INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN AN INNOVATIVE TEACHERS’ TRAINING PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BARCELONA: TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

From the creation of the European Higher Education Area and the consequent process of curricular and pedagogical adjustment of the university degrees, higher education institutions have had to take into greater consideration the training of their teachers to respond to the demands of the new framework. This situation has led to an increasing number of evidences in the research showing, within the tertiary education, the impact of different innovations for the professional development of the teachers.

Following this, our study explores an innovation project carried out at the University of Barcelona. Carried out between 2017 and 2019, the project was based on the ideas of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. The goal of the project was to contribute to the pedagogical and professional development of the teachers through the put into practice of a formative process—guided by an external assessor—that mixed clinical supervision and lesson study. Within the project, teachers from the four degrees in the field of health sciences (dentistry, nursing, medicine and podiatry) collaborated to design their lessons, to instruct and observe them and, finally, to reflect about them in order to improve them.

The aim of our research was to report the teachers’ and assessors’ perspectives about the project and its possible impact on their professional development. Specifically, in this contribution we analyse the impact of the interdisciplinary work attending to two dimensions: a) how this type of collaboration among disciplines offered professional learning opportunities to the teachers, b) how interdisciplinarity affected the put in practice of the formative process. To do it, we observed 25 sessions, conducted two focus groups with teachers and assessors and carried out eight semi-structured interviews.

Our results show that the participant teachers valued interdisciplinarity positively. They considered that this type of work allowed them to learn by confronting their own beliefs and ways of acting as teachers with colleagues from different, but still related, epistemological cultures. The positive impact of interdisciplinarity was also corroborated by the assessors, who pointed out the richness of the designed lessons and of the type of reflections that arose during the reflection after the instruction. However, our findings also report that the heterogeneity of the work groups affected the put in practice of the formative process given that their different disciplinary realities also meant a great disparity among their needs and, certainly, among their content-related insights.

In summary, we found that the conformation of interdisciplinary work teams in this formative experience—mixing clinical supervision and lesson study—offered an opportunity to the teachers to develop collaboratively by expanding their personal, disciplinary and pedagogical understandings frameworks. These results go along the same lines as previous studies indicating that interdisciplinarity contributes to stimulate creativity and innovation. Nevertheless, at the same time, our results also evinced the need to adjust the formative process in order to better address and respond to the inherent diversity of this typology of working groups.

Keywords: Higher Education, Teaching Innovation, Teacher Education, Interdisciplinarity, Professional Development.