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A New Perception of the University Teacher's Professional Identity in the Presence of the European Convergence

Nueva percepción de la identidad profesional del docente universitario ante la convergencia europea

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical reflection on the implications emanating from the European convergence process, and which affect how university faculty perceive their teaching. Creating a professional identity implies, among other things, the assumption of a determined mode of situating oneself in the presence of students' construction of knowledge. From Europe come suggestions for the adoption of models focusing on student-based learning; these models invite teachers to use participatory methodologies for managing the classroom, while designing strategies for a more flexible performance. Presented here is a comparative analysis of the functions traditionally assumed by university faculty and those indicated by the European Convergence, based on an analysis of the diverse elements making up the curriculum.

Key words: European Convergence, European Higher Education Area, university teaching.

Resumen

En este trabajo se expone una reflexión crítica sobre las repercusiones que emanan del proceso de convergencia europea y que afectan el modo en que el profesorado universitario percibe su docencia. La construcción de una identidad profesional supone, entre otras cosas, asumir un modo determinado de situarse ante la construcción del conocimiento por parte de los estudiantes. Desde Europa se sugiere la asunción de modelos más centrados en los mecanismos de aprendizaje del alumnado y se invita al profesorado a utilizar formas participativas de gestionar el aula, al tiempo que se diseñan estrategias de actuación más flexibles. Aquí se presenta un análisis comparativo entre las funciones tradicionalmente asumidas por el profesorado universitario y las que nos indican la convergencia europea, apoyándonos en el análisis de los diversos elementos que componen el currículum.

Palabras clave: Convergencia europea, Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior, enseñanza universitaria.

I. Globalization and university education

The context of cultural globalization in which we find ourselves supposes, according to Gimeno Sacristán (2001), the establishment of interconnections between countries or parts of the world with the goal of sharing its people's ways of living and what they think and do. By this is generated interdependence in economy, defense, politics, culture, science, education, technology, communication, lifestyles, ways of expression, etc. This cultural reality, as per Brockbank and McGill (2002), has been designated and understood in different ways, such as universal citizenship, a market without international boundaries, an information society connected on a planetary level, among other things. Specifically, in the field of university education we can locate the following among features derived from globalization, and which influence the creation of a European convergence:

- The prevalence of a *neoliberal ideology* favoring private initiative and ignoring investments in the public university system. The proliferation of private universities and the economic constraints faced by public universities illustrate this situation.
- A certain *homogenization* of the different European countries' educational policies, generated when the nations were trying to meet the demands of the economy, technology and globalized science. A common example is the narrative used by various governments in the field of higher education; this narrative makes reference to quality education, excellence, accreditation, managerialism, and creating national and regional agencies for evaluation.
- University training closely related to preparing students for the work world. The new global situation creates a *globalized labor market*, *unstructured* and rapidly *changing*, which causes difficulty in planning and adjusting curriculums to their demands. Therefore, the geographical horizon for finding a job is extraordinarily extended, exchanging a primarily-local mindset for a more universal one. As a result, university study programs have to combine a common-core curriculum with other areas more closely related to the person, so as to enable her* to construct the hallmarks of her identity in a suitable manner.
- In the new globalized world, *inequalities are exacerbated,* and therefore it is necessary to rethink the criteria of equal opportunity based on broader contexts and educational policies also globalized; these contexts and policies permit advancement toward the achievement of higher levels of social justice.
- Cultural globalization confronts us with a *more complex and interconnected social framework*. The so-called network society (Castell, 1997) demands a broader interdisciplinary framework for understanding the realities that dominate the world in which we live, and for understanding their meanings. University curricula must be flexible, so as to overcome the reductionist concept of the different materials, and try to go beyond the limitations imposed by excessive fragmentation of knowledge.

These influences, arising from the global cultural context in which we find ourselves, are projected in the different educational policy measures adopted in our community setting. In the environment of higher education at a European level, there have developed some actions which we will analyze later on, to help us understand better the current demands which the European Convergence makes on university teachers.

* Translator's note: Before the feminist movement arose, in situations including both genders it was customary to use the masculine pronoun. Today, however, pronouns of both genders are used to avoid what is now seen as sexist language. To avoid the awkwardness of a continual repetition of such forms as "s/he", "his/her", in this paper we shall sometimes use the feminine pronoun, and sometimes the masculine.

II. The European Higher Education Area

The creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has its most immediate antecedents in the Sorbonne Declaration (1998), the Bologna Declaration (1999), the Salamanca Conference (2001), the European Council meeting in the Barcelona Summit (2002), and the Berlin Summit of Ministers (2003). Among the most significant goals advanced in these meetings, we can mention the need to approximate and standardize the training processes of university students in order to facilitate the free movement of these persons throughout the European labor market.

The actions taken for the purpose of implementing this ambitious project have been oriented toward several concepts:

- The restructuring of the map of degrees and curricula currently available.
- The designing of new university degrees (governed by Royal Decree 55/2005, January 21; and Postgraduate Degrees incorporated in Royal Decree 56/2005, January 21).[1]
- The introduction of the Diploma Supplement (Royal Decree 1044/2003, August 1), understood as a document detailing the curriculum and training profile completed by the student.
- The concept of university quality and accreditation.
- The emergence of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS,) which, according to Royal Decree 1125/2003, September 5, is equivalent to 25-30 hours of student work, with a maximum of 60 credits per course.

These actions represent a radical change in the concept of the university we have been considering up to now, and present us with one of the greatest challenges in our professionalization as teachers. We face questions such as these: What role must we play as university teachers? What should we teach our students, or rather, what should they know? How important in their professional training is the subject we teach? What method do we use to explain the content and make it understandable? What system do we use to assess their learning? How do we plan our course; do we base it on conceptual objectives, or on professional competencies?

The list of questions could be expanded as far as we like, because now, with the arrival of the European Convergence and the new concept of ECTS credit, what actually must change is the teaching model and style to which each professional subscribes. It has to do, not with a mathematically adapting old ways of doing things in the classroom to the needs and "impositions" derived from community regulations, but with engaging in a process of reflection and collective debate in which, in a collaborative manner and with autonomy and professional experience backing us up, we profile the fundamental features of our teaching work. Next we will outline some of the points of reflection that, in our view, must be present in the discussions.

III. The low value placed on university teaching

In the well-known, traditional model of university faculty, and in the majority of cases, at the center of our professional activity lies the concern for teaching the content of our subject adequately. The focus is on the teaching process, that is, on the teacher's ways of trying to make the subject-matter accessible and comprehensible; hence, the unit of measure is the teachers' work (1 credit = 10 hours), and the methodology revolves around the classes he gives. The students' learning progress is considered to derive from the involvement, mastery, and quality of the training process which the teacher is able to create in the classroom.

We begin with a university education model based on the philosophy that students *need to study hard for a few years so as to work all their lives*. Seeing things from this perspective, we forget the concept of learning throughout life, as well as another whole series of vital factors involved in the integrated process of training students, such as their learning mechanisms, previous ideas, interests, motivations, experiences, self-esteem and expectations. All these variables influence the mode and manner each person uses for facing the new object of study, and explain the need to personalize the learning process based on the diversity of the start-off positions students present.

Moreover, based on this logic, in which the teacher is situated as the one who knows the subject, and the students as inexpert, the priority function of the student is receiving a knowledge that is foreign to him; this knowledge is presented as a finished product, organized and ready to be stored in the memory and retrieved as faithfully as possible when taking the appropriate assessment exam. Obviously the person does not build knowledge in this process; at best, she retains and reproduces it, but really has no deep understanding of it. As the popular saying goes, "If I remembered half of what I have studied and passed on exams, I would be wise." Indeed, this type of superficial learning, alien to the individual, creates problems of knowledge retention, while posing a threat to motivation and interest in learning.

But not only are the student's learning mechanisms factors that influence and modulate the processes of teaching and learning, but also the *contextual elements* that determine our work in education must be fitted in. There are the influences of the institutional context in which we stand, i.e. the idiosyncrasies of each educational organization; its professional culture; the departmental structure; the communication and relational style; the rules of each institution; the values, rituals, traditions. All these make up an ill-defined, but very influential framework for our attitude and professional labor.

From a more global point of view, the *social and political contexts* also influence our educational task. Thus, the social status allocated to the university faculty increases in prestige first and foremost if their research work is outstanding. Both the professional recognition and the economic and promotion incentives attributed to the excellence of the research work, are in contrast with the low value placed on

quality teaching practices in university education. Similarly, while in order to become part of the research community it is necessary to conduct a study that requires a deep and sustained effort—the doctoral thesis—the professional qualification for teaching is obtained immediately after getting the bachelor's degree in any branch of knowledge.

It is paradoxical that the educational requirements for teachers are inversely proportional to the level of the educational system in which they teach. That is, in the early stages of the education system more qualifications are required, while in the higher levels, no specific preparation is needed. Thus, when the educational level has to do with younger children, a higher level of specific pedagogical qualification is required (this is the case with kindergarten and primary education). However, as we move up in the educational system, the level of pedagogical demand decreases, as may be seen in the case of high-school teachers, who are only required to have taken a course; for university faculty there no specific requirement.

This situation allows universities to hire teachers with no training in pedagogy—teachers whose immersion in the practice of teaching has been hasty and barely appropriate. The first experiences assume a powerful source of professional socialization in which the novice teachers, in the absence of supervision, guidance, and the availability of other references and alternatives, often turn to the models of their own teachers during their student years; so that they assume and reproduce traditional teaching models.

Similarly, educational policy and the *university regulations context* affect the recognition and status allotted to the faculty's teaching assignments. In this regard, Spain's adoption of the Universities Act states that university faculty should be evaluated according to their teaching work, research and administration. This, in principle, is meant to reward good practice. However, attention should be given to what constitutes the evaluation criteria, i.e., when it is that teaching will be considered to be of high quality, and when not—while appraising the incentives provided, and the equity they possess as compared to those allocated to research.

To come to the point, we can see how the university faculty finds itself in a situation where the teaching they develop is not considered to be the focus for their professional promotion. As a result, this subsidiary character of university teaching leads to deflecting teachers' efforts and attention toward other, more cost-effective areas.

Nevertheless, and taking into account the labor that remains to be done in giving teachers dignity at the university level, it is true that the new model proposed out of the European setting offers a great opportunity to move forward and to modify the current teaching role. Going from focusing only on the teaching of our subject, to being concerned with potentiating our students' learning is a challenge—a challenge that we must not avoid, and which involves, first, knowing something

about how students learn, so as to rethink later how we can facilitate this way of building their knowledge.

IV. Basic mechanisms of university students' learning

Although at this time it is not our intention to present an exhaustive list of the learning mechanisms used by university students, we do consider it necessary to point out the most significant processes our students use when faced with a new learning task (Imbernón *et al*., 2002). This will give us clues to help us lead, guide and empower their future academic achievements. Here we describe these processes:

- Students build their learning in an active way. According to Piaget (1983) intelligence is a process of the individual's adaptation to the physical and social environment around him.** There are three fundamental learning steps: (1) the *assimilation* or perception of a new reality; (2) the *accommodation* or modification of the forms of knowledge to this new reality so as to understand it; and (3) the *adaptation* or consolidation of new mental models incorporating the progress experienced. Therefore, our students, in order to learn, need to ask themselves questions, analyze their thoughts, seek information, make mistakes, advance on a personal path toward knowledge and revisit former positions; become involved and "hook up" with the new proposal. As a result, to learn, they use much more than the visual and auditory, and they need to use more skills than just listening and memorizing.
- The student has cognitive, physical, social and emotional abilities. In the process of maturing some periods are characterized by the possession of capabilities and functions that differ in quality among themselves. These have a certain stability, and enable individuals to cope with tasks of increasing complexity throughout their lives. However, in order for these predispositions to become actualities and to be converted into abilities, attitudes and skills, educational training is needed. Our educational proposal must provide students with the opportunity to exercise hypothetical and symbolic mental operations, to practice logical deductive and inductive reasoning, to develop their mental abstraction, and to encourage their critical ability. But not only do students have cognitive or intellectual skills; it is also necessary for them to use their capabilities related with the physical, social and emotional environment, since the holistic development of the person requires this. Recent currents of research, centered on emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1997) and the concept of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1995; Gardner, Feldman and Krechevsky, 2000) show how social and emotional factors are crucially involved in learning.

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These have traditionally remained outside the university classroom because they were not considered very objective or scientific.

- Learning is built on the ideas and experiences students already possess. As well established by Ausubel, Novak and Hanesian (1983), what is most important for learning is to find out what students know—ideas correct, incomplete and/or erroneous—and connect the new content with that. There is no real, meaningful learning unless there is produced a substantive, non-arbitrary relationship between what students already know and what they are expected to learn. This situation demands a fully-individualized attention to learning, since the starting level and experiences are considerably different for every learner (Perinat, 2004).
- In order for learning to occur, the new material must meet some requirements. The proposed contents must be adapted to the complexity of students' abilities—psychological significance; possession of a coherent internal structure, i.e., must be organized logically (general-particular, particular-general, near-far, simple-complex, concrete-abstract). Similarly, it is important that knowledge be functional, i.e. it must be useful to the learners in other, non-academic contexts, especially in situations coming out of everyday life.
- Deep learning occurs when there is interest and motivation regarding the proposed task. The learning focuses which Entwistle (1988) proposes—surface, deep, and strategic—differ qualitatively, but vary mainly in the motive that the person has for learning. The first has to do with ephemeral learning, undesired by the individual, dependent upon external reinforcement. Deep learning, by contrast, is born out of intrinsic motivation, i.e. out of the desire to know, and out of the pleasure produced by new knowledge. It is a response to people's interests, and rather than being dependent on external reinforcement, it seeks the learner's own initiative. It is a durable sort of learning, solid and comprehensive, and is usually maintained and expanded over time. Finally, strategic learning is that which tries to get the maximum yield at the lowest possible cost—in other words, it attempts to optimize the time spent in relation to the results achieved. It is usually a bit more consistent than the superficial type, but is much less solid and durable than the deep. Generally, it is the most commonly used by pupils in preparation for examinations in the various subjects they are taking.
- The college student has the ability to achieve autonomous learning. In the so-called knowledge society the individual is overwhelmed with the tremendous amount of information generated. This is in contrast with the limited capacity for storing all that information. Therefore, our role as university teachers must be centered, not on the ability to receive information that will soon be obsolete, but on the mastery of search, selection and appreciation strategies. That is, we must make it easier for students to transform information into knowledge, and then into their own thought, so as to incorporate it into their attitude towards life. To this end, we have to potentiate the study of cognitive self-regulation strategies, so that students will be able *to learn independently,* without the

unending guidance of teachers. Based on the work of Monereo (1995, p. 27), we understand learning strategies as:

> …decision-making processes (conscious and intentional) in which students choose and recover, in a coordinated manner, the knowledge they need to comply with a particular claim or objective, depending on the characteristics of the educational situation in which the action is produced.

Metacognitive strategies and comprehensive memory will be of great importance in the knowledge and cognitive development of individuals, making them aware of their own learning process and offering the opportunity to become involved in it so as to improve it.

- Learning is an interpersonal student activity, student-student and student-teacher. University teaching is a process of reconstruction developed in an interpersonal scenario. Cooperative learning is a modality which, according to research psychology (Rogoff, 1993, Vygotsky, 1973; Onrubia, 2002, Edwards and Mercer, 1988; Rodrigo y Arnay, 1997 and Johnson, 1982), presents socio-cognitive advantages for learners. When a group of people cooperate in the joint solution of a problem, they develop social, cognitive, affective and emotional skills. Finding themselves backed and supported by the group, they take on more complex challenges, and intrinsic motivation is increased in a collective proposal, in which there are developed debate, argument, active listening skills, empathy and the ability to adopt agreements arrived at democratically. In the university classroom, sometimes we forget the need and the educational value of using a cooperative learning structure. We center on an overly-individualistic concept of learning and knowledge which generates attitudes of excessive competitiveness. Thus, we forget to promote fundamental abilities required in the workplace, including the ability to work with others, as well as to achieve a citizenship both respectful and participatory, and demonstrative of solidarity in everyday life.
- The role of the person experienced in learning is very important for facilitating the acquisition of new skills in the initiator. Vygotsky speaks of the *zone of proximal development* (1973), as the area where the expert—the teacher or peer with the most training—must be situated so as to help the novice to achieve his potential skills. That is, concerning the pedagogical, it refers to the pedagogical help needed for the learner to advance from his present capabilities to others more highly developed, not fully formed until now. Therefore, the most suitable teaching aid will be that which, based on what students know, facilitates the acquisition of other skills not yet developed.

Once identified some mechanisms and characteristics of the university student's learning, we consider it necessary to reflect on the impact or changes these generate in the work of teachers.

V. University curriculum changes proposed in the process of European convergence

As we noted at the beginning of the text, based the model proposed to us by the European Union, university teaching pivots around the students. From a teaching model excessively uni-directional and expositive in which the central protagonist is the teacher, we have moved into a multi-directional educational exchange in which students, faculty and context interrelate and become co-responsible for the advances that occur in educational settings. As indicated by Zabalza (2003), we went from being specialists in science, to being professionals in how our subjects learn; i.e., to our scientific competency we must add a pedagogical competency that will encourage the student to learn.

In what measure does this new concept of the university teacher's role affect the development of our educational task? Or, put another way, what do we have to change about our professional activity? We will try to answer these questions by giving a tour of the various curriculum elements we develop in our classrooms. Thus, we attempt to encourage reflection, discrepancies, and—why not?—promote constant reflection on our work, out of the conviction that an educational activity is always an unfinished task, and can be improved (Perrenoud, 2004a).

5.1. Capabilities, goals and competencies

In most cases, we began planning our educational involvement by considering what type of goals we had to reach in our subjects. These goals have been understood as *objectives in the teaching process*, directly related to the content of our subject. They were found to be more centered on a knowledge of the subject than on the development of students' capabilities, understood as the potential people possess, and which after training, *are transformed into skills and abilities* manifested on a behavioral level.

The most widespread criticism this way of planning a university education plan has received is that the basic purpose of the educational process is to reach the goals proposed in each area, which guarantees only that the student has mastered a series of unrelated objectives, proceeding from different fields of science. In no way does it insure that the college student has the skills to become involved with some credit in a particular professional field.

These complaints, coming primarily from the business sector, show that there is an undesirable distance and separation between the university (seen as excessively theoretical and academic), and the working world, which demands a more pragmatic kind of knowledge and skills adapted to the needs of the real context.

The flexibility, de-regulation and constant transformation of the current job market needs and demands professionals who have mastered a repertoire of generic competencies (analysis, decision-making, teamwork, critical thinking, research,

and selection of information), which must be supplemented by other, more specific skills, depending on the particular professional field in which we are situated.

We note then that one of the first tasks to be assumed by the university faculty in planning their teaching is not what it was before: thinking about what goals are most important, as based on the *logic of their subjects*. On the contrary, they must consider—along with their colleagues in related areas and the departments involved—what will be the professional profiles of the future employees they are helping to train.

Based these profiles there will be detailed the most important specific competencies needed to comply adequately with the demands of their jobs. Each of the subjects included in the curriculum will seek to contribute to the achievement of the competencies selected. What is important now is not whether students do or do not know this or that subject well, but that they be competent to become involved in this or that context (Perrenoud, 2004b).

To define properly the *professional profiles* of the different degrees it is necessary, or at least advisable, to count on the guidance and vision of groups of professionals and graduate students, because these can give us a real and current opinions of the professional setting for which we are trying to train people. As a result, the selection of competencies *obliges* us to open ourselves to the world of employment, to maintain contact with the labor market, to listen to some of the shortcomings and successes our graduate students have had to supply, or take advantage of. In short, working with competencies can mean an approach to the real world, an invitation for the university to open itself to being more permeable when facing changes and social challenges, and a springboard so that teachers may be sensitized, may approach and come to know the peculiarities of the various practical scenarios.

5.2. Contents

The exposition, storage, understanding and evaluation of the thematic nuclei that make up our subjects have been fundamental in the tasks we set ourselves concerning the teaching of our respective subjects. Normally, our planning is more closely related to the internal logic and scientific structure of the discipline we teach, than to students' learning abilities. This is one of the challenges we as university teachers must face, that is, to carry out adequately the didactic mediation necessary to make scientific knowledge accessible for learners' understanding and use.

Facilitating the connection of the new content with the ideas students already have, will be an unavoidable teaching task which must be based upon an optimal initial assessment. Based on this prior knowledge, however meager it may be, we must begin to construct the knowledge edifice.

Similarly, our programs appear overloaded with content; we are always complaining about the lack of time and the practical impossibility of developing issues indispensible to us. Our goal is to finish the program planned; we think less about the quality of learning our students have achieved. The *reduction of these topics* to the basic nuclei is a recommendation emanating from the model proposed by the European Convergence. The decrease in credits per year and the rationalization of work and study hours required of students taking different subjects are some of the tasks sought in the new model of university teaching and learning.

Besides the reduction of syllabuses, we propose a different presentation format. While students currently are engaged for the most part in copying notes or studying various documents, and are little involved in searching for, selecting and understanding information, in the new model the proposal must include *a more practical dimension*, closer to the students and of a more functional character.

So that contents can fulfill their true mission of providing for an understanding and management of practice, in order to promote students' development of personal and original conclusions, it is necessary to have them interact with three other elements: the reality, the beliefs, and the attitudes students already have, produced by informal learning and their own personal history. Knowing the purpose and meaning of mastering a particular item of knowledge helps to increase motivation and involvement in the proposed task.

Similarly, contents cannot be envisaged as a fixed and exclusive set of ideas. All knowledge, regarded as a social construct, incorporates value commitments, and is plural. This plurality has to be reflected in the program.

Accepting the *problematic* and the *controversial*, not as impediments but as natural—as opportunities for growth—implies recognition of and service to the plural and heterogeneous. Attention to diversity is impossible from a standard, uniform view of knowledge. The recognition of diverse perspectives and theoretical currents is essential in the planning of any subject.

Understanding that learning processes are shared and negotiated social constructs (Yus, 2001), and that the responsibility for what happens in the classroom—either positively or negatively—does not rest exclusively on the teacher, will be one of the principles for guiding and developing content. To develop this co-responsibility for learning there is a need to create a permanent climate of dialogue, negotiation, and search for understanding between teachers and students. Because of this, and because of having less time for direct teaching, it is necessary to intensify communications relationships in a *more personalized* way, mentoring learners' progress with a higher level of individualization.

Tutorials may be very fertile ground in which to adjust teaching aids to the idiosyncratic situation of each student. For this, the number of students per class must also be considerably reduced, since the massification of university teaching makes it difficult to accompany students in their learning process.

Now, we must not only promote the mastery of a theoretical content, but we will also have the possibility for evaluating students' overall competency by including, in addition to their cognitive abilities, their attitude towards study, the level of effort involved, the procedures used to acquire theoretical knowledge, and so forth.

5.3. Methodological strategies and resources

Another of the dimensions affected by the new role of the university faculty is the method or manner of organizing and performing in the classroom. From expository methodology, based mostly on the transmission of knowledge through lectures, we have moved to an *active methodology* where the focus of the teaching and learning process falls on the students, who take a leading role in their own training, situating themselves as active processors of information, not merely as passive recipients of knowledge which the teachers will transmit to them orally.

In essence, it has to do with organizing the classroom on the basis of a research focus in which the student seeks to address some hypotheses and questions. To do this, he must employ search strategies, selection, arrangement, comprehension and use of information, so as to construct his own knowledge.

Another of the changes in methodology resulting from the new model is the need to address the *diversity* and *plurality* of our student body. From a common, homogenized approach for everyone in the classroom, we move to self-directed work proposals aimed toward a smaller number of students, so that we can oversee their problems and advances. Such methodological devices as small groups, discussion groups, workshops, seminars, roundtables, etc., must be alternated with the classic, sometimes necessary, presentations by the teacher.

This methodological diversification will encourage attention to a greater number of learning styles among our students. The idea is that a particular competency can be achieved by following different methodological routes or training paths. Therefore, the methodology we use is flexible, context-permeable, and extremely varied in context.

One of the issues we find most interesting is the possibility of creating a *workspace shared* between different fields of related knowledge. The need to coordinate the organization of our work to bring about the training of our students—if we know how to use it—can give us the opportunity to leave the narrow confines of our subject and exchange experiences, thoughts and concerns with other colleagues. However, the teacher should not only practice this group work; the cooperative learning structure, as we have noted previously, is one of the mechanisms by which students' knowledge is increased.

Organizing cooperative work proposals requiring student interaction, negotiating rules, sharing responsibility, relishing the joy and the difficulty involved in developing an equitable joint effort, are some learning experiences favored by a holistic education.

With the European Convergence there appear new training modalities that serve to replace classroom teaching, with its spatio-temporal limitations and constraints, and that allow the possibility of actualizing the right to education throughout life (e-learning) for a wider segment of the population. This being the case, the use of new media resources, blended learning, virtual tutoring, distance learning, and online training are new learning environments with we must become familiar.

The so-called *third environment* (Echeverría, 2000), which includes the contexts of interaction generated by information and communication technologies (ICT), has its own language, as well as some peculiar modes of interaction in which we must become literate. Our learning should not be reduced to the technical and instrumental dimension of these, but to the possible use of them for facilitating the teaching model we have been endorsing. We must not forget that it is possible to modernize the format of our teaching, going from paper to screen, and still maintain the same didactic approach. As Zabalza (2003, p. 104) says, "Putting a text on the web is not difficult; making it a proposal for self-directed study, is." The interactive nature of the proposal, the possibility of adjusting it to the different levels of complexity and competency, the flexibility it has for expressing different training routes, and its ability to involve students and increase their motivation, will be among the criteria that will serve us in evaluating the didactic worth of the abundant informational material existing today. However, as we very well know, all this has no explicit educational interest; it is rather of a commercial nature.

5.4. Evaluation

Another of the university professor's functions affected by the proposed role change coming out of Europe is evaluation.

At the university the kind of evaluation primarily practiced is the *summative*; i.e. only the result is assessed, and we focus only on the cognitive abilities of the trainees. The examination is employed as an almost exclusive tool, on which we base an extremely high percentage of the final grade we give to each student.

By doing this, we are using evaluation in a punitive, not a formative manner. When we assess only the product of learning, we forget that a very important part of it is the process—that is, the way, the effort, the perseverance, the systematicity and progress of each student in her training. Sometimes, this system generates situations of injustice, by favoring those students most gifted at the memory level, to the detriment of other students with other skills which, although very important in social life, are ignored in university examinations.

The new model proposes to us an assessment which will be *continuously evaluating* the process, i.e., students' advances and difficulties, so that in the shortest possible time we can detect any hypothetical dysfunction and correct it. Therefore, the fundamental role of evaluation will be that of helping to improve learning.

Similarly, evaluation today is directed toward only one of the agents in the educational process: the students. Ignoring in this situation the influence wielded by the quality of teachers' work, as well as by the planning, the context, and the resources, means carrying out a biased task which places responsibility in the learning process upon the student only, considered as an individual and decontextualized entity.

It is necessary to make a more inclusive assessment which would address the different agents of the learning process. Moreover, we must implement a type of assessment that will encompass not only cognitive, but will be sensitive to other types of abilities, skills and attitudes.

As well, it is necessary to *personalize* and adjust the evaluation, as far as possible, to the characteristics of the students. We must take into account the effort, involvement and interest shown within a reasonable time frame. To do this, we will need to use various assessment tools and criteria for collecting abundant and diversified data on our students. These criteria and instruments must be known by the students and negotiated with them, so they can prepare in advance to meet the requirements for passing the course.

Furthermore, we must also take into account the possibility of practicing a *transverse* type of evaluation, that is, by contrasting information and sharing student evaluations with colleagues who teach other subjects to the same group of students; establish grades that could be compensable; carry out useful practices for evaluation in various subjects. This means a very enriching task, and one that would increase the quality and appropriateness of the grades, by comparing the view of many professionals on the same person. In such a manner there would be produced a kind of triangulation that would help to emit less arbitrary, more informed evaluations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we need to clarify that the new model of university faculty, derived from the proposed creation of a European higher education space, is not a question to be soon to be brought about. The proposed legislation regulates and orders, but does not infiltrate classroom practices; we therefore run the risk of having the same thing happen as in other stages of the education system, where the reforms have taken place more at the level of law than of reality.

The mindset of teachers, their educational philosophy, their professional and personal orientation regarding their teaching, the culture existing in each school, and the degree of hope and work put into play—all will be factors that will or will not explain the change connected with this new work being proposed to us.

We must also insist on the conditions of funding, plus the institutional commitment and support to be offered to teachers. The legal structures show a plethora of good intentions and declarations, but there are few resources for putting them into practice; this results in attitudes of disenchantment, frustration and indolence.

We believe that we are at a moment of transcendental importance regarding our future practice. Our desire is that there come about real change in line with what we have been presenting. Otherwise, we will simply varnish ourselves with the new European jargon, but will maintain the inertia of old practices.

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[1] The abbreviation R.D. means “Royal Decree”.