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Reconceptualizing teaching education in Higher Education
Reconceptualizando la profesión docente en la Educación Superior

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Reconceptualizing teaching education in Higher Education
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RESUMEN

Los últimos años la Universidad ha ido afrontando una serie de cambios que exigen replantearnos, tanto la concepción de lo que significa ser un profesional de la docencia, como las competencias que han de tener los profesionales de la educación, para poder afrontar con éxito su tarea docente. Este trabajo tiene como objetivo comprender lo que es ser un buen profesional de la educación superior, y analizar aspectos relacionados con la conceptualización que se le otorga al buen docente, y a sus competencias. Se hace hincapié, a través de una revisión bibliográfica, en diversos autores y se tiene en cuenta el Marco de Desarrollo Docente (MDAD), para lograr mejorar la calidad de la educación. Además de valorar los atributos de una docencia de calidad. La perspectiva actual del profesorado requiere de profesionales cualificados para la docencia y la investigación y esto conlleva enormes esfuerzos (Eurydice, 2017). En este sentido, se pretende concretar funciones, competencias y procesos de profesionalización para dar respuesta, de forma alternativa y de prospectiva de futuro a la práctica profesional y a las necesidades del profesorado universitario. La revisión bibliográfica posibilita ahondar en el sentido y significado de la buena docencia en Educación Superior

PALABRAS CLAVE

DOCENCIA, PROFESIONALIZACIÓN, COMPETENCIAS, REQUERIMIENTOS

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the University has been facing a series of changes that require reconsidering the conception of what it means to be a teaching professional and the competencies that education professionals must have to succesfully complete their teaching tasks. This paper aims to understand what it means to be a good higher education professional and to analyze aspects related to the conceptualization given to the good teacher and his or her competencies. Through a bibliographic review emphasized in the work of various authors, we considered the attributes of quality teaching and the Teaching Development Framework (MDAD) to improve teaching-learning development. The current perspective of being a teaching professional requires upgrading qualification and performing in teaching and research, which entails substantial efforts (Eurydice, 2017). In this sense, the aim is to specify functions, competencies, and professionalization processes to respond, in an alternative and forward-looking way, to the professional practice and needs of university academic

2

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staff. The literature review makes it possible to delve into the meaning and significance of quality teaching in Higher Education today.

KEYWORDS
QUALITY TEACHING, PROFESSIONALIZATION, COMPETENCIES, REQUIREMENTS

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the university has been confronted with changes requiring rethinking the concept of quality teaching and of the competencies that teaching professionals must have to succeed in the teaching and learning process. Wideen, Mayer-Smith, and Moon recognize the implication of an act of reflection by higher education teachers, and through this process, knowledge about teaching-learning professional development is acquired (Marín, 2016). Teaching training at the university level must, therefore, revolve around method and didactic communication. It must understand the university context and know how to resolve conflicts with students.

Carkhuff (De Armas, 2009) establishes the professional's seven helping skills (empathy, respect, authenticity, concreteness, confrontation, immediacy, and self-manifestation). We are using five as an alternative model (AM), -empathy, respect, authenticity, concreteness, and confrontation-:

1. *Empathy* (knowing how to listen to the other person and give back to others what has been captured).
2. *Respect* (willingness and commitment to work with individuals, adequate estimation, and valuation of practical resources).
3. *Authenticity* is the coherence between what is felt, thought, and said.
4. *Concreteness* (it focuses on the need to understand concrete data related to the individual's problem area).
5. *Confrontation* (action initiated by the professional, involves putting the person in contact with themselves by considering interpersonal discrepancies in the teacher-student relationship.

The "quality of university teaching" requires good libraries and sufficient didactic and technological resources, which are unproductive if the academic staff feels they need to be more committed, motivated, willing, and able to initiate change processes. Change processes are our universities major challenge today (Couto, 2018).

The Reconceptualization of the Teaching Profession

The word profession comes from the Latin *professio*, which means to profess a science or an art and to exercise it with voluntary inclination. Professions seek to solve the needs of societies with a social and ethical approach to conflict resolution and the generation of new knowledge (Peraya, 2015). The concept of profession arises, as we understand it, when the organization and division of labor appear (Gichure, 1995). For Adela Cortina (2000), the profession is a cooperative social activity and provides society with a specific and indispensable good for survival. Therefore, competition of identified professionals in society is required.

According to the sociology of professions, five attributes are essential for a profession to exist (Almagro, 2015):

1. The existence of a body of knowledge that underpins practice.
2. Professional authority and determination of what the other party needs.

3. Control over admission mechanisms, privacy, and authority to implant social norms and sanctions.
4. Professional codes of conduct.
5. Work culture encompasses values, rules, and symbols that establish common beliefs for all professionals.

In other words, professions are occupations that require specialized knowledge, high-level educational training, and also control over the working conditions, as well as their organization and self-regulating ethical rules (Almeida, 2014). For Le Boterf (2000), the professional is the person who knows how to manage a complex work situation. This author favors a definition that associates professionalism with competence. His proposal involves making explicit the different components that characterize a professional:

- Knows how to proceed in a relevant way, beyond what is prescribed, in each context or situation.
- Knows how to combine personal and environmental resources mobilized in specific contexts.
- Knows how to transfer personal resources to the teaching-learning situations that the context requires.
- Knows how to learn from experience and learn to learn.
- Knows how to be committed to the task and in professional relationships with others.

Professional competence in its higher levels of development expresses the harmony and integrity of the subject's feelings, thinking, and doing of the subject in professional performance. It means that professionals are competent because they express knowledge and skills that allow them to solve professional problems adequately. Furthermore, they feel and reflect on the need and commitment to act under knowledge, skills, motives, and values, with dedication and perseverance in solving the problems that professional practice requires. (González, 2002). Flexibility means thriving with change, managing issues, and adapting to new requirements. Moreover, it requires the ability to incorporate feedback effectively, face praise, criticism, and setbacks positively, adopting different points of view to reach solutions (Kivunja, 2015).
Along with De la Orden (2011), university professors are dedicated to teaching. Nevertheless, they are also specialist at the highest level of science, i.e., researchers, whose profession allows them to approach a field of knowledge and push back its boundaries.
According to UNESCO, higher education teaching requires specialized knowledge, a profession acquired and maintained through rigorous study and research (UNESCO, 1997). This organization underlines the importance of personal and institutional responsibility in providing education and welfare for students and the community at large, and achieving a prominent level of qualification in study and research activities. University teachers are academics who combine teaching and research generally and pass this on to students through deep learning.
From what has been said, the current perspective of quality teaching requires qualified professionals for teaching and research, which entails enormous efforts (European Commission Eurydice, 2017). We are focusing on giving quality teaching the prominence it deserves. Therefore, the following section will analyze what we mean by quality teaching in higher education.

METHODOLOGY

To have a global vision of everything that is required of higher education teachers to carry out their profession succesfully, it is necessary, as mentioned by Montero (2004) and Iglesias et al., (2011), to carry out a reflection and analysis of global aspects that go beyond the technical and scientific aspects. Specifically, we refer to the following:

- Analysis of the concept of professionalism today and in the mentality of academic staff, as well as the training model and the specific functions of academics (Jorro, 2012).
- Analysis of social changes to glimpse, as far as possible, what the role of higher education institutions and the competencies of academic staff will be (Más-Torelló & Tejada, 2013).
- Analysis of the current situation of university education (new demands in a changing context) to see if its structures, functioning, and orientations respond to today's society (Zabalza, 2002).
- Analysis of the current policies, curricula, and organizational situation to derive appropriate professional development strategies. *In discussing the importance of creating an open, democratic, and inclusive society as necessary conditions for creating a dynamic economy and a learning society*, as Stiglitz & Greenwald (2014, p. 471) have stated.
- Analysis of current students to review the academic staff functions and the new tasks to be assumed inside and outside the university sector (Michavila et al., 2017).
- Analysis of the work situation and the academic career from an individual and collective point of view (learning environment) to see needs to improve and exercise professional development, such as accreditation, access, labor relations, remuneration, responsibilities, *etc*. (Núñez et al., 2012).

All this will make it possible to specify functions, competencies, and professionalization processes to respond, in an alternative and forward-looking way, to the professional practice and needs of University and Higher education professors. Despite the complexity of the competencies that a teacher should develop, the university community accepts no single model (Torra et al., 2012). We can identify and characterize some essential competencies that teachers should possess, as this will help us to guide the academic function and monitor the changes that need to be addressed in teacher education programs.

There are three essential levels of competence related to the professional development of academic staff, according to the European Commission (2017). First are professional competencies related to work experience and professional technical skills. Second, pedagogical and social competencies, facilitating didactic processes, working with students, integrating teaching-learning functions, mentoring, collaborative learning, and practical knowledge transfer. And last, management and coordination with collaborative training agencies and supervision of practices.

About teaching, Sánchez (Fernández, 2016) points out that university teachers are professionals who have a rigorous command of the technical content related to the task they are related to perform but are unaware of many of the pedagogical resources needed to transmit this acquired content.

The review by Jerez, Orsini, and Hasbún (2016) classifies the attributes of quality teaching into three major themes or competencies. The first corresponds to generic

competencies subdivided into personal, attitudinal, and communicative characteristics. The second corresponds to pedagogical competencies subdivided into teaching-learning and planning-management strategies. The last corresponds to disciplinary competencies.

These competencies related to teaching should be complemented by those necessary for carrying out the research process. We also consider this essential, but we will not focus on it this time. Although we are aware of the significant importance of research, even today in our context (UNIBASQ, 2012; ANECA, 2015) due to its relevant role not only as a transmitter of knowledge but also as a guide. Rekalde (2020) defines the functions of today's teachers in a university in the 21st century, as necessary to develop competencies different from those of just two decades ago. The ways of learning have changed, and the ways of being a university teacher have also changed. Today, they perform a complex task that involves three professions, research, teaching, and management, in a framework of ssignificant technological and multilingual change (Ereñaga & Recalde, 2021).

In any case, academic staff needs to change their tasks; their teaching function demands competencies such as comprehensive and in-depth knowledge of the teaching and learning process**,** redefining their role in tutoring and guiding learning, reworking programs, integrating ICT in training processes, planning activities, redefining face-to-face teaching and theoretical content, designing resources and materials, and the criteria and system of educational evaluation (Torra et al., 2012; Reverter-Masiá & Alonso, 2016).

Along these lines, Medina, Domínguez, and Ribeiro (2011) specify the following ten professional competencies of higher education academic staff: innovation in teaching, involvement in the society of knowledge, communicative competence, didactic interaction, planning of scientific knowledge and teaching skills, development of the system and methodological strategies, assessment of the European dimensions of Higher Education, tutoring, professional identity, the design and implementation of methodologies and methodological strategies, and the development of the European dimension of Higher Education.

In this sense, according to Zabalza (2002) there are two key ideas: on the one hand, the idea that innovating is doing different things, doing better things, and, on the other, the idea that the quality of an innovative experience depends on the quality of the underlying prior proposal, not because it is an innovation, which is already good.

As Tejada (2013) suggests, an attitude of reflection and criticism about teaching, self-improvement, training, and ethical commitment to the profession should be present in the training processes to achieve these requirements and competencies.

Finally, to ensure that the teaching profession has legitimate academic professionalism and that professionalism is maintained over time, several universities have established institutional frameworks and policies based on university teaching qualification schemes and learning outcomes, such as the Professional Standards Framework (PSF) for teaching and supporting learning in Higher Education in the United Kingdom and the Australian University Teaching & Criteria & Standards Framework. Several years after their inception, they have significantly affected the language, criteria, processes, and structures for academic support, promotion, and tenure (Chalmers, 2011). In developing these frameworks, university teacher education, as we will see below, is recognized as a relevant factor in improving educational quality in higher education institutions. (Lameul et al., 2014).

RESULTS

What do we mean by Quality Teaching in Higher Education?

With all that, we would like to end this theoretical section by asking ourselves a critical question that is difficult to answer: What do we mean by being a excellent teacher? To answer this question, we will focus on the Academic Teaching Development Framework (Marco de Desarrollo Académico Docente, MDAD) developed at the initiative of the State University Teaching Network (Red Estatal de Docencia Universitaria, REDU), even if it will not give us a clear and objective answer. However, it will offer a conceptual guide to help us to reflect on the subject. This proposal seeks to bring together the primary available research evidence defining what constitutes quality teaching as a starting point for deliberating, reviewing, organizing, and improving it in an explicit, public, and informed framework (Paricio et al., 2019). We start from the idea that this framework aims to foster an academic approach to quality teaching and, therefore, begins with a thorough review of more than four decades of research on the state of the art of teaching.

Moreover, the framework has three fundamental premises: development, progression, and integration (Paricio et al., 2019), which are designed to promote the academic development of teachers and not for their evaluation. It also offers teachers a progressive academic path to advance, encourage reflection, and help them decide what is good teaching in each of our cases. In a map grid, this framework collects diverse levels of academic teacher development, which gives a staggered view of four levels of teacher development in their ways of conceiving and practicing teaching.

These levels include various stages of development. These stages are grouped horizontally and are as follows:

Figure 1. Levels of development stages
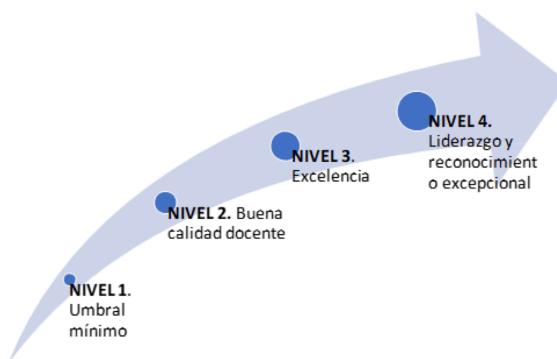
Source: General outline of the MDAD, adapted from Paricio et al. (2019).

Each level represents a teacher's profile with different conceptions of teaching and learning. We are talking about profiles or archetypes so that each person can be reflected on more than one level:

Level 1 refers to the minimum quality criteria that must be guaranteed in any teaching development and, therefore, any academic institution must ensure. Level 2 defines *practical teaching* as facilitating the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Level 3 corresponds to excellence and is typical of an approach to teaching as an

academic priority. The proposal of experiences of high educational impact characterized it. The fourth level identifies and conceives teaching as research.

The aim is to make a relevant contribution to improve teaching at universities and higher education institutions, and in this map, we also find different dimensions that cross it vertically. Each of these dimensions responds to an aspect of teaching that research has associated with good learning processes or results, with an essential level of consensus. In other words, they are conceptions, approaches, and practical strategies that characterize quality teaching (Paricio et al., 2019). These dimensions are organized into three blocks:

Figure 2. A general outline of the dimensions of the Academic Teaching Development Framework (MDAD)
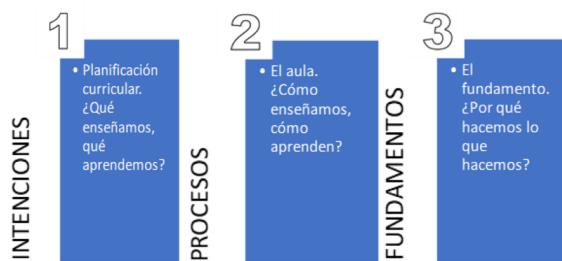
Source: Own development

Block I, called *Intentions*, focuses on curriculum planning, how the curriculum should be derived from the university's educational vision, and the value of what is taught and learned. It covers two sub-dimensions: an explicit, defined, and coherent curriculum and an integrated curriculum oriented towards transforming the way students think and act (REDU, 2022).

Block 2, Processes, focuses on how teaching and learning happen and the types of experiences offered to students. It covers the following sub-dimensions: Active and constructive learning; deep learning; self-regulation; intense and valuable interaction; authentic, challenging, shared, and sustainable assessment; and finally, learning scenarios as spaces for action, interaction, self-regulation, and personal knowledge elaboration.

Finally, Block 3, Intentions, catches why we do what we do, and the academic knowledge, values, and conceptions that guide our decisions and actions as teachers. In turn, it includes the following sub-dimensions:

- In-depth and critical knowledge of the subject matter
- Knowledge of theory and research in Higher Education
- Academic and democratic values
- Coordination and participation in improvement processes
- Continuous process of revision and innovation
- Relevant contribution to research in Higher Education.

DISCUSSION

In short, this map crosses 15 dimensions that scientific literature has recognized as indicators of quality teaching, with four levels of development. In each of these cells, descriptors suggest specific ways of approaching or carrying out teaching-learning

processes that correspond to interpreting of a criterion at a given stage of development (Paricio et al., 2019).

As we have observed, making an academic approach to quality teaching forces us to imagine the profession in a much more integrated and complex way. Paricio et al. (2019, p. 23) make this clear, highlighting that *academic professionalism* (scholarship) is the goal, but to reach it is necessary to establish routes that allow people to interpret the path and make decisions. At this point, teacher training processes become relevant.

About the contribution:

Jon Díaz Egurbide: Provision of study materials. Preparation, creation, and/or presentation of the published work, specifically the visualization/presentation of data. Preparation, creation, and/or presentation of the published work.

Nagore Guerra: Ideas; formulation or evolution of the general aims and objectives of the research. Development or design of the methodology; creation of models. Preparation, creation, and/or presentation of the published work, specifically the writing of the initial draft.

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