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How do novice university professors learn to teach?



The research is an holistic study of informal learning about teaching of novice university professors at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. In this sense, the study has analyzed how novice university professors learn to teach, by identifying what teaching competencies they developed from informal learning, what strategies they have used to learn and how the university organization has influenced this process.

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Most novice university professors begin teaching without being trained for such function formally, that is, through specific master's degrees or short-term training. Therefore, professors learn to teach mainly through informal learning, which is defined as unstructured learning that does not require a trainer and can take place at any time in daily life.

The study aimed to analyze different elements related to this phenomenon: the teaching competencies developed through informal learning, the informal learning strategies used by the professors to learn, and the elements of the university organization that promote or inhibit this informal learning. The research focused on novice university professors at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, that is, those professors who have a maximum of five years of teaching experience at the university. Specifically, the data was collected through eighteen interviews with

novice professors, six interviews with degree coordinators, two focus groups of novice professors and one focus group of experts. All professors belonged to the fields of Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences and Education.

Regarding the results on the teaching competencies acquired through informal learning, the most developed competence by the professors was the interpersonal, that is to say, the relation with the students and the management of conflicts. They also learned aspects related to methodological and teaching planning competences, as well as knowledge related to the disciplinary content of their field of study.

Regarding informal learning strategies, professors mention that talking with peers is the way through which they learned more about teaching, as it allows them to seek advice and learn from the experience of others. Other strategies through which faculty learns are subject or degree level meetings, belonging to teaching teams, mentoring programs and reflection on their own experience.

Finally, about the organizational elements, it has been identified that each element can be a facilitator or a barrier of informal learning depending on its development within the university organization. In the context of UAB, one of the supports identified for informal learning is the institution's climate, as the relationships between the novice professors and their accessibility are considered positive. The leadership of senior professors with organizational responsibility has also been appreciated, as they tend to support novice professors in organizing learning initiatives. About the elements that hinder informal learning, the most mentioned is organizational culture, as there is a general lack of interest in teaching staff and a feeling of loneliness in the exercise of this function, as well as a clear orientation to research. At the same time, shortcomings in the professor training policy are also mentioned, as there are usually no support strategies for novice professors.

These findings help to understand the phenomenon of informal learning about teaching of the novice university professors in a particular institution, as well as to guide proposals at an organizational level that promote informal learning about teaching among professors who start teaching at the university.

Laia Encinar-Prat and Joaquín Gairín Sallán

Department of Applied Pedagogy.

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB).

laiaencinar@gmail.com, joaquin.gairin@uab.cat

References

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