

Policies for training university professors in Sao Paulo, Brazil and Catalonia, Spain: trends and challenges¹

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Abstract

In the context of significant changes to higher education and the subsequent increase in interest about training teaching staff, the present research draws on international and regional guidelines and recommendations in this field to shed light on the trends that affect policies for training professors at universities in Sao Paulo and Catalonia. The methodology brings together qualitative and quantitative approaches and includes the use of documentary analysis, interviews with people in charge of training and specialists, questionnaires and focus groups. An analysis of the information collected and a comparison of the training initiatives in both contexts showed that training for professors has been driven by current educational reforms, which are supported by the idea of the harmonization and construction of common spaces in higher education. On the one hand, these changes can lead to restructuring curricula in the name of quality, but on the other hand, they require greater accountability for students' results on the part of professors and may lead to greater instability for the profession, by increasing demands, reducing public funding and fragmenting research and teaching activities. Training, as a disputed field, is both an adaptation strategy and a drive towards didactic-pedagogical improvements and the professionalization of university teaching. These results present certain challenges, including overcoming the unequal recognition given to research and teaching, defining the responsibilities involved in teaching and going beyond the immediate needs of the labor market, by transcending the technical-instrumental paradigm of current neoliberal reforms and ensuring that training contributes towards greater professionalism for professors.

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Keywords

Training Policies – University Teaching – Transnationalization.

Políticas de formação de professores(as) universitários(as) em São Paulo e Catalunha: tendências e desafios^I

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Resumo

Em um cenário de intensas mudanças na educação superior e o consequente aumento do interesse pela formação de professores, a presente pesquisa se propõe a caracterizar as tendências que afetam as políticas de formação de professores(as) universitários(as) vigentes em universidades paulistas e catalãs com relação às diretrizes e recomendações internacionais e regionais nesse âmbito. A metodologia, baseada na complementariedade entre os enfoques qualitativo e quantitativo, consistiu no emprego de análise documental, entrevistas com responsáveis e especialistas, questionários e grupos focais. A análise das informações recolhidas e a comparação das iniciativas de formação de docentes universitários nesses dois contextos mostrou que a formação docente tem sido impulsionada pelas reformas educativas vigentes, especialmente apoiadas na ideia de harmonização e construção de espaços comuns de educação superior, as quais, por um lado, provocam processos de reorientação curricular em nome da qualidade, mas, por outro, amparam-se na responsabilização dos docentes pelos resultados dos estudantes e na precarização da profissão, por meio do aumento das demandas, diminuição do financiamento público e fragmentação das atividades de pesquisa e ensino. A formação, como campo em disputa, apresenta-se tanto como estratégia de adaptação, quanto de impulso à dimensão didático-pedagógica e de profissionalização da docência universitária. Ante esses resultados, colocam-se alguns desafios como superar o reconhecimento desigual em relação à pesquisa e ao ensino, considerar as determinações do trabalho docente e ir além das necessidades imediatas do mercado de trabalho, transcendendo o paradigma técnico-instrumental das reformas neoliberais vigentes e fazendo da formação uma possibilidade de contribuir para a profissionalização docente.

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Palavras-chave

Políticas de formação – Docência universitária – Transnacionalização.

Introduction

The transition to the 21st century has been marked by intense transformations in the world economic system, permeated by crises, recession and uncertainties. Among the most significant transformations are those that have affected the productive sector and the role of the state, and have opened up space for international organizations to begin to regulate social policies. This “new global order” points in the direction of a “new educational order” (ANTUNES, 2008) marked by transnationalization, a process that accentuates market trends in education and means that universities and training organizations are faced with the challenge of how to respond to changes in the labor market, and to promote the mobility of students and workers.

Thus, the dilemma of choosing between a “knowledge society” and a “knowledge economy” increases, as universities face new dynamics and priorities, in which their role as a contributor towards the globalization of the economy is given precedent, to the detriment of a commitment to advancing common welfare, democracy and social justice. In this sense, Dias Sobrinho (2005) aptly states that the university should not only be an engine for economic and market globalization, but the motor for the globalization of human dignity.

The dilemmas that affect universities have an important influence on the academic ethos and on teaching conditions. The cause for concern is that the field of on-going training for teaching staff is influenced by regional and transnational educational reform processes, many of which are based on a technical-instrumental paradigm that sees training as a process of adaptation and not necessarily as a process of emancipation and personal and professional development for university teaching staff.

The present study is based on a comparison between training initiatives in public universities of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia in Spain and the State of Sao Paulo in Brazil, regions

of significant economic and social development within their respective countries. Although these are different universities, regions and countries, they face pressures caused by very similar trends in political, economic and educational terms.

This research is particularly pertinent since it addresses a theme that is highly contemporary, and due to the lack of studies that explore policies aimed at training university professors from a perspective that goes beyond the national perspective: it recognizes that the development of policies in this area transcends institutional and national boundaries, hence the importance of considering the processes of globalization, regionalization and transnationalization.

From the new world order to the new educational order: the importance of considering the global, regional and local in education policies

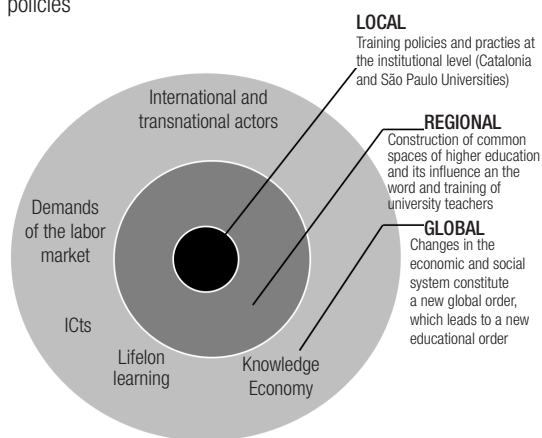
In the current context, there are major concerns about the on-going training of professionals from different areas due to rapid changes that may increase the risk of knowledge or even people becoming obsolete. At the same time, there is an increase in international exchanges which are part of the complex and dynamic processes that make up globalization. It is therefore necessary to reiterate the importance of giving consideration to the relationship between education and training policies and other global economic and social policies.

The emergence of a new globalized world order is thought to lead to a new educational order, since policies in this area are understood to serve as an important means of regulation, especially by international agencies and organizations, such as the World Bank, OECD and UNESCO, which consider education to be an engine for the economic and social development of different countries.

In this sense, studies in the field of education policies and comparative education need to consider different levels of analysis:

at the global level, although there are different processes of globalization, (some that are unreasonable and “top down”, and others that are emancipatory and “bottom up”), it is extremely important to consider the major changes that have occurred in the global production system in recent years, whereby the economy has changed from one based on the production of goods to one based on the intensive use of knowledge (BERNHEIM & CHAÚÍ, 2008) .

Figure 1 - Different levels of analysis in the field of educational policies



Source: Author
 EHEA: European Higher Education Area; ICT: information and communication technology; SEM: MERCOSUR Education Sector

At the regional level, it is important to consider the importance of initiatives aimed at constructing common educational spaces, such as the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the MERCOSUR Education Sector (SEM), and the repercussions of these movements at the local/institutional levels; in the case of the present research, we focused on policies for the training of university teaching staff.

In addition to the global, regional and local levels, other possible levels or dynamics need to be considered, including internationalization and transnationalization. Internationalization requires the participation of different states that

negotiate through their representatives and seek to reach consensus, so is a process “between nations”. The transnationalisation of education is understood to be a phenomenon that is intrinsically related to the processes of globalization and regionalization, and refers to, among other things, the consolidation of decision-making spaces that transcend the national level and alter the dynamics of power and decision making within the scope of the politics of education (DIAS SOBRINHO, 2005). Unlike internationalization, it does not include the participation of states in the field of social policies, so it allows for the entry of new actors and legitimizes privatization and supranational regulation.

Transnationalisation also refers to new paradigms in the social sciences in the face of the emerging ‘new world order’, since education and training become subjects of interest not only to states, but also to international organizations and supranational entities. This is because education and training are considered to be drivers for economic and social development that can thus serve as tools to promote economic and business interests.

Changes in the role of the state have triggered important organizational and structural changes to education systems: the neoliberal logic of the ‘minimal state’ for social policies and the ‘maximum state’ for capital (PERONI, 2003) have intensified privatization and commodification in education.

In the case of Brazil, the extent of privatization is worthy of note: in 2013, 74% of enrollments in higher education were private. At the same time, capital in the education sector is highly concentrated and internationalized, and is limited to a few groups capitalized on the stock market (SGUISSARDI, 2013).

In the Catalan case, where most enrollments are in public institutions (87% in 2013), it could be said that there was a process of “privatization from the inside”, because with funding cuts, many public universities were pressurized to adopt a management model based on the logic of the market, betting on

competitive research and passing on costs to users, through increases in student fees¹.

In this context, public universities face some important dilemmas: in parallel with an increase in enrollments and demands for technological innovation and modernizing teaching-learning processes, public resources have decreased at this level as has the need to ensure quality. In addition, these institutions are called upon to enhance economic development, competitiveness and productivity while at the same time meet the demands of promoting democratization, inclusion and social responsibility.

The impacts on training policy of educational transnationalisation and reform

The construction of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as an intergovernmental and transnational project to promote European education systems, especially in relation to the United States, has meant that European universities have had to adjust to the new demands of the global capitalist system, strengthening economic integration and the mobility of skilled labor through convergence and the recognition of qualifications. It should be noted that this trend of educational regionalization is not limited to Europe, but has also influenced education policies in other continents.

In this sense, authors such as Azevedo (2008) and Verger & Hermo (2010) have identified similarities between the EHEA and the goals established under the MERCOSUR Educational Sector (SEM), which highlights, among other things, the need to recognize qualifications, the mobility of students and professionals and the implementation of joint activities in the area of training for teaching staff. In addition, the construction of common education policies has

required greater convergence between different didactic parameters, with the incorporation of new dynamics, structures and languages, inviting us to think about the influence of these processes in the work of university teaching staff and their training.

Among the various university models and ideas, university reforms encourage the adoption of a North American or Anglo-Saxon model, which is based on the instrumentalization of education in favor of the demands of the labor market and therefore reinforces the commodification of the education sector. This deepens the dilemmas and crises that affect universities and training, particularly when the vision of a university is that of a social organization (CHAUI, 2001), since it assumes a technocratic and operational bias, favoring productivity measures, efficiency, bureaucratization and heteronomy, something that inevitably affects university professors, particularly since it increases the demands that are made on them, causing greater fragmentation and antagonism between teaching and research.

Paradoxically, the reforms that have occurred as a result of the convergence of education systems in different countries also generate a greater concern with the didactic-pedagogical aspects of university teaching, highlighting the importance of projects and sectors for permanent training as spaces that encourage professional development, through the search for greater recognition of teaching and a real professionalization of this area.

Pimenta and Anastasiou (2002), Leite (2008) and Almeida (2011), among others, have recognized that these reforms have repercussions on professional development and emphasize the importance of institutionalizing projects and didactic-pedagogical training initiatives, that are capable of providing them with theoretical foundations for their practice and permanent support, especially in a context in which these professionals experience contradictory demands and challenges.

1- According to a recent study, tuition fees charged to students have risen 47% in recent years in public universities in Catalonia, which are already more expensive in Spain (OSU, 2015).

In the present study training is considered a policy, since it is considered to be complex and closely related to other teaching staff policies, covering access, assessment and promotion. In addition, the specifics of the role of universities and the role of teaching staff at this level are emphasized, since their work is based on the inseparability of teaching, research and extension, the intensification of neoliberal policies tends to give rise to a strong fragmentation of these activities.

Reforms that have occurred in recent years in the education system affect teaching staff education, by placing greater demands and responsibilities on them for the quality of education, often with disregard to the scope of their work. In addition, education reform generally takes little account of teaching staff perceptions and opinions about reality, so they end up generating resistance and run the risk of failure. Therefore, the importance of their participation in the reforms and training policies proposed to them must be emphasized, in order to give rise to real transformations in education practice.

Objective and methodology

The main objective of this research is to identify the trends that influence policies for training university teaching staff, particularly in relation to international and regional guidelines and recommendations for higher education and universities. In order to achieve this objective, it was first necessary to carry out a deep analysis of the discourses found in official documents (both international and regional) that relate to the role of universities and teaching staff training. Secondly, the existing training policies and practices at the institutional level were mapped out through interviews with the people in charge of training and experts in this field. In addition, the perceptions and opinions of university professors were gathered, with a view to comparing this information with recurrent practice in reform and seeking to broaden the

understanding of the problem, identifying the main trends and challenges in training policy.

The methodology adopted was based on an interpretative and socio-critical perspective, involving both qualitative and quantitative approaches in a complementary way. The following techniques were chosen for data collection:

- Analysis of official international and regional documents: a total of 26 UNESCO, OECD and related documents on the configuration of common spaces of education in Europe and South America (EHEA, European Commission and MERCOSUR Educational Sector) were analyzed;
- Semi-structured interviews with people in charge of training initiatives and specialists in the field of training: 26 key players were interviewed, directly involved in training courses and international policies;
- Online questionnaire addressed to the teaching staff of six universities that participated in the study; a total of 721 responses were collected, which allowed for a broad view of the problem, taking into account the opinion of those who are the beneficiaries of the training policy;
- Focus groups with participants in the training projects: two focus groups were held, bringing together 15 teaching staff, which allowed exploring more deeply certain issues addressed in the questionnaire.

In order to achieve the study objective, the research was based on the epistemological and methodological qualities of Comparative Education (Ferrer, 2002; Vega Gil, 2011) and on a broad perspective of research in the field of education policies. These make up a field in which negotiations and decisions involve multiple actors and complex dynamics that go beyond the national scope (Dale & Robertson, 2007; Bonal, Tarabini & Verger, 2007 among others).

In addition, a comparative approach makes it possible to review, analyze and report on education policies and practices in different contexts, promoting a broad reflection on the

possibilities and limits of policy lending and copying of models, broadening our view of our own reality.

For the processing of the qualitative information that was gathered, a content analysis inspired by critical analysis of the discourses was carried out and, therefore, supported by a critical perspective that considers power relations and the explicit and implicit meanings of written or oral discourses. In addition, this analysis considers the importance of subjectivity, that is, the knowledge, experiences, contexts and worldviews of the subjects involved in the research, including the researcher herself.

The answers to the questionnaires were analyzed based on the descriptive and inferential statistics, facilitated by the use of SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), which mainly involved two statistical tests: Student T and Variance Analysis (ANOVA), making it possible to compare the means of two or more groups. The post-hoc contrasts were made using the Duncan test, which establishes a level of error protection for the set of contrasts.

Contexts and research participants

In this study we opted to analyze the training policies in some public universities of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia and the State of Sao Paulo, which are set out in the table below:

Table 1 - Universities that participated in the research

Autonomous Community of Catalonia	State of Sao Paulo
Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB)	Campinas State University (UNICAMP)
Polytechnic University of Catalonia (UPC)	University of Sao Paulo (USP)
Rovira i Virgili University (URV)	Sao Paulo State University (UNESP)

Source: Author

Only public institutions were selected because of their social importance and because they are considered to be those that have been most impacted by current transformations, since the process of education transnationalization influences the formulation of public policies through the intensification of the market logic within public institutions.

The criteria for choosing these institutions were: prior knowledge of the contexts and previous contact with some professionals of these institutions, which facilitated access to data. We also used as a criterion evidence of a marked concern on the part of these institutions with the policies of internationalization, in addition to a trajectory and experience in the field of permanent training of university teaching staff.

The universities chosen for this study have some important specificities: they are relatively young, since most of them were officially founded in the second half of the twentieth century (except the USP), although some of them emerged from the unification of different institutes, as is the case of UPC, URV and UNESP.

Another feature of note is that these universities have a considerable number of postgraduate students, which highlights the importance that they give to research, a feature that makes these institutions responsible for much of the academic output in their respective countries.

The analysis of the legal frameworks of the two countries and regions in question shows that the laws enacted, particularly in the regions, are consistent with the transnational agenda, that is, with the international and regional guidelines for higher education, which often have a clear neoliberal bias.

It is important to emphasize that education legislation in both regions does not consider the need for specific training in the field of teaching for professionals who will work in higher education. The only requirement is training at the postgraduate level (Masters and Doctorate), so that one can perceive the emphasis given to

research, implicit being the idea that the domain of knowledge of a respective area is sufficient to be a university professor.

Although the need for specific pedagogical training is not present in the legislation of both countries, there are some initiatives for the

permanent training of university teaching staff, on a voluntary basis, that have been strengthened and institutionalized in recent years.

The following chart summarizes the training initiatives for university teaching staff present in each one of the universities in the study.

Table 2 - Sectors for the training of teaching staff at the six universities

Universities	Training sectors and year of creation	Main Objectives
Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB)	Unit for Teaching Innovation in Higher Education (IDES) created in 2003	To enable teaching staff to: reflect on competence-based training; design disciplines and evaluation systems; evaluate the role of active methodologies in the new EHEA framework; use information and communication technology to support teaching; experience of the process of adaptation of degrees to the EHEA.
Rovira i Virgili University (URV)	Institute of Educational Sciences (ICE-URV) created in 1999	To enable teaching staff to: acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes related to teaching competencies; awareness of the need for educational innovation; develop skills and teaching skills to promote change; establish spaces for the exchange of teaching experiences; create teaching teams responsible for carrying out innovation projects and adaptation to the EHEA.
Polytechnic University of Catalonia (UPC)	Institute of Educational Sciences (ICE-UPC) created in 1998	To provide basic, mainly practical, pedagogical training consistent with the European educational model and enabling teaching staff to develop, improve and innovate their teaching performance; contribute to the professional development of teaching staff in all areas of their academic activity.
University of Sao Paulo (USP)	Office of Pedagogical Support (GAP) since 2004 and Pedagogical Support Commission (CAP) created in 2008	To construct spaces for pedagogical improvement for the professors at the University of Sao Paulo; to value the activities related to graduation, encouraging and giving support to the teaching staff so that they renew and deepen their knowledge in order to improve the quality of education.
Sao Paulo State University (UNESP)	Pedagogical Support Nucleus (NAP), created in 2000 and Center for Studies on Pedagogical Practice (CENEPP) since 2008	To promote reflection on pedagogical practice and the dissemination of successful experiences in the classroom; to enable the continuous improvement of teaching and quality assurance of teaching at the university, alongside research and extension.
Campinas State University (UNICAMP)	Area of Support to Teaching and Learning (EA2) Created in 2011	To offer continuous actions that encourage the valuing of learning and teaching in graduation; promote and publicize events in the areas of education, teaching, pedagogy and the evaluation of higher education; provide support and services that assist teaching staff without constant improvement of their teaching activity; Offer academic-administrative assistance for actions aimed at raising funds and investments for innovations and improvement in undergraduate education.

Source: Author

In comparative terms, Catalan universities were the first to establish sectors responsible for the training of teaching staff, especially through the Institutes of Educational Sciences (ICE), which were more focused on the continuing education of teachers. In recent years, they have been dedicated to the training of university teaching staff. In some universities, sectors specifically designed for

university teaching (such as IDES-UAB) have also been set up to help meet the challenges posed by the EHEA. Concerns about the construction of the EHEA were found to be very present in the objectives of the training at Catalan universities, especially with regard to skills training, improving methodological strategies, use of new technologies, teaching innovation and exchange of experiences.

In the universities in Sao Paulo, the process of creating these sectors is more recent: at USP, the Pedagogical Support Office was created in 2004 and became a Pedagogical Support Committee in 2008. Also in 2008, at UNESP the Center for Studies on Pedagogical Practice (CENEPP) was established, which was a decentralized project characterized by having commissions in different campuses, a characteristic that makes this an unusual initiative; in addition to the CENEPP, a Pedagogical Support Nucleus (NAP) exists in the scope of the Botucatu Medical School (FMB-UNESP), which has been working in the field of training of health professionals since 2000. At Unicamp, the Area of Support to Teaching and Learning (EA2) started to operate in 2011, but already takes up an important place among institutional policies.

Comparing the objectives of these training sectors, emphasis is given to topics such as: pedagogical improvement, reflection on practice, quality of teaching-learning processes, improvements in undergraduate training and continuous support for teaching. Unlike the Catalan universities, the universities of Sao Paulo focus more on the valuation of undergraduate education, something that can be attributed to the recent policies of expansion and democratization of this level of educational.

Discussion of results: trends in policies for training university professors in Sao Paulo and Catalonia

As a result of the research, it was possible to confirm that many of the concerns that arise in official documents are shared by the people in charge of training and experts. These concerns, which include changes to the role of the state, reductions in public financing and the restructuring of the productive system, have imposed new requirements on universities and placed a greater importance on the training of students and teaching staff, so that they might be fit and able to adapt to new demands.

Some documents emphasized the expectation that teaching staff would “do more with less”², namely they would guarantee quality and improve their knowledge and skills, even in the context of severe financial constraints and increased demands. By asking professors to develop skills to “adapt” to this new situation, these discourses only add to the instability of the teaching profession.

In addition, the growing demand for students and the lack of adequate investment in higher education have also led to a process of precarious working conditions for teaching staff. It is a trend that reinforces the fragmentation of and dichotomies between teaching and learning processes, between theory and practice, and between teaching and research, and does not contribute to the participation of teaching staff in ongoing training activities.

The education reforms implemented in recent years in both regions also tend to lead to the restructuring of the curriculum (revision of curricula, creation of new courses, convergence, harmonization, etc.) in order to facilitate mobility, comparability and recognition of qualifications. This leads to a series of organizational and structural changes and, consequently, to changes in the roles of teaching staff, which in turn leads to interventions in the permanent training of these professionals.

Many of the official documents analyzed reveal a largely functional and instrumental view of the role of universities and training, which is also reflected in the training policy, itself serving for reform. This can be attributed to the intensification of neoliberalism in higher education that puts pressure on universities to adapt to the new dynamics of global and corporate capitalism.

A transfer of models from the north to the south was also found to have occurred, since the principles and directives of the EHEA

2- This is specifically a thematic report produced at a World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE) held in 1998 in Paris, entitled “Training of higher education personnel: a permanent mission” (UNESCO, 1998).

influence the training of other regional spaces, such as the MERCOSUR Education Sector, due to the convergence of objectives, principles and projects that can be observed since the implementation of Tuning Latin America Project³. This project was recently implemented mainly through the SEM Support Program (PASEM), an agreement between the European Union and the MERCOSUR Education Sector, which proposes to develop actions that will contribute to the improvement of initial training and to the professional development of teaching staff in the region. It focuses on the design and management of public policies for continuous training of teaching staff and professional development, the recognition of studies, the use of information and communication technologies for teaching and learning and the strengthening of institutional links. As teaching staff training has become a central element of the regional agenda, it is important to question the real interests behind this, after all, these policies end up having important repercussions in the universities.

Many of the changes that had occurred in the training policies at the six universities in this study were found to have started mainly after the intervention of global policies, which were adopted by national governments. According to the opinion of people in charge of training and experts, in the case of Catalan universities, the influence of the Bologna Process and any organizational and structural changes caused by the adaptation to this process is evident. In the case of the universities in Sao Paulo, policies of expansion and democratization, internationalization, new curricular guidelines and demands for quality assessment and assurance were the ones that most affected the dynamics of training.

Another issue is that in both contexts there is considerable concern about rankings,

which many people in charge of training and experts consider to be problematic, since such a way of evaluating and classifying does not take into account the possibilities and limits of each context and obliges universities to give up their internal needs in order to meet external demands. In addition to the rankings, the issue of internationalization also reinforces the tendency to adopt specific training models, mainly based on the American model of or American universities.

Thus, in both contexts there is a strong tendency towards the “Americanization” or “Anglo-Saxonization” of higher education, since these models were mentioned at several moments by participants: in Catalan universities this model justifies the strengthening of the relationship between universities and the labor market, while in the Sao Paulo universities this model is based on the idea that professors can choose between exercising a more teaching or more research based profile.

Nonetheless, some participants also criticized the “grants model”, typical of American universities, which links funding to scientific productivity, in order to strengthen research to the detriment of teaching and to widen the gap between these two fundamental tasks of university professors. In this sense, professors in both contexts claim that both research and teaching have the same weight and are recognized in the processes of assessment and career promotion. In the context of the fragmentation caused by educational reforms of a neoliberal nature, it is considered extremely important to reinforce the complementarity between both these dimensions of academic work.

Throughout the present research, the training of teaching staff was also found to be influenced by quality standards created externally and placed upon universities and professors by quality agencies. In the context of the Sao Paulo universities, this is done through assessments periodically carried out by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), while in the case

3- This project started in Europe in 2001 and was brought to Latin America in 2004 with the aim of developing comparable degrees and fostering the convergence and harmonization of higher education in the region. For further information, see: <http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningal/>.

of Catalonia, the National Agency for Assessment of Quality and Accreditation (ANECA) and the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU) have an important influence.

For the research participants, the role of these agencies is associated with the bureaucratization of the processes, since the assessment carried out by them requires a lot of time and causes discomfort among professors. At other times, it presents itself as a “battlefield” because it is claimed that training and teaching are recognized criteria in the assessment that these agencies carry out, in the same way that research and academic productivity has been considered. Faced with this situation, it is necessary to rethink the role of assessment and quality agencies, so that they are not limited to the mere control and regulation of the policy, but have a real commitment, not only in terms of postgraduate studies and research, but also with regard to undergraduate education and the professionalization of teaching.

The concern expressed in the official documents regarding the improvement of the quality of education for teaching staff is related to the quality of the students’ results and, consequently, to the system itself.

The existence of a positive relationship between the training of teaching staff and improvements in student performance was observed, so that training became central to the agenda, once its importance for quality assurance and for the implementation of the desired educational reforms was recognized. In fact, the teaching staff who answered the questionnaire reported that improvements in students’ learning outcomes should be one of the objectives to be pursued by training initiatives. Through this discourse, the concern was expressed that that professors had been given too much responsibility for the quality of undergraduate training.

Given the trend towards placing greater responsibilities on teaching staff for the quality of education, without considering the context and limitations that affect their work (increased

demands, precarious working conditions, etc.), the understanding of training as collective and institutional accountability is considered to represent an important advancement, through the institutionalization of training sectors within universities.

Finally, competence-based training was found to be a particular stand-out trend in Catalan universities, since the implementation of the EHEA has boosted the use of this approach in the training of students and teaching staff; in the universities of Sao Paulo, there was a greater resistance to the adoption of this approach due to its technical-instrumental nature, but at the same time, people in charge of training and specialists admitted that its influence seemed to be on the rise, mainly as a result of pressure from international policies.

Some training policy challenges

In light of the results presented here, some challenges relating to training policies in both contexts were identified from the data collected, participant opinions and the reflections developed throughout the research.

The first of these is to address the unequal recognition given to research and teaching, and give them both the same weight in assessment indicators, thereby allowing for the promotion and advancement of teaching staff in their academic careers.

Another challenge is to give consideration to the scope of teaching work, giving context to its initiatives and training in a broader and more critical fashion, giving new meaning to external demands in favor of the academic community. This is done with the intention of making the proposed reforms and the curricular renewal an opportunity for reflection on teaching practices, reinforcing the didactic-pedagogical dimension of university teaching and the social role of the university, in its commitment to the demands of its environment.

The training of university teaching staff also implies going beyond the immediate needs

of the labor market, expanding the view on the labor world, so that the university does not yield to the market logic of preparing only those professionals that are required by the market. In this sense, the research participants considered it necessary to reconcile the demands of the labor market and the demands of training professionals for social transformation. The interventions of these actors reinforced the imperative that the training offered by the university should go beyond the technical, and consider the ethical and political dimensions of training for the transformation of society and the labor market itself.

Thus, it would be important move beyond a competence-based approach which is subservient to the volatile demands of the labor market, and includes thinking in a broader perspective with respect to education and training, making it possible to make the current changes and reforms an opportunity to approach the demands of the most marginalized sectors of society.

Finally, in the context of training policies, it is essential to be inspired by other training models and practices and not simply to imitate them. This requires considering the complex and multidimensional nature of educational processes and the inability to transfer or to “copy and paste” projects and practices. Ideally, knowledge of other initiatives might promote mutual learning, based on the in-depth study of experiences that occur in other contexts, in order to contribute to rethinking our own reality.

Final Considerations

In the present article we have tried to synthesize the main results and reflections about trends that affect policies for permanent training of university teaching staff in six

public institutions in Catalonia and Sao Paulo. Transnationalization and neoliberal globalization was found to have imposed new demands and dilemmas on universities, leading to instability in the teaching profession, in spite of the repeated discourse about improving the quality of teaching.

In addition, there is a tendency to consider training as a functional element of reform, making teaching staff responsible for the success or failure of the processes of change and for the quality of education, without taking into account the context and the scope that mark this profession. Paradoxically, the creation of training sectors within different universities lies in contrast to this trend, signaling a greater awareness of institutional and collective accountability for the quality of education.

Many of these sectors chose not only to use training as a strategy for adapting teaching staff to the changes posed by the reform, but mainly to strengthen the didactic-pedagogical dimension of university teaching, as well as processes that involve reflecting on professional practice and development. This demonstrates the importance of the role of local actors in leading and redefining external policies, placing them in favor of the needs and interests of the academic community. Likewise, these sectors face many challenges, such as overcoming the dichotomy between research and teaching, as academic productivity continues to be more recognized in both institutional and external assessments, following the parameters placed by international rankings and policies.

Finally, the need to overcome the technical-instrumental paradigm is reiterated, making training a process that involves the development and professionalization of teaching staff, salvaging its social purpose and its emancipatory character.

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