RESEARCH ARTICLE

Experiences on the Initiation to University Teaching in the Faculty of a Mexican Public Institution

Experiencias sobre la iniciación a la docencia universitaria en el Profesorado de una institución pública mexicana

Experiências sobre a iniciação à docência universitária no corpo docente de uma instituição pública mexicana

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▶ **Abstract.** The analysis of the conditions in which an individual starts a career in university teaching is the departure point of this work, whose core interest is the initiation period. With previous research about work insertion into the education sector as a reference, this paper discusses the relevance of support provided to staff in the initial stages of their work, as an opportunity to equip them with the training they lack. In that sense, the aim of this article was to describe the initiation experiences taking place during the first years of teaching of a group of five professors, with whom semi-structured interviews were carried out. A finding was that the work and training experiences of the professors at the time they started working at the university worked as resources to face the challenges presented by the educational task. In the same way, the direct experience and the models obtained from other professors were important elements that guided their decisions. It can be concluded that the challenges found and the strategies that were developed to face them have been varied in these professors, based on the professional development they have had.

Keywords:
higher education, teaching staff, teacher training, pedagogical practices, novel faculty.

▸ **Resumen.** El análisis de las condiciones en las que se accede a la docencia universitaria es el punto de partida de este trabajo, cuyo asunto de interés central es el período de iniciación a la docencia. Teniendo como referencia trabajos previos acerca de la inserción laboral a las tareas de enseñanza, se argumenta la relevancia del acompañamiento al profesorado universitario en las etapas iniciales de su trabajo, como una oportunidad para dotarle de la formación inicial de la que carece. En ese sentido, el objetivo del presente artículo fue describir las experiencias de iniciación que han ocurrido en los primeros años de enseñanza de un grupo de cinco profesores en la universidad, con quienes se tuvieron entrevistas semi-estructuradas. Se encontró que las experiencias laborales y formativas de los profesores al momento de su ingreso a la universidad, funcionaron como recursos ante los retos planteados por la tarea docente. Del mismo modo, la experiencia directa y los modelos obtenidos de otros profesores fueron elementos importantes para orientar sus decisiones. Se concluye que los desafíos encontrados y las estrategias desarrolladas para afrontarlos han sido variados en estos profesores, en función del desarrollo profesional que han tenido.

Palabras clave: *enseñanza superior, personal académico docente, formación de docentes, práctica pedagógica, profesorado novel.*

▸ **Resumo.** A análise das condições nas quais se acede à docência universitária é o ponto de partida deste trabalho, cujo principal interesse é o período de iniciação ao ensino. Tendo como referência trabalhos anteriores sobre a inserção laboral nas tarefas de ensino, é discutida a relevância do acompanhamento ao corpo docente universitário nas fases iniciais do seu trabalho, como uma oportunidade para equipá-los com a formação inicial que lhes falta. Nesse sentido, o objetivo deste artigo foi descrever as experiências de iniciação que ocorreram nos primeiros anos de ensino de um grupo de cinco professores na universidade, com os quais foram realizadas entrevistas semiestruturadas. Constatou-se que as experiências de trabalho e formação dos professores no momento de sua admissão na universidade funcionavam como recursos diante dos desafios impostos pela tarefa de ensino. Da mesma forma, a experiência direta e os modelos obtidos de outros professores foram elementos importantes para orientar suas decisões. Conclui-se que os desafios encontrados e as estratégias desenvolvidas para lidar com eles foram variadas nesses professores, dependendo do desenvolvimento profissional que tiveram.

Palavras-chave: *ensino superior, corpo docente acadêmico, formação de professores, prática pedagógica, novos professores.*

University teaching is a professional activity, whose access conditions are significantly different from those that predominate in teaching at other educational levels. Different sources have mentioned the fact that teaching at this level is more related with a mastery in a body of knowledge and its respective research than with the teacher's pedagogic and didactic capacity (Grisales & González, 2009), giving priority to the research role over teaching. This creates an imbalance in the importance given to training and performance of both roles (Preciado, Gómez & Kral, 2008). Academic degrees, highly valued in training university professors, seem to be more related to the focus of having research capacities, while the pedagogic capabilities take a second place. The latter remains under the teacher's responsibility (Monreal & Ruiz, 2009), and subject to the institution's will to provide its teachers with training opportunities.

Overall, in order to practice the teaching profession at the higher level, priority must be given to the mastery of the content to be taught, accepting as evidence the obtained academic degrees: the more, the better. This condition increases the outsourcing probabilities and gives access to a number of benefits for those considered better teachers, assuming that a high command of the content to teach is equivalent to a greater mastery of the teaching task itself.

However, current situation at universities requires teachers to have not only a wise knowledge (scientific knowledge in a specific area), but a taught knowledge (the knowledge translated so it can to be taught). This translation denotes the pedagogic and teaching capacity of the person who teaches (Chevallard, 1991, as cited by Grisales & González, 2009). University teaching has been flooded by conceptual and methodological elements that imply capacities additional to those of the discipline taught, and which are more linked to the very function of teaching. Regardless of the professional title obtained, the university teacher is currently involved in tutoring functions and extended services, and is expected to include innovations on their teaching, and to translate institutional purposes such as social responsibility and meaningful learning, to name a few.

Given this picture, in different researches, it has been emphasized the lack of conditions in which the most of university teachers are incorporated in the teaching work. Having mastery in the content, as well as having a successful experience as a student, are not enough to be responsible of the professional training of others, with all that this implies (Knight, 2006). "The university faculty start teaching without a specific professional training. This fact generates an impact on the teaching task, on the relationships between the teaching staff and between teachers and students" (Benedito, Imbernón & Félez, 2001, p. 2). Consequently, novel teachers are facing a number of circumstances they have not been prepared to, but that required an immediate action by them since they start teaching at the University. According to Teixidó (2009) "most teachers enter the schools without knowing what they will have to do or not being prepared for it" (p. 23), so they face the challenge of developing new

knowledge, methods and attitudes. Due to the above, it is even more convenient to assume the insertion stage as an opportunity for training the didactic capacities of the faculty, so that their professional practice begins with personal and work experiences that are relevant as well as satisfactory.

This study considers a novel teacher as a university professor teaching for a period of less than five years (Benedito et al., 2001). Those early years are especially critical for the teacher's development and to shape his identity as such. It is a period that the teacher must take advantage of in order to form the capacities and attitudes necessary for a successful teaching. Ii is also a period to constitute the profession that is profitable in personal and labor fields. However, in order to be able to suggest support and assistance programs for novel teachers, it is necessary to understand the circumstances they are going through and the problems they face. For this reason, this work focuses on this stage of training and career, offering an overview of such experiences based on the stories of the faculty.

Theoretical references

The process of becoming a teacher has been addressed in the scientific literature from the different aspects that make up their education. During its development, this education has received names such as updating, recycling, training, improvement, continuous or permanent teacher training, and even teacher professional development (Vezub, 2009, p. 912). In this regard, it should be noted that the training of a teacher is a process that includes both intentional training activities, and unintentional experiences, that also influence teacher training (Serra, Krichesky & Merodo, 2009, p. 197). In relation to this process, the literature widely reports the stages of teacher education in basic education; this is the case of Bullough (2000, as cited by Vaillant, 2009) who identifies four moments:

1. The period before starting the training, in which the prospective teacher develops an idea about teaching, due to their observation while being at school.
2. Academic studies, in which training is received, especially theoretical studies.
3. Teaching practice, that according to Bullough, is overestimated.
4. The first years of teaching.

Meanwhile, Serra et al. (2009) point out that several authors agree that the process of becoming a basic level teacher includes the following stages: (a) the student's own experience as a student, (b) initial training as a teacher, (c) professional initiation in educational institutions, and (d) ongoing training that involves planned activities by institutions or by teachers themselves to promote professional development and teaching improvement.

In summary, it is possible to conclude there are four stages indicating the particularities in the case of university faculty, as described below.

1. The process begins before the initial training. The prospective teacher is still a student,

builds expectations about teaching work, identifies the social roles associated with that work and builds vocational interests. In the case of the majority of the university faculty, this stage extends to university studies. Here, as being dedicated to study a profession different from teaching, they accumulate experiences and expectations from their position as students.

2. The training continues with academic studies or initial training. In this stage, the general and specific capacities linked to the teaching exercise are developed. In the case of the university faculty, this formative stage is practically nonexistent, because their training concentrates on the capacities related to other professions.

3. Teaching practices and the first years of teaching represent the transition phase to professional life. They are the third stage in the process of training, in which the insertion to the labor field takes place. In the case of university faculty, this stage has been reported in the literature. In fact, Kugel (1993), Nyquist & Sprague (1998) and Robertson (1999), as cited in Feixas (2005), refer to this stage as the first stage in the training of the faculty's pedagogical orientation, showing the difficulties and negative emotions associated with starting in this professional field (p.1).

4. The training extends beyond the first teaching experiences, which is called continuous training. The knowledge is continually reconstructed based on the contextual needs and the changes in the teacher and in the school institutions. In the case of the university teachers, at this stage there are two moments in the training of their pedagogical orientation. Since it goes from the teaching improvement concern to the students learning concern (Kugel, 1993, Nyquist and Sprague, 1998, Robertson, 1999, as cited by Feixas, 2005, p.2).

Job placement is understood as "the period of time that covers the first years, in which teachers have to make their transition from students to teachers" (Marcelo, 2009, p.5). In this stage, the process of induction to teaching usually takes place, especially among basic education teachers. The teaching insertion can last several years, as the novel teacher develops his identity and assumes a concrete role in the institution (Vaillant, 2009). It is an intense training period to learn to teach, which can be made up by formal or informal adaptation programs. Their purpose is to serve as a bridge between the final stage of training and the real practice of the profession: between the condition of being a student to be a teacher, and to be a teacher of students (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, Ingersoll & Smith, 2004, as cited in Fletcher, Chang & Kong, 2008).

The stage of insertion into teaching influences the permanence in teaching of the amateur teacher and determines the type of teacher in which they will subsequently become (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, as cited by Fletcher et al., 2008). Hence, there is a need for institutions to have specific programs or actions that support the novel teacher in their transition to working life. This phase of teacher training has been of interest in various studies, where the concern was

to analyze the conditions in which the process of insertion occurs and the problems associated with it, in the case of novel teachers of basic and secondary education.

Such is the case of the work of Serra et al. (2009) who identified four categories of difficulties and needs expressed by novel high school teachers in Argentina: (a) problems related to group management, order maintenance and discipline in the class; (b) problems related to teaching, disciplinary content, teaching methodology, strategies and student interest; (c) administrative problems, rules and procedures; and (d) relational problems. On their part, Sadler and Klosterman (2009) concluded that the work transition stage is a great challenge for novel teachers, especially in terms of the current complexity of schools, the classroom management, and the diversity of students. Finally, Sandoval (2009) analyzed the conditions under which insertion into teaching occurs at the secondary level in Mexico, indicating the existence of two initiation models: (a) through regular schools and (b) directly in the school, each one characterized by different strategies and situations.

According to Serra et al. (2009), this kind of studies have been scarce in Latin America. It is noteworthy that both the teaching initiation process, and the first years of work experience have been addressed broadly regarding basic education teachers, but not in the case of university teachers. It is possible to conclude that the work insertion stage can and should be studied in depth, considering the importance for the professional development of university teachers, as well as the contributions that recent literature has made about the existing mechanisms that support a professional in the process of becoming a teacher.

Starting as a teacher at the university

In an approach to publications related to the initial training of the faculty, there are works such as Bozu's (2010) work, who addressed the meaning of being a novel teacher in the university context of the New European Higher Education Area, the needs and concerns towards teaching, and their perceptions about quality teaching. Among his findings, he points out that: (a) being a novel teacher has different meanings, some of them associated with the information and training they receive as part of the policies that guide their work in the university; (b) professional training and development, as well as teaching practice, represent the main needs and concerns raised by novel teachers, and (c) new teachers' perceptions of quality teaching are related to various theoretical models. For their part, Monreal and Ruiz (2009) addressed the characteristics and origins of a teacher training plan within the framework of a Spanish university. The narrated experience is a matter of interest as it generated a training offering according to the internal needs and demands based on the context and particularities of the faculty.

Other works have addressed and discussed the training needs of university teachers; Gonzalez and Gonzalez (2007) identified teacher training needs at the university regarding: (a) mastery of specific teaching methodologies, (b) learning assessment, (c) tutorial action, (d)

knowledge of the student, (e) leadership, teamwork and organizational communication; (f) use of ICT, g) educational innovation and (h) self-evaluation of teaching performance. In the same line, Aciego, Martín, and García (2003) found that the most requested training topics for teachers are: (a) didactic methodology for planning, performance, and evaluation; (b) food for thought; (c) development of capacities in the students, and (d) research methodology. On the other hand, Benedito et al. (2001), identified four categories in the training needs of the novel faculty in the University of Barcelona: (a) teaching planning, (b) teaching methodology, (c) evaluation, and (d) teacher-student relationship.

Regarding the follow-up, support, and training of teachers during the work insertion, Cullen and Harris (2008) point out that the amateur university teacher assumes a role similar to the role of a student in a traditional instructional paradigm, since they are in a situation of low power (Amey, 1996, as cited by Cullen and Harris, 2008). On the other hand, Leidman (2006) proposes to apply the role theory and mentoring, as instruments to reduce anxiety, increase productivity, and encourage the integration of novel teachers. Finally, Sanchez (2002) introduces the basis for a training intervention program for university novel teachers based on a study of pedagogical training needs at the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, as well as the analysis of the initial training experiences developed for the university teaching.

In conclusion, we can affirm that the early stages in the profession of basic education teachers has been approached with more frequency and variety of interests than in the case of a faculty. This could be due to the fact that, as already mentioned, the issue of insertion does not seem to be problematic in principle. However, unlike the basic level teaching staff, the university teacher never goes through the initial training stage, when the basic skills for teaching performance are developed. This turns the professional insertion into the stage where the university professor learns how to be a teacher, at the same time that practices being one.

In the absence of an initial training in teaching, the university faculty faces, from the first day of their work, a series of circumstances they have not been prepared for in a formal way, but that demand an immediate response, since the university teaching role is of such complexity that requires teacher a training in basic skills, both of a personal and instrumental nature (Bozu & Imbernón, 2009, p.77). This is why, since its inception, university teachers are often facing difficulties in managing the various factors related to the teaching task, such as context, collegial work, and skills to promote learning (Guzmán & González, 2008, p.3).

Given the demands of teaching practice, teachers assume a personal pedagogical theory, based on their experiences as students, the little experience they have acquired as teachers, and the information they receive from their colleagues (Bozu & Imbernón, 2009, p. 78). This agrees with one of Margalef's (2005, p.401) findings, regarding the ability of university teachers to build pedagogical knowledge from the direct experiences of the profession.

However, as the risk that these sources of knowledge are not suitable or that they generate beliefs and practices that are ineffective, irrational or contradictory, the teacher training support becomes vital using strategies such as the constitution of practice communities, where the novel teachers can be supported in the reflection and analysis of their teaching, in order to improve it (Canabal & García, 2012, p.302).

From all the above, it is concluded that the work insertion is a stage that requires special attention from the universities, depending on the conditions in which the university faculty access the teaching tasks, facing them with the resources acquired in graduate school, and usually based on their own experiences as students, with the implications this has for the proper practice of the profession. A vital task before any attempt to meet the needs of teachers at this stage, is the formal study of the real conditions in which the teaching insertion takes place, in order to define the challenges and demands of teachers, so they can be understood.

In this work, an approach of this kind is proposed, in which the voice of the protagonists occupies a first plane, since these actors can best describe their experiences and the meaning that the different events of their work insertion have as part of their training process.

In this sense, the purpose of this work is to describe the initiation experience occurred in the first years of teaching of a group of teachers at the university. The following objectives are set:

1. To describe the experiences of professional integration that have taken place in the first years of teaching at the university.
2. To describe the challenges faced and the strategies that new teachers have developed to meet the demands of teaching at university.

METHOD

The research was conducted based on the qualitative paradigm. This is due to the key interest in studying the teaching insertion phenomenon based on the reality built by the subjects themselves, i.e. the university teachers, aiming to interpret this phenomenon from their own frameworks. This paradigm prevailed both in the data collection methods, as well as in the analysis strategy described below. Regarding its purpose, this was a descriptive study, since the objective was to identify the study phenomenon, without paying attention to the causes explaining it. The main interest was to know how the participants' experiences and perceptions are, and how they are expressed.

A case study design was chosen (Stake, 2005; Simmons, 2011), because it is a perspective that focuses on the particular and individual issues investigated. This allowed us to keep the subject in the foreground, and particularly in this case, the experience associated with their insertion process into the university teaching.

Context

In the Mexican Educational System, the higher level of education refers to the institutions authorized to grant bachelor's (undergraduate) degree, and specialization, master's and doctorate's (postgraduate) degrees. This level is comprised of Universities (public and private), Regular Schools, and Technical Institutes. This study was developed in the context of a Mexican public university with autonomous government. The university is organized into five campuses by areas of knowledge: (a) Architecture, habitat, art, and design, (b) biological and agricultural sciences, (c) health sciences, (d) social, economic-administrative sciences, and humanities, (e) exact sciences, and engineering. Within the campuses, academic communities are organized around faculties, and within these, they are grouped into academic bodies guided by lines of research.

Participants

The study involved five university teachers who were working in the institution for less than five years at the time of the investigation. To select them, an accessibility sampling was carried out, given that the teachers were identified by other more experienced teachers, who suggested possible candidates. Despite the limitations of the sampling, it was possible to obtain a certain variety of subjects in terms of: (a) their professional qualifications, (b) the field of knowledge they teach, and (c) gender. Below there is a brief description of each of the teachers, who appear here with fictitious names to maintain anonymity. In all cases, their informed consents were obtained to participate in this study:

1. *Susana.* Bachelor's degree in Mathematics. She started teaching at a high school level. At the time of this study, she had a length of service of four years and 10 months at University. She was in the full-time teacher category, hired as an interim, and assigned to a multidisciplinary campus.
2. *Alfredo.* Bachelor's degree in Computer Science. He started teaching in a private institution. At the time of the interview, he had two and a half years of service, and was studying a Master in Computer Science.
3. *Laura.* Pharmaceutical chemist, biologist, with a master's degree in chemical sciences, specialist in virology. Her first teaching experiences were at this University. At the time of the interview, she had three years of service, and was hired as an interim, with the category of associate research professor.
4. *Roberto.* Bachelor's degree in Psychology, with a master's degree in mathematical sciences. His first teaching experience were at a high school level. At the time of the interview, he had four years of service, and hired as interim with a full-time teacher category.

5. **_Fernando._** Pharmaceutical chemist, biologist, teacher, and doctor in immunology. His first experiences in teaching occurred during his doctoral studies. At the time of the interview, he had two and a half years of service, and was hired as associate research teacher.

Data collection techniques

The data was obtained from semi-structured interviews, carried out individually with each of the teachers. Although the content of the interview could vary in each case to suit the particularities of each teacher, the following topics were addressed in all of them: (a) academic training, (b) professional career, (c) university entrance as a teacher, and d) first teaching experiences. The interviews had an average variable length of 90 minutes. They were recorded with the subjects' informed consent, and once the corresponding confidentiality agreement was signed.

Procedure

In order to get important stories about the first years of teaching at the university, it was essential that the research purposes were clearly understood by the teachers invited to participate. For this reason, said purposes were exposed since the first contact. Likewise, researchers' flexibility was required, given the time constraints raised by participants. Therefore, all meetings were held at the teachers' workplace, at the dates and times they were available. Once the data was obtained, it was transcribed, put in order, and recorded in electronic files.

The information analysis was carried out by a thematic coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, as cited by Flick, 2004). For this purpose, each interview was analyzed as independent texts, using Max QDA program, taking the statements as units of analysis.

Assuming the core matter of research as a process (the induction to teaching), we sought to set codes and categories that reported the different moments that marked the beginning in teaching for each of the teachers, such as (a) initial training, (b) work experience before teaching, (c) mechanisms to be admitted at the University, and (d) first teaching experiences. These categories are linked to the first objective of this investigation. In the case of the second objective, it was mainly related to emerging categories: (a) problems or difficulties faced at the beginning of teaching, and (b) strategies to face the difficulties encountered.

The coding was first carried out individually by each researcher, to later compare the codes generated and set the common structure that resulted from each interview. In this way, it was intended to have a researcher's triangulation (Denzin, 1989, as cited by Flick, 2004). Once this was done, we proceeded to illustrate the system of categories generated in each interview to facilitate the identification of both, the common elements among all participants, as well as

the specific elements of each case. Finally, based on the identified relations, we proceeded to prepare the report including the stories.

RESULTS

According to Roda (2003, as cited by Teixidó, 2009) most of the models of organizational teacher socialization indicate the existence of three major phases:

1. The anticipatory or pre-entry socialization, which is defined by the background of knowledge, skills, and expectations that teachers have about teaching work.

2. The encounter, initial confrontation or accommodation, that occurs during the first months of incorporation. There is a total immersion in work, so it represents the central phase of the reception process.

3. The acquisition and change, which represent the new teacher's adaptation. This phase completes the process of socialization, when the teacher manages to meet adequately the demands of the teaching task.

Through the stories of the teachers interviewed regarding their first years of teaching at the University, it has been possible to identify the experiences related to their stage of accommodation. The results obtained are reported below.

Experiences of induction to university teaching.

During the encounter or "shock of reality" stage, the new teacher strives to acquire information that allows him to adapt, while contrasting his expectations with reality, analyzing the institution's operation, identifying rewarded and sanctioned behaviors, and learning their own role (Teixidó, 2009). The following are stories of the teachers interviewed regarding their experiences during this phase.

The circumstances in which these teachers arrived at the university were different, but in all cases, the emotions experienced at the beginning were a mixture of expectation and uncertainty, joy, enthusiasm, and even fear:

"I was really excited because they offered me a job I always wanted, but that I didn't believe I could have at that moment. I love the Faculty because I spent many years there, I had many experiences, and I didn't want to leave. When they gave me this opportunity, I felt excited, happy" (Susana).

However, other less pleasant feelings appeared and mixed with the previous ones at the beginning of the teaching experience at the university. Uncertainty, fear of not meeting the expectations, and the insecurity of one's own abilities were emotions these teachers also experienced. The story of Laura stands out regarding her first days of teaching:

"Ah! those [first days] were tense. From arriving at the faculty, from the entrance to the

classroom, it was really tense for me, due to the way they looked at me" (Laura).

From all the teachers interviewed, Laura was the only one who had her first teaching experience at the university she currently works. In the other cases, the teachers had had some previous experience, either at secondary or higher level. However, it is likely that the other teachers have had similar experiences in their first jobs as teachers, but they are not mentioned in these stories, since they refer only to experiences as novel teachers at the university.

Regarding the mechanisms or procedures of induction to institutions, it can be affirmed, based on the reports collected, that they were produced with the support of colleagues and administrators provided through informal explanations about the procedures, available resources, working areas, etc. Regarding particularly to the induction to teaching, the interviewed teachers referred to experiences such as the support received from the most experienced colleagues. This induction consisted of general guidelines for working in a particular subject, the exchange of experiences and even teaching materials:

> "The other teacher of this subject, shared his materials with me. He explained to me how he was working, he gave me tips about how he organized his time. He also gave me details of how he was working with students, and as soon I started to teach methodology, he also gave me materials. He gave me everything." (Roberto).

A particular way of induction to teaching occurred when working together with another teacher, even as an assistant in any class. Here it is worth mentioning the point made by García, Villagrá & Jorrín (2008), who studied the process of technological-educational training of an amateur teacher. They concluded that being part of a community of practice is very significant for the novel teacher, since it serves as support, guidance, and complement for their training.

According to the comments obtained by the interviewed teachers, the support they received when they start teaching, was sufficient in some cases, but insufficient in others. This reveals an area of opportunity for the institution, in terms of improving the processes for being accepted as part of the academic personnel.

Challenges and strategies developed by novel teachers at the university.

As part of the stories presented here, the interviewed teachers revealed certain guidelines for their teaching work, some problems they have faced, and the strategies they have used to deal with them. The also share their experiences that, as per their own words, indicate the evolution of their teaching during this time.

An important part while interviewing, was the teachers' stories about the elements they use as a basis or source in their decision making regarding their work. The direct practical experience has been the first source of resources for these teachers. That is, they have learnt to be teachers while practicing being a teacher on a daily basis. Another source of ideas to guide teaching is the experience lived as a student. In the case of some teachers, it seems that

observing their teachers guided their first actions.

> "I don't' know if I'm doing it the right way, this is what I can tell you. I do not know if it's the right thing, because I'm focusing more in the way I was taught… I try to see, in my opinion, the training I received and to copy how they taught me." (Susana).

One of the most recurring stories among teachers refers to a teaching figure they have contact with in previous formative stages, and who has the characteristics of a model or exemplary teacher. Although teachers did not explicitly refer to these teachers as "the ideal teacher", most of them said that this figure has been an important influence on their current work:

> "I had a magnificent teacher of statistical inference and linear models, who, besides his doctorate in inference, he had a master's degree in history of mathematics, and I considered his way of working very appropriate" (Roberto).

> "When I came to teach, I felt I was missing a lot. Obviously, I had the image of my favorite teacher, who helped me understand this subject" (Laura).

> "…he was an old man, but very demanding… He told me that mathematics was not difficult, they were logical, and if I could find it, I will be able to overcome my fears and get through the subject… This motivated me a lot. He was my inspiration to be a Mathematics teacher. Yes, my high school math teacher." (Susana).

Another important guiding tool for these teachers is undoubtedly the training experience they have received to develop specific teaching skills. Although not numerous, all teachers agreed on the importance of their training experiences for their current work. However, only one teacher reported receiving a pedagogical training course as part of her induction to university process.

Observing the way of working and the resources used by other teachers, either more experienced colleagues or pedagogical instructors, it is also a source of ideas that teachers use to incorporate new strategies into their classes, according to their stories:

> "The experiences of my other colleagues who already have a little more than two or three years than me, helped me the most. They told me: Here you can do this dynamic, here you can do this one, let them read this article, give them this…" (Laura).

It is important to take these issues into account when dealing with the difficulties of new university teachers. As mentioned above, they tend to be incorporated into teaching without having a specific training to do so, having the mastery of content as a main resource, which is achieved through postgraduate studies.

Different teachers, different problems.

Novel teachers may find it difficult to handle the various factors related to the teaching task, including the aspects of context, collegial work, and skills to promote learning (Guzmán &

González, 2008).

The main problem for Susana was to adapt the mathematical content to be taught to different audiences and for different purposes. Susana's training gave her a deep knowledge of mathematics, but she faced challenges when teaching it to students, who would not be mathematicians like her, but required mathematical content for other purposes:

"My fear was how mathematical the content should be. [If] I teach complex mathematics, then students will fail, so I have to lower the level. But I didn't know to which level" (Susana).

To face this challenge, Susana seek –without success – the experiences of other teachers in the same field. As a result, Susana learnt that the content is not the only element that determines how to perform in the classroom. She began to look for other sources, such as to know the students' characteristics and the purposes set in the curriculum. According to García et al. (2008), "the procedural competence that the novel teacher must acquire to take charge of the course, is the most difficult competence to be faced" (p. 12). This is the reason why it is recommended that teacher like Susana receive mentoring from the most experienced member of the faculty, as a source of support when doubts and difficulties arise, so they collaborate in the amateur teacher's training.

For Alfredo, the main challenge was to make his teaching something useful for the professional and career future of his students. From all the teachers interviewed, Alfredo was one of the most experienced. Because of that, he perhaps did not mention group management or didactics as relevant problems. On the other hand, he had another concern: to make learning useful due to the different interests of his students:

"I always try to make the information not only useful for a specific university degree, but also for a student of a different university degree. I always try to give examples for every student." (Alfredo).

Alfredo's story shows a clear concern to show his students that there is a relationship between the content they learn and the skills that will be demanded in their future work. His interest agrees with Fried (1995, as cited by Day, 2007) in the sense that "passionate" teaching is related to the quality of student's learning, among others, when students are able to make connections between what they learn and how it is applied in real life.

In the case of Laura, her personality was something that made her doubt about her abilities to teach. This concern about a personality that she considers "silent", that is, introvert, reveals that for Laura, having the capacity to transmit knowledge with expository techniques is a key trait in teachers. Another difficulty then arose: Teaching knowledge that she calls theoretical and that occurs in the classroom, in contrast with teaching applied knowledge that happen in a laboratory environment. Due to her personality, Laura felt she was more able to teach in this last environment:

"The practical [subjects] were not difficult at all, since it is technically lab work. It is about

what you do outside and come to apply it here. The theoretical part was more difficult for me, because... How do you express the content on the book to your students?" (Laura).

To overcome her difficulties, Laura seek to increase her mastery in the subject; as a strategy to avoid losing control of the class. Consequently, her teaching was focused on her and her expository skills, making her feel stressed and afraid. According to her, she could manage to overcome these fears by realizing that the theoretical content can be handled with different strategies, giving more prominence to students.

The problems Laura went through at the beginning of her teaching show what was pointed out by Fondon, Madero, and Sarmiento (2008): "The amateur teacher can be left unprotected and feel lost be when facing the new challenge. Since there is no guarantee that the faculty is a good communicator and transmitter of knowledge, teaching can be difficult in the initial stages" (p. 2).

The problem for Roberto was different. The method or way of approaching the contents, weren't a difficulty, due to the training resources he had. However, his concern was the need to involve his students in a work dynamic that were beneficial for their learning. Making the students learn is the core interest of Roberto, and for that, he is interested in having his student pay attention, focus, and work with a certain discipline:

"I'm in the middle of the class, and a student enters 20 minutes late without talking to anyone. He walks by, eating behind you, he takes a seat in the corner, and nothing happens. Students tend to be more uninterested, less proactive, and this is a common pattern." (Roberto).

To face such a challenge, this teacher had to try other ways to communicate with his students, choosing a point between more or less strict disciplines, depending of the case. As a result, we could say this teacher has learnt to modify his schemes regarding the relationship aspect of his teaching.

"I had to learn, and relearn to handle a relationship between cordiality and discipline with my students. I was looking for the right point in between." (Roberto).

Finally, Fernando has faced difficulties totally different from his colleagues. His challenges seem to be the most important for him, and they are not related to specific situations in the classroom and teaching, but generally to his adaptation to the institution itself. Fernando studies to become a Physician in a university much bigger than the one he currently works in. As a result, and due to the experiences lived there, he arrived at this university with a wealth of ideas he considered innovative and wanted to implement:

"I did find things that were not so... and you come up with an idea, perhaps trying to... new ideas or ideas you liked or ideas you want to apply here at the Faculty" (Fernando).

Despite his initial enthusiasm, his proposals weren't supported by the institution. This made him feel disappointed and discouraged. In order to face these difficulties, Fernando chose to adapt himself to the context and learn to identify the right circumstances to deploy his

proposals. Regarding Fernando's difficulties, De Montes (2008), affirms that novel teachers are characterized by having the illusion of doing their job well, transmitting existing knowledge and generating new knowledge through research. However, it is not easy for them to find the ideas place to work autonomously, and get recognition to the work they do at the university. Rather, it happens that "the newcomer has no other choice but to adopt the dominant perspective. To be accepted, he must comply with the work assigned to him, and with the standards set by his colleagues and managers" (Teixidó, 2009, p. 24).

DISCUSSION

The main findings of this study are presented and discussed below. In relation to the **first objective**, the following was found:

a) From the collected stories, it is clear that the emotions associated with starting the teaching profession at the university are usually a mixture of positive feelings such as enthusiasm and job, and other less pleasant emotions such as uncertainty and fear. For some of the teachers interviewed, their first classes were especially tense, particularly if they had no previous experience in any other institution. This shows that, as per Knight (2006), the first years of teaching are very important because this is a period of tensions between the demands of one's own abilities, and the new identity demanded in teaching. Therefore, it is important for institutions to ensure they offer adequate support and guidance to foster the development of a teaching identity that is consistent with the values and profiles they enhance as part of their educational models and ideas.

b) Based on the stories, it can be affirmed that almost none of the teachers participated in a process of formal induction to work at the university; however, they did have informal experiences where peer and administrative staff supports played an important role. This informal induction happened in two areas: (a) induction to the institution in general, and (b) induction to teaching, in particular. Working together with other teachers was a way of induction commonly used among the teachers that were interviewed. In this regard, García et al. (2008) conclude that the participation of a novel teacher in a community of practice is very significant, since it serves as support, guidance, and complement to their training. This was evidenced in the experiences reported by the teachers, by highlighting the importance of colleagues support during the first years of their work. However, as being referred to as the predominant induction channel, it also reveals an area of opportunity for the institutions where they work in, in the absence of formal induction mechanisms for their personnel. Given this, it is convenient to consider specific initiation strategies, such as mentoring,

in virtue of the benefits derived from this kind of relationship, both for new teachers, and more experienced ones.

c) The practical teaching experience and the models observed in other teachers were an important resource to guide teaching in the first years. Given the need to guide their decisions on teaching, they referred to what they have observed in their own teachers, the image they have of an ideal teacher and the models they copy from other more experienced teachers. These resources can be useful in certain circumstances, but since teaching is situated and contextualized, the adoption of models can eventually lead to frustrations and disappointments because not all formulas work in the same way in all situations. In addition, their experiences as students, even when the have been outstanding, are not enough to face challenges in training other people with all that this entails (Knight, 2006). For all this, it is necessary that the new teachers develop their own styles, strategies and identity, based on the contextual elements determining their daily work. To that end, it is relevant that at universities "teachers are taught to educate, so that students learn to learn" (Cáceres et. al., 2003, p. 1), since the novel teacher has only scientific training of their field, but lacks the pedagogical foundations to develop their teaching.

d) During the first years of teaching, these teachers have also relied on what they have learnt in their training experiences. Although it is not a great number, all teachers agreed on pointing out the importance of their training experiences to develop their current jobs. Such experiences allowed them to get the basic notions of teaching work, which they lacked due to their professional training in other fields, but which are essential to develop while in the middle of the university teaching period. However, we are ignoring the opportunity to initiate these teachers into the didactic-pedagogical dimension of the teaching task. This could help them acquire the criteria to select from a variety of strategies to intervene intentionally, promoting students learning (Braslavsky, 1999, as cited by Ponce, Lomeli & Roa, 2008). These training elements are as important as the mastery of the content expected from the faculty as the main requirement to access teaching, thus, it is not enough to successfully deal with teaching at this educational level, due to the complexity involved in the professional training.

Regarding the **second objective**, the following was found:

a) The difficulties and challenges, also reported as the interviewees' main concerns, were different (didactic transposition), teaching of useful contents for the professional future (meaningful learning), the improvement of one's own skills to communicate the contents (communication for teaching purposes), establishment of an environment of attentiveness and discipline (teaching relational aspect), and the adaptation to the institution.

These challenges show the need of these teachers to continue developing their essential skills for the faculty. In this regard, Monereo, and Domínguez (2014) have identified 12 issues, some of them being the concerns revealed in this study, such as: effective communication (shown in the story of Laura); respect for the students (shown in the case of Roberto); learn collegially (situations occurred in almost all cases); resistance to incomprehension and frustration to innovation (Fernando's concern); empathy with the students (shown in the cases of Susana and Alfredo).

Regarding this finding, the literature about the development process of teacher thinking shows different versions regarding the change in the concerns related to the teaching task. According to Ramsden (1993), Murray, and McDonald (1997), as cited by Feixas (2005) three types of progressive concepts are pointed out: (a) teaching as a transmission of concepts, (b) teaching to help students acquire knowledge and develop skills, and (c) the development and change of concepts about the teaching subject. According to this classification of progressive beliefs, the first concept is noticed in the stories of all participants. Susana, Laura, and Fernando expressed their concerns regarding an adequate transmission of the relevant concepts as per the teaching subject. On the other hand, Roberto and Alfredo seem to be moving towards a conceptualization of teaching as an aid to acquire knowledge and develop skills.

Meanwhile, Kugel (1993) Nyquist and Sprague (1998) and Robertson (1999) as cited by Feixas (2005) point out that the pedagogical orientation of a teacher is developed in three stages:

1. In the early stage as a teacher, the concerns lie in overcoming the difficulty of teaching for the first time, facing uncertainty and anxiety, showing mastery of knowledge, gain student's interest and respect. These concerns were shared by Susana, Laura and Roberto.

2. In the second stage, the concerns lie in improving teaching, motivating students, helping them to understand concepts and transmitting content clearly. Fernando, Roberto and Alfredo showed these types of concerns in their stories.

3. In the third stage, the concern lies in making students learn and develop their own concepts of the subject. Only Roberto showed concerns of this kind.

From the previous proposal, it is inferred that basically teachers are more concerned about themselves, then about teaching, and finally about learning (Feixas, 2005).

This journey of progressive stages and concepts shows that teaching work is characterized by changes. Although novel teachers have not yet gone through all stages in their professional development, it is actually the need to achieve a deep understanding of university teaching that can give rise to the processes of change (Medina, Jarauta & Urquizo, 2005, p. 236).

b) Finally, the main strategies developed by the teachers in order to face their difficulties were: to use the purposes of the program and the characteristics of students as sources for guidance in the teaching work; to guide their work, reusing their knowledge in the work field; to use strategies focused on the student; to try new ways to interact with students; to pay attention to the circumstances to adapt to the context.

According to Shcwab (s. f.), as cited by Posner (2005), there are four "common principles (places)" that work as curriculum organizers: (a) the students, (b) the subject, (c) the teacher, and (d) the means (p. 154). The stories obtained allow us to conclude that, as a general strategy, teachers develop the need to change the "common place" they take as a reference to organize their teaching, since they initially adopt principles and guidelines based on the "content" (for example, in the cases of Susana and Alfredo), and on the teacher (e.g.: the case of Laura), and subsequently they start to consider principles and guidelines related with the students and the context.

CONCLUSIONS

The training for research and mastery of the content to be taught are not the same as the training for the teaching role, therefore, fulfilling these requirements were not enough as a training for teaching at the university. Regarding the first objective, it is concluded that the fist teaching experiences are fundamental, and if these are not educational enough, teachers seek their own experiences as students, tend to copy the models observed from other colleagues in order to have a reference to perform their teaching tasks. On the other hand, teachers referred that educational experiences and the support of other colleagues have had a relevant role in their insertion. Thus, it is concluded there is a need to have specific training programs, insertion strategies, mentoring, and support.

Regarding the second objective, it is concluded that for the teachers participating in this study, the first stages of teaching made them face a group of difficulties, being the mastery of content the least one, due to the disciplinary training they already had. The concerns expressed by the teachers interviewed are similar to those reported in the literature regarding this topic. This evidence the development taking place when building up their professional identity, as well as the need to assist teachers through their educational training strategies.

Finally, the most important challenge for these teachers, as for many university teachers, is to achieve a real balance between the disciplinary training and their pedagogical training, in order to achieve a professional teaching (Bromberg, Kirsanov & Longueira, 2007) allowing them to accept the teaching work as an activity where their abilities are in constant development. In the case of amateur teachers of this study, it is concluded that the process of insertion into teaching has been defined by their specific traits, such as training and experience background.

With these two elements they could start teaching and face their challenges in a specific way. By doing this, they have started the journey to develop the essential skills for their teaching work in a university environment.

Recommendations

The research experience reported here reveals relevant issues regarding the beginning of the faculty in teaching. These issues represent determinants of this stage that deserve to be analyzed in more detail, since they exceed the purposes of this article. The initial motivations and the role of the teaching passion, the rationalities that predominate in novel teachers and how they correspond to the institutional ideological framework, the meanings associated with teaching in general and the quality of teaching in particular, the role of the first experiences to build professional identities, the host culture in universities, the mechanisms and contents that prevail in the communities of practice that receive new teachers, among other topics, are issues that need a deeper study if achieving a greater understanding of the phenomenon at the start of teaching is desired, with the purpose of providing the best ways to support, train and plan the professional development of teachers.

For future studies interested in the same topic, is it desirable to use additional strategies to the interview, in order to solve the limitations of these techniques exclusively. Likewise, the observation of teaching practice in the scenarios where they happen, as well as the analysis of reflective personal journals could provide complementary information to the interviews, offering a better overview of the process of initiation into teaching.

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