



TEACHING AND LEARNING INNOVATION IMPACTS

THE TEACHING PORTFOLIO AT UNIVERSITAT AUTÒNOMA DE BARCELONA: A TOOL TO ENHANCE TEACHING QUALITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF PROFESSORS?

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- 1. ABSTRACT:** Could be the teaching portfolio (TP) a real strategy to improve the quality in our classes and in the learning process and assessment of our students? In this work, we have analysed the contents of several TP developed under the FDES program organized by IDES at UAB. Moreover, once teaching portfolios were reviewed, the real impact on teaching practice was assessed through an Internet-based survey. As a conclusion, we can say that implementation of TP in our context needs institutional support.
- 2. KEYWORDS:** teaching portfolio, teaching quality assessment, institutional support



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3. DEVELOPMENT:

INTRODUCTION

Could be the teaching portfolio a real strategy or a tool to improve the quality in our classes and in the learning process and assessment of our students? Does the teaching portfolio may be the necessary and objective tool to evaluate and reward professors? Contemporary society requires a constant renewal of higher education institutions, which implies changes in teaching, research and university management. These changes should consider an educational model to define specific guidelines for the exercise of the functions carried out by the entire university community, as an integral part of the training of current and future professionals.

The implementation of a system of continuous updating and improvement of the curriculum should be established as a priority for any educational institution (Torra Bitlloch et al., 2013).

To ensure compliance with this, the governing bodies of the University shall be involved in the development of the transformation process. But not only the governing bodies must become the engine of change, professors should also have an important role in this transformation. As professors, we regularly ask ourselves with a number of issues: do my students learn what I am teaching to them? Am I happy with my teaching methodology or I should change it? There is any way to improve the performance of my students? Do our educational programs respond to the needs of today's society? Am I a good professor? Shall I assess and share my educational actions? Traditionally, university professors are hired to teach but rewarded for research, and this is why "Evaluating teaching performance in the absence of factual information is very difficult. Rewarding it is also very difficult, as is improving it" (Seldin, Miller and Seldin, 2010). In fact, professors are usually evaluated and hired using the typical curriculum vitae that lists publications, research grants, publications, and conference presentations but says almost nothing or very little about teaching.

In this sense, the teaching portfolio can be established as a tool that represents an opportunity to rethink and evaluate the professors' body, as it facilitates self-management, self-regulation, continuous learning, self-assessment and planning of future work. It is, therefore, an ideal tool for ease professors about reflection on their teaching (Seldin, 1999).

What is a teaching portfolio?

The teaching portfolio (TP) is the result of personal reflection about one's own teaching practice; however, this reflection should be properly evidenced and discussed to be useful for improving teaching quality. In the teaching portfolio (Figure 1), a professor thinks about its own personal experiences in its teaching trajectory and documents and evaluates its own process to become a teacher and its progress over the time. The teaching portfolio is used by a teacher to put together and to showcase, in the best possible way, its teaching awards and recognitions, its daily practice and personal style of teaching (teaching philosophy), its teaching experience (responsibilities), a relevant selection of its course planning artefacts (sample course syllabus, lesson plans, assignments, exams, activities) and finally, some evidences of its teaching effectiveness (student feedback, department evaluations) and professional development (Shulman, 1998).



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The TP writing process make teachers to think with honesty about their daily activity, to discover their own educational philosophy, to evaluate their own progress as teacher and also, to start the search for the most effective educational and innovative strategies that not only will benefit students, but also, will serve to train better teachers.

There are many ways of doing, organizing and presenting a TP. The choice of a structure, table of contents, format, etc, answers to a great extent to practical considerations or to one's personal preference, taking always into account the reflection and comprehension of the educational activity and looking for possible improvements.

Objectives of the teaching portfolio

From a literature review, three possible objectives of the TP can be established. First, a summative TP, created with the purpose of applying for an academic job or for promotion and tenure within an academic department, as it has been demonstrated by its extended application in the Anglo-Saxon countries (Knapper and Wilcox, 1998). Second, a formative TP, used as a tool for self-reflection on the process, the progress and the results obtained as a teacher, pursuing, therefore, the improvement of the teaching effectiveness and performance over the time (Lyons, 1998; Wade and Yarbrough, 1996). Finally, a TP can also be used as a self-development strategy in the context of professional training of university teachers (Fernández, 2004).

The conventional Curriculum Vitae (CV), on the contrary, is a summary of the activity and educational experience of a university teacher. The CV is, among other things, a list of given courses, of syllabus developed by the teacher, of publications and materials produced by the teacher, of academic commissions, a so on. Its format and content normally serves to provide evidence on decisions taken by the teacher relative to its academic career, but, a CV lacks of elements to evaluate or to report on the teaching quality of a teacher, of a subject, of a department or inclusively, of an institution (contrasting of what happens in the evaluation of research quality).

To evaluate the teaching quality is necessary a document where a deep reflection over one's teaching activity is showcased. In this document, a teacher should summarize its strong points and achievements. Therefore, the TP provides evidences over the decision making process of one's academic career, and, it might be said that a TP is to teaching, what research publications, scholarships and distinctions are to research.

Moreover, as the teacher is developing its TP by giving answers to the questions sketched in Figure 1, him/herself improves its teaching quality based on the knowledge of his/her strengths and weaknesses, helping to organize and to improve the learning process on his/her subjects, as well as the careers' study plans.

This process that integrates the personal experience and the theoretical knowledge one's can have constitutes an essential element to develop a professional culture of the teaching (Zabalza, 2002). And, in spite of being a personal process, based on the reflection on the own practice, TP promotes the collaboration and the exchange of experiences and ideas, key elements for the overall improvement of the teaching quality in an institution.

Finally, the TP helps to construct the global and external image of an institution, as its gives visibility to the activities that are developed to improve the university teaching and affects, at



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the same time, the establishment and evaluation of the training programs of the university professors.

According with the Unit for Teaching Innovation in Higher Education (IDES) (Sabaté, 2016) at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), more than 92 professors and researchers (including junior and senior professors) from several knowledge areas have developed their TP between 2013 and 2016. A large part of them have been encouraged by the FDES program organised by IDES-UAB each year. The objectives pursued by teachers could be summarised as follow: A) to analyse and to improve their teaching practise and B) to be officially recognised by the FDES program.

The FDES is a training program specifically designed by IDES-UAB (2009) for higher education's teachers. The purpose is to develop teaching abilities and skills on several areas, but, in particular the ones referred to the planning of the teaching-learning process, to the use of innovative strategies and didactic resources and to the use of an evaluation's system according to the frame of the ESHE.

IDES-UAB has chosen a TP's structure where the biographical sketch (CV) is less important and thus, the teaching philosophy and methodology take special significance, as well as, the evidences that demonstrate teaching quality and the future plans for improvement.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Following these premises, in this work, we have analysed the contents of several teaching portfolios developed under the Professors' Training Program in Higher Education (FDES) organized by the Unit of Teaching Innovation in Higher Education (IDES) at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB). The analysis was based on the review of each one of the teaching sections (biography, teaching done so far, evidences, future plans) and of the whole writing and reflection process.

Several criteria were taken into account to assess the teaching portfolios, such as: clearly stated objectives, broad statement of the rationale or purposes for teaching (planning and development), and evidences of basic competences as a university professor (results), or evidences of excellence in teaching (awards, etc.). A rubric has been designed specifically for this purpose (available only in Spanish at the moment: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/pvpvn9o2f40s2vr/CriteriosEvaluacionCarpetaDocente.pdf?dl=0>). Moreover, once teaching portfolios were reviewed, the real impact on teaching practice was assessed through an Internet-based survey (In Catalan: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/or489xfwx2z34ue/Enquesta%20sobre%20la%20Carpeta%20Docent%20com%20a%20eina%20per%20a%20avaluar%20la%20qualitat%20docent%20a%20la%20UAB.pdf?dl=0>).



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RESULTS

At first glance, in terms of the rubric above exposed, the best teaching portfolios were obtained from those professors who followed a specific workshop (where the writing process was guided and shared among other professors) compared to the ones that just attended to a seminar. Secondly, results show that teaching portfolios represent an evolution and not an end by itself. Moreover, teaching portfolios were considered as a flexible tool, based on real evidence, which involves professors in a process of continuous reflection and analysis of their own teaching performance, being an important tool for monitoring and self-regulation. Also, teamwork or collaborative construction (Millis, 2006) of the teaching portfolio helps to improve the self-awareness of what is being doing. Besides, the teaching portfolio analysed showed us the differences coming up across the different disciplines in the way teaching is performed, in the teaching and learning processes, and in the teaching results as Neumann pointed out (2010).

As example, Table 1 shows the biography of 3 professors at different levels of the academic career (in Spanish). The first biography presented is fairly common from professors coming from science and technical knowledge areas. It is focused in the research activity, being short and concise. It has the advantage that at a glance you have an idea of the person who is evaluated. In the second biography, the biographical data and the summary of teaching carried out is presented in one paragraph, which may be excessive. It is interesting that the person who wrote this biography highlight the teaching experience prior to higher education because it deeply marked him as professor. Finally, the third biography requires more work and time for reflection, but as the writing is more personal, it often draw more attention of the potential readers that the other two, because the writer tried to create a complicity with them.

Concerning the internet-based survey, Figure 2 shows that 29% of the professors that done their TP under the FDES program in years 2013 to 2016 has answered the questions, while Figure 3 shows the knowledge area, academic category, age and sex of the respondents. Regarding the knowledge area, the participants are mostly from health (41%) and social sciences (33%) while most of them are from “other” academic categories like PhD students and associated professors (67%). The last value shows that FDES program is more attractive to early stage professors than to more experienced ones, no matter is they did not received formal training as teachers. This is confirmed by the group ages, where the group of people aging 26 to 35 years old are the 33% of the participants. Last but not least, women (56%) are more likely to answer the survey than men (41 %).

The survey also showed us that teaching portfolios are barely known in our context (97% of the respondents say “no” or “there is a bit of everything”); therefore, we had to learn and to disseminate what a teaching portfolio is, especially, when many national and regional accreditation agencies are demanding self-assessment reports. It is worthy to mention, that these reports follow similar criteria to those used in the Anglo-world, where teaching portfolios are widely known (Seldin, 2010). In the Spanish context, the criteria to evaluate teaching performance is just flourishing, but no clear guidelines are being set up, and, for example, many professors get salary supplements for teaching (“Tramos Docentes”) without knowing that the self-reports (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2007) they presented are in fact, teaching portfolios.



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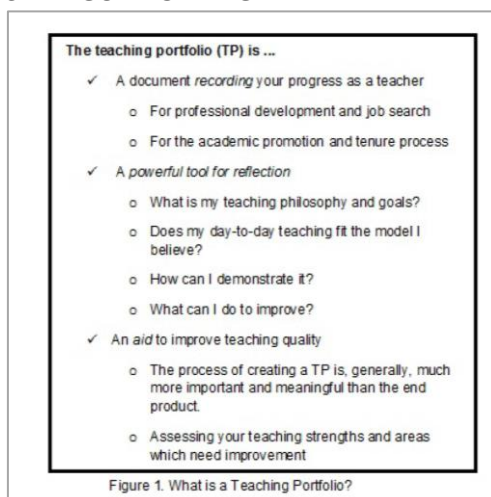
Figure 4 show the results to the questions: a) Do you use the teaching portfolio for reflection and improvement of your teaching?, b) How often do you update the teaching portfolio?, c) Do you consider important for professors to develop their teaching portfolio?, d) Do you plan to use the teaching portfolio in the future? and e) Do you believe that institutional support or incentives shall be given to professors to make their teaching portfolio?

About the question “Do you use the teaching portfolio for reflection and improvement of your teaching?,” 52% of the respondents do not use the TP for self regulation and quality evaluation of their teaching, this might mean, in our opinion, that they have done the TP merely as a requisite to obtain the FDES certificate. However, 82% of the respondents think the doing a TP is very important, while the same percentage of the respondents that do not use the TP for self reflection do not know if they will use the TP in the future. Therefore, to obtain an effective institutional assessment and to help to improve the teaching quality, the institution should encourage professors' self- assessment, reflection and willingness to change, i.e. it has to pave the way and encourage them to periodically elaborate a full TP as the 48% of the respondents has pointed out in the question “Do you believe that institutional support or incentives shall be given to professors to make their teaching portfolio?”. In this scenario, there is no doubt that teaching portfolios can help professors in self-management, self-regulation, lifelong learning, self-assessment and planning of their future work as academics (Felder and Brent, 1999).

CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion, we can say that implementation of teaching portfolio in our context needs institutional encourage and support at this stage, in order to promote this tool as the way to improve teaching quality, but also, to influence stakeholders in setting up clear criteria for evaluation of the teaching performance calling it by its real name: teaching portfolio.

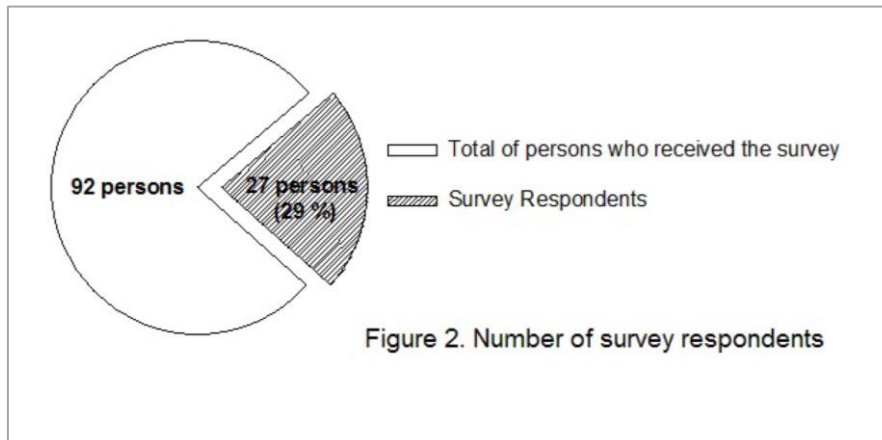
3.1. FIGURA O IMAGEN 1



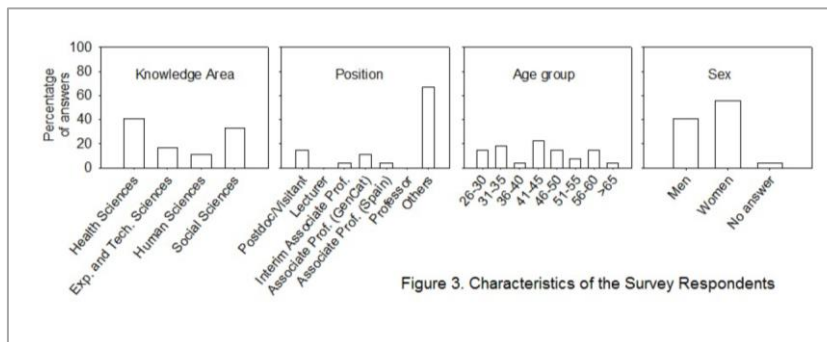


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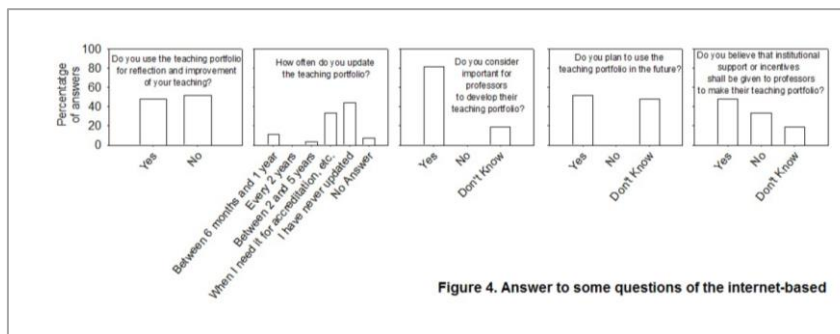
3.2. FIGURA O IMAGEN 2



3.3. FIGURA O IMAGEN 3



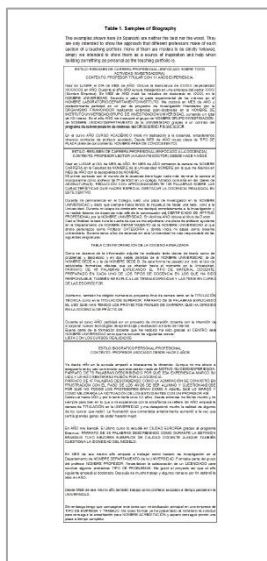
3.4. FIGURA O IMAGEN 4





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3.5. FIGURA O IMAGEN 1



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