Let's open spaces and approximate the gaps in the academic training of teachers, creating learning communities/units in the teaching departments.

MSc. Pedro Alberto Aburto Jarquín
Professor Researcher
UNAN-Managua
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5949-2167
paburtoj@unan.edu.ni

"The spaces are opened and closed by will and disposition, the gaps between these spaces must be approached with a high disposition and a demonstrated will." Pedro Aburto Jarquín. (2020)

Keywords: learning units, collaborative work, teamwork, multidisciplinarity.

ABSTRACT

The learning communities in the universities have arisen spontaneously, without any order that potentializes their importance in their academic functioning, both for the institution and for all the actors involved in the learning process: managers, professors, students, administrative workers, and members of the community or society. They turn out to be a powerful instrument to systematize the academic history of the institution and the role that each unit and each protagonist plays in terms of the change in educational quality in the training of professionals.

INTRODUCTION

We are in the XXI century, a situation that makes it necessary to change roles in the management of universities, all for various reasons, mainly due to the advancement of technology in general, that is, information technology and educational technology (TIC). Priority, in the roles of teachers' functions as main agents of profound changes in pedagogical, investigative, extension, and management practices.

Today more than ever, teaching departments are required to walk at the forefront of these changes: teachers with new skills appropriate to modernity, teachers who master their specific areas of knowledge, teachers with the command of methodological-didactic processes and capable of transforming student thinking making it more critical, more reflective, more socially committed, capable of innovating and solving problems that arise in society and its immediate environment.

Let us ask ourselves; are not teachers who are in charge of these strategic objectives? are teachers prepared to manage these changes? are there communicational mechanisms that train teachers and their students? are our students aware and trained to face these new challenges?

In the CRES 2018 Declaration, a proactive higher education with solutions to problems of social order is proposed based on its functions of teaching, research, and connection with the environment…

The social responsibility of higher education institutions requires a new relationship with society and postulates an innovative transformation of higher education.

The limited focus of social projection and university extension that visualizes them as appendices to the central function of student training and knowledge production must be qualitatively overcome and identify the social commitment of higher education consistently with the new realities of society.

The IES´s (As in Spanish) will be responsible for graduating professionals with technical, professional, and cultural competences to face the challenges of society and contribute to the achievement of the ODS's, as well as to access decent employment and activate entrepreneurship.

Another aspect addressed in this conference was the theme of teacher training due to the marked need to generate knowledge, a situation that we will discuss later.

Objectives

1. Declare the functional characteristics of the spaces for a learning community at the university.

2. Describe the importance of the formation of learning communities in the structure of the university.

3. Specify which are the academic impacts that arise as results in the function of the learning communities.

INSTITUTIONAL POLICY

We are going to start this article reflecting on what institutional policies are. Institutional policies are guidelines that, like any other plan, denote the guidelines that the institution issues for its strategic direction; they are mandatory and strict compliance, they must be assumed and applied to their context and in this case by each administrative or academic unit of the university. They arise from the conflicts or iterative problems of the institution, which it seeks to resolve by defining policies.

For Harold Koontz (2014), *"Policies are guides to lead action; they are general guidelines to be observed in decision-making about a problem that is repeated over and over again within an organization"* (p.31).

For Solórzano JE (1984), (cited by Chavarría, J.J. 1984) when referring to the concept of politics he says: *"we can choose other more traditional definitions, such as the one adopted by the Dictionary of the Royal Academy, according to which politics is "the science or art of governing and giving laws and regulations to maintain public tranquility and security and to maintain order and good customs"*. In our attempt to adopt a concept more adjusted to our reality, we could bring up that of a prestigious theorist, Bertrand de Jouvenel, for whom politics would have to do with any action within an aggregate or group aimed at building, securing or preserve its stability (p.139).

The RAE when Solórzano interprets it refers to the forms of government, which in our context must be interpreted by the institutional forms of government and are the university council, the faculty councils, and the technical councils in the teaching departments. Here the university work, achievements, progress, limitations, opportunities for improvement are discussed, and policies, regulations, plans, etc. arise. In other words, the institution is normalized to move forward. Juvenal in the previous paragraph is more in line with the context of this article when it refers to the fact that the policy has to do with any action within an attache or teaching group to add or preserve its stability. The latter is important as it must be the strategic and political priority to be taken up and guarantee its effectiveness by the heads of teaching departments.

In Law 89 or Law of Autonomy of Higher Education, Title IV, Chapter I, of schools and teaching departments, in the following articles it says verbatim: **Article 41.-** "The teaching, research and social projection tasks of each faculty will be carried out through the teaching

departments and the schools, where appropriate. School principals will be elected". **Article 42.-** "The teaching department is the academic unit that integrates related subjects, it is responsible for guaranteeing the quality of the educational process, through methodological teaching work and scientific research, and it brings together all the teachers dedicated to teaching these subjects". **Article 43.-** "The organization and operation of the teaching departments and the schools and their boards of directors, as the case may be, will be indicated by the statutes and regulations".

In this legal mandate, they give the leaders of the teaching department the power to plan strategically, defining strategic objectives, policies, goals, the ways of directing, the methods to be used to achieve those goals, and strategic objectives. Let us observe well that the article refers to teaching. Let us ask ourselves, and what do we understand by teaching, research, and extension? Of course, macro institutional objectives must be taken into account to align in the same strategic direction, we cannot ignore this policy.

In modern universities, teachers form groups of professionals to exchange academic experiences of all kinds, mainly those tending to seek new initiatives or good teaching practices, instigative-innovative in the search for professional training with an impact on society. This is what is understood in the Institutional Project (2015) in point No.6: AXES AND THEIR CHARACTERIZATION IN THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT and specifically in subsection 6.2 of innovation and modernization, states: "The excellent human capital that our university has is an academic potential that should be encouraged to explore and propose initiatives of interest to the university and society. (p. 11)

This will be possible when the teaching groups of the Faculties reflect on this need for inter and multidisciplinary collaboration, through teamwork. For this, the need for integration in the broadest context will be a sine qua non condition, thus the Institutional Project also addresses the following about this need.

INTEGRATION

In Section 6.3 of the Institutional Project (2015) it is pointed out that *"Integration implies new university management that is consistent with institutional values, so that the tasks of each unit do not compete or create obstacles among themselves, but rather discover possibilities for cooperation. The cooperation between the different university instances will be harmonized through defined and periodic work plans so that this operating modality is institutionalized. All institutional improvement initiatives will integrate teaching, research, university extension, cultural dissemination, and administrative management. This integration will be a characteristic of UNAN-Managua, which will guarantee the combination of strengths in the fulfillment of the different functions".* (p. 11). My

reflections revolve around what we are doing in this regard. Are there still individual practices that are not shared in the department and what are the leaders of this unit doing in this regard to find ways to eliminate these work models? We have already seen the Institutional Policies that leave these possibilities open. Do the teaching departments and their leaders take into account the institutional policies to plan their strategies and activities? Are there initiatives by teachers to address the best academic best practices practiced by members of the teaching community?

DEPARTMENTAL STRATEGY

We are going to make **the concept** and its dimension of a **strategy** clear and affordable so that we have the basis to refer to the subject at the right time. When addressing the issue of strategy, a strategy is spoken of in all areas: in business, in politics, in religion, in culture, in short, in every aspect of daily life. It seems that everyone is skilled in the matter, and has as many meanings as practical applications; marketing strategy, university strategy, didactic strategy, business strategy, etc., but also a number of other words have emerged, such as strategic planning, strategic administration, strategic management, strategic evaluation, strategic diagnosis, among others, which are normally used but of which it is not known how or when to apply it or how to write or understand it, sometimes.

A strategy is a goal that must be directed to be achieved in the long term and that is impactful in the context that is applied, which solves something pertinent to the development or growth of the community or the country.

Examples: Vocational training is a priority strategy for universities or at least, that should be the intention. They are also strategies: the curricular transformation, which is a first-rate university strategy; Likewise, the professional training of teachers is another strategy of the university.

Similarly, the concept of Strategy as set out above, for the teaching department and its leaders, indicates a program of actions, derived from them as strategic objectives, activities, goals, which must be defined to achieve the institutional objectives or key strategies of the institution. We must be very clear that the expected results when implementing the strategy will be achieved in the long term, and must be defined by the top management of the university institution.

For Conteras E.R. (2013):

> "The word strategy has its origin in the Greek words "stratos", which refers to the army, and "agein", which means guide. Likewise, the word "strategos" that alluded to "strategist" also comes from Latin and the ancient Doric Greek dialect. (Wikipedia.org). The strategist was the individual (or individuals) who was in charge of directing or leading the army in wars for

territorial dominance or for imposing its hegemony. Similarly, another of its functions was to try to avoid war through negotiation with the cities that were to be invaded. In this way, the rulers of Athens, Sparta, and Thebes consolidated their position; the former through dialogue; the second, with the use of force, and the third, applying the strategy".

When we previously referred to the faculties or powers granted by Law 89 to teaching departments (leaders), we refer to that explicit in the law. If they are responsible for teaching, extension /projection research, internationalization, and management, well, there are five departmental strategies. They must be addressed to obtain satisfactory results, which define the quality of the same.

NEED FOR TEAMWORK

Teamwork is a vital necessity for the development of the teaching staff and its growth as such, it allows bringing to the table different themes, problems of an administrative nature of education, of an academic nature, of a behavioral nature, problems of planning and evaluation and nothing better than discussing them among its protagonists.

The team is characterized by everyone consciously wanting to contribute something to contribute to the change that arises in the CRES. *"In the CRES 2018 Declaration, a proactive higher education with solutions to problems of social order is proposed based on their teaching, research, and relationship with the environment..."* The social responsibility of higher education institutions requires a new relationship with society and postulates an innovative transformation of higher education.

But at the same time, they are willing to regularly address these issues outlined above. In teamwork our knowledge is consolidated, we learn to listen and respect what each of its members propose, there is greater collaboration. According to specialists in neurosciences, there is better and more creativity, new initiatives come out on how to tackle problems, a responsibility is acquired to do and fulfill my role.

What are those spaces and those gaps? What are those spaces?

The spaces to promote learning communities, first of all, **there is the classroom**.

The role of the teacher has changed, today the teacher plays another role in the classroom and his performance. Today he directs, permanently leads them to reflect, takes into account previous learning, motivates, encourages, encourages, accompanies, leads, is a tutor, they intervene in student learning by reorienting and suggesting how to do things. Students now search, investigate, generate their own learning, not only individually but also in the work team and it is there in that community where they discuss, propose their best ideas, present their own initiatives and creativeness, there they share their knowledge and from that point of view also,

understand, interpret the forms, methods, procedures, and behaviors that the rest of the team members make up. In this space they look for information, share it, discuss it, analyze it and reach new theoretical or practical positions regarding the topic or process studied, the teacher participates emphasizing what is important, what is substantive, and how it will be useful for life, together with them it concludes and they reach agreements.

In collaborative work, the teacher only acts as a facilitator and the group assumes the responsibility of carrying out the activities collectively and thus meeting their goals and objectives. (This is the work that is required in the classroom and any form of independent work) José Luis Soto Ortiz and Carlos Arturo Torres Gastelú (2016. p. 2-5).

The university or faculty council is one of the best spaces for discussion and learning, it is in this faculty of professors made up of the main actors of the university or the faculty where an enriching work agenda is proposed for its members, it is where plans, programs are proposed, their structure, their possibilities of compliance, advantages, disadvantages are discussed, aspects of control, follow-up, monitoring, evaluation, standards to be complied with, forms of execution, assigned budget, resources, equipment, methods, curriculum, and its impact; that is, in this learning community the substantial of the university or the faculty are discussed: teaching, research, extension and projection, the internationalization of management itself.

Technical or department councils. They are another space to recover, what is intended today in the teaching departments of the modern university in seeking joint responses among all teachers to those problems that arise from annual planning, in which teaching planning stands out: that is, curricula, majors, subjects, but also in this learning community the academic results of the previous semester or year, limitations, risks and weaknesses found should be discussed; Here, their councilors give their opinions, propose, suggest and it is in this process a permanent learning space.

The teaching department can be made up of several learning units: **Subject groups, major groups, professional practice groups, groups responsible for axes.** There may be as many collectives as there are project needs in that department; moreover, they can function as staff teams. What to discuss? the modalities of studies, shifts, organizational forms of the development of classes, laboratories, aspects of planning, taking advantage of planning among all those who teach in that course and thus must address issues such as quantity and quality of content, such as Write learning objectives, agree on aspects related to the forms and methods of evaluation to be used, and what instruments we should use. Let's not wait for it to be planned, let's take advantage of the time exchanging experiences, this pursues further development and personal and professional growth.

In the field investigations, the extension work that the students with a social projection of the university do are the so-called "learning units", but they go beyond what is proposed, because they seek links with actors from the community, from the territory who must integrate into the solution of social problems in collaboration with the university.

These learning communities can establish communication and maintain collaborative teamwork at a distance or online. In the exchange, you can use e-mails, video conferences, Skype, Classroom, Zoom, WhatsApp, and its utilities such as voice, photos, videos, etc. These are the spaces that must be opened between the teaching departments of the same faculty with other related departments of other faculties of the same university or with other national universities and through academic networks with international universities.

> "A first characteristic of an innovative learning space is precisely digital connectivity, through the incorporation of information and communication technologies, which provide the possibility of accessing information to build knowledge. According to Edel, García, and Tiburcio (2008), new information technologies facilitate the monitoring of critical instructional events in the teaching-learning process. The ease that connectivity offers to exchange content between people located at a distance, makes it possible to perform in a global environment without having to incur the cost of physically moving from one place to another (Gros and Contreras, 2006)". Cited by Farías (2010)

The spaces in principle must be planned by the director of the teaching department, remember that by law this authority corresponds, but, it can be requested by the professors of the area concerned, it can be requested by professors from different disciplines, to address integration issues. When and at what time can they meet? **Informally, fleeting learning units can be created**, for example, once the day is over in the classroom, there are spaces where they can coincide to take advantage of them for these purposes, at coffee, lunch, or dinner time that is to say, in those moments that "we are free" and in which subjects of interest for the professors who have coincided at that time can be debated.

Collaborative teamwork

The role of collaborative work in higher education. Starting from the approach of collaborative work in an educational context, this constitutes a methodology in which teachers work together intending to solve learning activities. As the document points out (SEP, 2010), the main function of collaborative work in the academic field is to create a direct relationship between the different learning areas based on a strategy in which everyone works in a group to learn together and obtain optimal results. This requires the conjugation of skills and competencies through a series of negotiations that allow them to achieve the established goals.

MULTIDISCIPLINARITY

Who are the collaborative teams? not only the area teachers. These can be made up of professors from different scientific areas/disciplines, in a course they participate, for example, a business administrator, a public accountant, a finance professor, an expert professor of statistics, one in the humanities who teaches professional ethics.

Note well the richness of the experience of the discussion in which various experts in various disciplines participate, each one exposing at his own discretion the topics and the ways of approaching his area in the development of professionals.

Let's review the following: Does an expert architecture professional make the 10-story building himself? No, you have to work cooperatively/collaboratively with other professionals such as civil engineers, drainage engineers, electrical engineers, environmental engineers, material resistance experts, etc., for that reason the student must be trained to develop this collaborative and multidisciplinary job competence.

Next, the criteria of two writers philosophers of education concerning learning communities are exposed.

"What are learning communities?" The concept of the learning community can be defined in a simple way as a group of people who learn together, using common tools in the same environment. The concept of a community of practice described by Etienne Wenger is also interesting and very illustrative, for which "since the beginning of history, human beings have formed communities that accumulate their collective learning in social practices communities of practice"... that defines knowledge as an act of participation".

Learning communities according to Nicanor García Fernández, regarding the methodology, we keep the Paolo Freire model, which suggests abandoning the traditional concept of "bank" education (the teacher issues knowledge and the student accumulates it and stores to later turn it into an exam), Freire proposes a pedagogy in which students become active participants in a learning community that exists within a social context, and take responsibility for their own learning. The similarities to the Wenger concept are important. Fernández G.N (2002)

These two ideas seem fundamental to us when defining what we understand by the learning community, and we make them our own, so they will be present throughout this reflection.

On the subject, teachers must plan their classes in such a way that the contents, objectives, methodology, and performance evaluation can train students to also work in specific

learning communities and then expand virtually, online, in person, or with other national and international work teams.

Traditionally, we have seen how our universities have been approaching these objectives, but we need to further enhance multidisciplinary integration and teamwork both within the classroom and in teaching teams. There are still teachers who do not like to work in teams, do not like to share their knowledge with others, much less with their students. These are the gaps to approach with the willingness of teachers planning under this approach. Gaps must be bridged between teaching and research, between the undergraduate and graduate levels; There are policies in this regard, it is strategically planned, however, we have to make much more effort to close these gaps. And who is responsible for directing this policy, this task? This decision must be made by the director of the teaching department, pushed by the group of teachers that comprise it.

Farías M. (2010), explains that *"it is not enough for an innovative learning space to incorporate a computer, a projector and an Internet connection into the classroom. Learning activities aimed at developing and strengthening competencies must incorporate implementation and performance to account for the degree of achievement. The design of learning activities using new information and communication technologies constitutes an alternative to recreate a performance-oriented environment in the classroom (Coll Salvador, Rochera Villach, Mayordomo Saíz et al, 2007), not just a place to listen and take notes"*.

These authors confirm what has been explained regarding the learning communities in the classroom, (integration of topics, learning methods, and forms of evaluation), the teaching community, (integration of people between teachers, students, and society) with students and with the community or society.

Violant, Verónica; Rochera, María José; Dorio, Immaculada; Anton, Ana Maria; Llorca, Queralt (2016) these authors consider the learning units as it has been conceived in an introductory way in this article and they expose:

> "In our case, when we talk about the learning unit, we talk about and refer to the plot, artificially constructed (space). In the case of the learning unit, it is the plot endowed with temporality (first semester of the first year); of content (the subject that has been planned in the teaching plan of the subjects involved, in our case: the subjects of Education and Childhood Psychology, Health and Illness), of interrelationships (Practicum I and the practice centers and professionals involved with our students of the double degree of the infant and primary degrees of the University of Barcelona). This design allows the formation and evolution of interdisciplinary teams that not only meet to analyze the contents of each subject, but also propose the development of competencies conveyed through content developed jointly". (Integration) (p.977)

IMPACT ON OPTIMIZING THE USE OF SPACES AND CLOSING GAPS

What are the expected impacts if we begin to consolidate these challenges? Of course, they revolve around the quality of the university academy: teaching, research, postgraduate, extension, internationalization, and management.

Better levels of perception of quality in the teaching exercise internally and by the community, who in the end is the best evaluator.

A higher level of professional preparation and training for teachers.

The best level of competencies achieved by teachers and students, future professionals.

The satisfaction of the university community and society as a whole for the quality of citizen professionals.

Acquisition of new forms of communication and digital training (ICT) for teachers versus teachers and versus students.

Improve interuniversity, intra university, and social links.

Improvement of the indicators of student performance, which will facilitate a better assessment of skills.

Improve the projection of the teaching department inside and outside the university for its quality in performance.

WORKS CITED

Chavarría, J. J. (1984). Una Nota sobre el concepto de Política. *Revista de estudios politicos (Nueva época)*, 12.

Fernández, N. G. (05 de 06 de 2002). https://www.um.es/ead/red/6/comunidades.pdf. Obtained from https://www.um.es/ead/red/6/comunidades.pdf.

Heinz, H. K. (1991). Planeación. Politica. En H. K. Heinz, *Administración de empresas una perspectiva Global* (pág. 720). Mexico: McGraw Hill.

Martínez, G. M. (2010). Espacios de aprendizaje en educación superior. *Apertura UDG*, 153.

Nicaragua, A. N. (1990). *Ley de autonomía de las instituciones de educación superior. Ley 89*. Managua: Gaceta.

Organización de las Naciones unidadas para la educación, l. c. (2019). Plan de acción CRES 2018. *Conferencia Regional de Educación Supoerior para América Latina y el caribe*. Córdoba. Argentina: ONU.

Ortiz, J. L. (06 de 06 de 2020). http://www.scielo.org.mx/pdf/apertura/

v8n1/2007-1094-apertura-8-01-00002. pdf. Obtained from http://www.scielo. org.mx/pdf/apertura/v8n1/2007-1094- apertura-8-01-00002.pdf.

Sierra, E. R. (2013). El concepto de estrategia como fundamento de la planeación estratégica. *Pensamiento & Gestión*, 181.

Violant, V., Rochera, M. J., Dorio, I., Anton, A. M., & Llorca, Q. (2016). Unidades de aprendizaje interasignaturas psrs desarrollar la competencia de aprender a aprender. Una experiencia de formación del profesorado en la doble titulación de los grados de educación. *Poción*, 981.