example shows how research can benefit teaching by providing real-life applications as interesting cases illustrating the application of theory."

"The second example is of teaching benefiting research. Ideas and material for publications can come from planning courses and activities in courses."

"The final form of synergy comes from teachers researching into their own teaching. Innovative teaching can be turned into publications."

As Light and Cox (2001) describe, there are tensions separating three 'worlds' – student, teacher and researcher. As they illustrate in Figure 1 Diagram A, the linear model, the teaching-research relationship is detached. "One practice is 'achieved' at the expense of the other practice".

Diagram A
(Linear Model)



Diagram B
(Intersubjective Model)

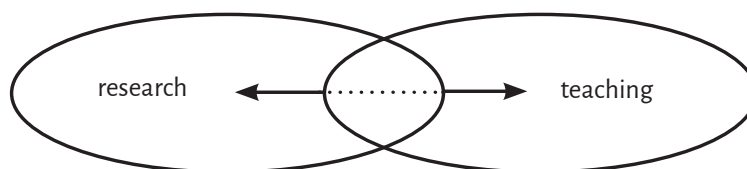


Figure 1 - Conceptualizing research and teaching (Light & Cox, 2001, p. 35)

In Figure1 Diagram B, the ‘intersubjective’ model, the relationship is described in terms of the ‘overlap’ between teaching and research, in a constructive engagement. The figure proposes two ways to achieve this: from research to teaching and from teaching to research. This model applies Schön’s (1983) perspective of reflective practice and establishes a dialogue between these worlds, in an integrated understanding about the higher education world.

The guiding principles of OPDES are not founded in a restrictive conception of pedagogy, focused solely on the teaching and learning processes. On the contrary, these principles consider the higher education system as a multidimensional and complex context of four developmental axes suggested by Zabalza (2002): university politics; subjects, curriculum, science and technology; professional activity; students and the market place. The activities of the OPDES Project were designed to support faculty in the acquisition and improvement of pedagogical skills and the enhancement of reflexive and active questioning about the pedagogical practices of each and all, aligned with the ultimate goal of higher education: the development of highly successful students and therefore societies.

The efficacy of teaching and students’ success can be improved if faculty are provided with access to the pedagogical training, support and consultancy needed to help them to know, for instance, how an individual thinks as a student, which aspects determine the learning they accomplish, and which methods or pedagogical approaches best fit the diversity in a classroom. The availability of institutional structures and support services is one important

step that can help faculty to consider the problems faced, and find, through the cooperation among peers and/or through technical support, the best solutions to solve such problems.

Portugal is still in need of a long standing tradition of action-research in this area, like that in many European countries, mainly the Anglo-Saxon countries, where for more than three decades faculty activity is thought to require specific pedagogical training. As Esteves (2012, p. 57) states “what we need to know to work in a given course, in a given subject, with a given group of students at a given institution is not prescribed in advance. We need to discover it by using the “action schemas” from theory and, if possible, constructing new theories from practices that are the subject of systematic inquiry, especially if we want to produce pedagogical change and innovation.”

In accordance with Correia and Mesquita (2006), we also advocate the urgency of providing opportunities for faculty to learn and develop innovative pedagogical approaches that can foster students’ success and learning.

Research development about and in teaching is a fundamental way to enhance a positive impact on teachers’ pedagogical practices (Vieira, 2009). Therefore, teachers should be the protagonists of their own professional development in teaching (Esteves, 2012). The redefinition of professional teaching requires teachers to study their practices, engage in dialogue with each other and disseminate their experiences, contradicting the pedagogical isolation that has characterized their work for so long, “abandoning definitely the pedagogical autism as a way of being a teacher” (Vieira, 2009, p. 293).

Such processes of professional development of Higher Education teachers, based in individual or team project, action-research, collaborative and problem solving oriented, need to be institutionally supported (Esteves, 2012).

Pedagogical support for college teachers: The Project OPDES and the teaching center CINEP

In recent years, the pedagogical support for the teachers of our institution has been provided through several means, mainly by intensive workshops and through an open access resource bank, which includes books about teaching and learning in higher education, pedagogical methods and techniques, and an editorial line that publishes papers from colleagues based in other institutions. These initiatives have been offered not only to our

college's teachers, but also to teachers from other colleges of the Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra.

This intervention project, currently supported by a research team, with the valued contribution and involvement of other teachers from almost all colleges of the Polytechnic Institute, started with two projects: "Pedagogical Guidelines for Faculty" (OPDES) and "Pedagogical Training for Faculty" (FPES) in 2007. During the first stage, between 2007 and 2008, these projects ran with public funds from a Portuguese state organization, Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia. At this point the project was only intended for our Polytechnic faculty. However, today the new resources available are suitable for any college teacher and staff member from public or private higher education institutions that might be interested in acquiring or deepening pedagogical knowledge and skills. Indirectly, and long term, it's intended that college students can benefit from the project's actions and results, mainly in terms of their success, learning and development.

From the very beginning the Project benefited from an international partnership with two centers for pedagogical support and research: University Center for the Advancement of Teaching from Ohio State University, former FTAD-Faculty & TA Development (Columbus, Ohio, USA), and Centre for Teaching Excellence from the University of Waterloo, former TRACE-Teaching Resources and Continuing Education (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada). These centers are organizational structures that provide support for the diverse departments, schools and faculty through a range of activities such as pedagogical guidance and support, conferences, workshops, seminars, personal consultancy, support for research projects, planning programs and pedagogical coordination. This is in line with our intention to introduce university teachers to international culture and to other universities of a reputable international standard (Kember & McNaught, 2007).

In our project the partnership included technical consultancy and external assessment, as well as the acquisition of copyrights for using, translating and adapting some of their pedagogical resources. Being more oriented towards pedagogical training of faculty, both projects (OPDES and FPES) were articulated to develop the following activities and resources:

- a) Planning and development of workshops, debates, and conferences focused on pedagogy in higher education;
- b) Conception, production, adjustment and divulgation of pedagogical resources for college teachers or faculty;

- c) Editing of booklets and manuals concerning several pedagogical issues;
- d) Acquisition of books about learning and teaching in higher education, as well as didactical videos and pedagogical games;
- e) Building a website in order to spread and make available electronic resources and give pedagogical support to faculty training. These resources support faculty in training sessions or self-directed learning. The project website is located at the Teachers' College webpage (www.esec.pt).

Since the very beginning of the Project's planning and implementation, there has been concern to assure the quality and relevance of these resources, which was mainly due to the international partnership with the aforementioned centers. A pilot course was designed, based on initial faculty pedagogical needs assessment. The evaluations of the participants were essential because they allowed the team to more precisely define their pedagogical training needs and to adjust not only the online resources (teaching tips), but the pedagogical approaches of the trainers themselves during the workshops.

The development of the project was also informed by a focus group with some teachers from our college, who contributed with proposals, critiques and suggestions. Some of these were used to improve the presentation and management of the online teaching tips, at the project's webpage. With the ending of the funding for both projects at the end of 2008 (FPES was more focused on pedagogical training through offering 29 workshops; and OPDES was more focused to make available a permanent resources bank), the team has continued the editorial activity and the improvement of the website.

As a result of the project success and the interest of teaching staff in the institutions, a new teaching center has been created in the institution. In the "Strategic and Action Plan for the 2009–2013 Quadrennial of the Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra", the creation of a pedagogical training and innovation centre was planned to better qualify the teaching staff of the institution, as delineated in our mission statement: "To create a support and teacher training center for higher education teachers, with the aim of helping to promote pedagogical qualification innovation, quality and excellence (...). The activity of this center must be articulated with the colleges'/institutes' Pedagogical Boards and serve as an instrument of intervention attuned to the results of the pedagogical evaluation of the teachers of the IPC" (p. 13).

This new structure, Centro de Inovação e Estudo da Pedagogia no Ensino Superior/ Centre for the Study and Advancement of Pedagogy in Higher Education (CINEP) – www.cinep.ipc.pt – generated new energy and enlarged

OPDES' scope of intervention, inheriting the legacy of the projects OPDES and FPES, by developing, at an institutional level, the pilot-activities started with these projects, and including consultancy, individualized tutoring, pedagogical accreditation, continuing training (workshops, courses and seminars) and the organization of an annual symposium with national and international participation.

We will briefly present these results and products developed over the last 8 years, acknowledging in advance the fact that the goals of both the funded projects OPDES and FPES and the activity of the teaching center CINEP have been largely accomplished through the voluntary involvement of a group of college teachers and researchers interested in pedagogical issues in higher education and already envisaged as a true learning community.

Results and products

1. BOOKLET SERIES AND MONOGRAPHIC SERIES

The major concerns of this two series (the booklets and the Educational Guides) revolve around the processes of teaching and learning in post-secondary education. Methods, activities, strategies and processes that foster the learning process and promote the efficacy of teaching are the core issue in this publication.

The booklet series *Pedagogy in Higher Education* is published twice a year (in July and December) by CINEP, both online and in paper version, and articles can be published in Portuguese, English, French or Spanish. Case studies, examples of successful projects, the explanation of specific teaching methods, study plans and teaching tips are all welcome in the articles. These can be original contributions or unpublished conference papers. At this time, almost thirty issues have been published. They cover diverse topics including: teaching methods, curriculum development, e-learning and b-learning, learning styles, collaborative learning, transformative evaluation, academic fraud and plagiarism.

The most recent Monographic Series *Educational Guides*, is published online and in paper version, having six volumes published and six new ones on press. This is a non-periodic collection of monographs focused on specific topics and aiming to provide faculty with specific guidelines for the educational activity. The contributions are practice-oriented and although rigorous and informed by scientific evidence, they include orientations for teaching staff, teaching tips, and strategies or methods easily replicated or adapted.

This series is a complementary resource to the booklets, because they are practice oriented, beyond just developing the chosen topics theoretically.

2. PEDAGOGICAL TRAINING AND THE ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM

Several conferences, workshops and courses have been organized for the teaching staff of the Polytechnic of Coimbra. The training sessions are planned from the needs analysis conducted with teachers and based on their working contexts. Since the first twenty nine workshops, organized under the auspices of the project FPES, seven years ago, more than a hundred sessions where implemented and successful.

Because it wasn't a specific training focused on the scientific disciplines, a shared space was created for reflection, where the teachers from different scientific domains and schools shared problems, reflections and strategies. The evaluation of the workshops and courses is very positive and the majority of the participants usually express a desire for this training to continue, because they recognize not only its contribution to enrich their pedagogical competences, but also the valuable opportunities for debate to discuss and reflect upon problems with positive effects contributing to a sense of cohesion and institutional identity. For many teachers the sharing and critical reflection of their practices through the eyes and ears of their peers is a useful way of becoming critically aware. Brookfield (1995) tells us something very similar. Colleagues' perceptions can help us to acquire a more clear understanding of our practices in need of more attentive analysis. Even with colleagues outside their disciplinary area, teachers acknowledge that they are not alone in their particular concerns. As Kamber and McNaught (2007, p. 17) argue, "if there is a disciplinary body connected to teaching, the focus is probably on what is taught (...) disciplinary bodies do not differ significantly in terms of their vision of what constitutes quality in teaching." The conversations and reflections promoted by this opportunity opened the door to sharing new ways of analyzing problems and new ways of solving them.

Besides the courses and workshops, CINEP started, in its very first year of activity the organization of the International Symposium Study and Advancement of Teaching in Higher Education (SATHE), now already in its fourth edition. This is a successful event, gathering in a couple of days the teaching staff of the whole institution for discussing issues of teaching, pedagogy and related topics.

3. LEARNING RESOURCES

Our institution has a long history in teacher training, but the library didn't have specific books or pedagogical resources for higher education teachers. As a result of our projects, the library of the College of Education has now more than sixty technical resources, including reference books about various issues within the domain of pedagogy in higher education, videos (about lecture, role-playing, body expression and voice, collaborative learning, debate moderation) and pedagogical games (simulation games, group dynamics, icebreaking, creativity promotion and problem solving, motivation games and leadership...).

4. TEACHING TIPS

The teaching tips cover diverse issues of interest for the teachers and are perhaps the simplest, but most effective product of this initiative. They provide, in a quick reading, practical ideas to make teaching more effective, because they can be adapted to the teaching activities of each teacher, regardless of the subjects and degrees. They can be read independently. Most of the teaching tips were translated and adapted from materials from the partners of the Project. Although there are forty-three teaching tips available at the moment, this is a work still in progress, with a lot of potential to be explored.

5. WEBSITE AND SOCIAL NETWORKING: ESEC.PT/OPDES, CINEP.IPC.PT AND FACEBOOK

The first website (www.esec.pt/opdes) was built to promote the dissemination of the materials produced and to support the faculty's pedagogical training. With the creation of the teaching center CINEP, part of the contents of this website, have been relocated and can be seen now at cinep.ipc.pt. This website allows the access to the several publications, such as the Booklets and the Educational Guides, teaching tips, interesting Links and reference documents, and updated information about the activities of the center, such as training, conferences, co-working, learning communities and so on. A facebook page is connected to the website and there a range of interesting events, publications and conference/ paper calls are updated on a daily basis.

6. INTERNATIONAL NETWORKING: INAPHE

CINEP created an international network called INAPHE – International Networking for the Advancement of Pedagogy on Higher Education. The mission of INAPHE is to contribute toward pedagogical innovation and quality in higher education through international cooperation of teachers and researchers. INAPHE is focused on pedagogical study and innovation in higher education, and is composed of an international network of cooperation among these institutions of higher education, via teaching support services for teachers, departments and centers of investigation.

INAPHE's members cooperate in the realm of higher education pedagogy for development of international I&D studies and projects, staff mobility, synergies for international financing, academic publications, and consulting and support for professional development of professors. The network promotes and facilitates international R&D teams, the study of teaching and learning and teaching technologies, International cooperation for innovation in higher education, Staff Mobility, Consultancy for professional development of teachers and academic Publications (especially through the booklets and monograph series).

Final notes

From what has just been stated and described, one may infer the level of effort and importance of these initiatives. Inquiries and regular assessment of the activities developed show that there's an unanimous opinion that these activities are innovative, relevant and worth maintaining.

Publishing online and paper versions of booklets and teaching tips has been an important instrument for the dissemination of methods, strategies and innovative ideas in teaching and learning. The symposium SATHE, started in 2011, is seen as a very special opportunity for the teaching staff of the Polytechnic of Coimbra to discuss (in panel sessions, workshops and round tables) their shared problems and challenges, their vision and ideals about teaching and learning and the connections to relevant topics such as teaching methods, new technologies in teaching, curriculum development and quality and certification of course, etc).

We hope that the spread and growth of this project can contribute to the expansion of pedagogical support services for faculty, the emergence of inno-

vative pedagogical environments, the commitment made by higher education institutions in promoting the quality of education they provide, resulting in the optimization of development opportunities for students and communities.

The support of leadership to the development of learning and teaching support centers, with training programs and institutional and inter-institutional educational action research projects constitutes a condition for building excellence in pedagogy (Esteves, 2008; Kuh et al., 2005). At a time of great operative changes in the contexts of higher education, it becomes even more pertinent to value pedagogical training as an important element in the performance of the teaching profession and pay attention to the signs of negative impact from the devaluation of the pedagogical aspect on the quality of teaching (Simão, Santos, & Costa, 2003).

“It is therefore important that both the general political level, as in institutional and academic plan cherish objectively the value of these missions: to this purpose, current devices for internal and external evaluation of institutions and courses, and performance evaluation teachers should play an important role in the objectification mentioned” (Esteves, 2012, p. 63).

We combine our work and our voice to others who are contributing positively to call attention to the importance of pedagogy in higher education. We conclude by addressing the invitation to readers to join the project. A first step is as simple as visiting the center’s website and making suggestions for improvement: www.cinep.ipc.pt.

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