Constructing educational development from University Schools and Faculties:
The case of the University of the Basque Country

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Abstract

What kind of University Schools/Faculties-based change iniciatives support deans to undertake student-oriented curriculum development? This paper presents an experience developed in 29 Faculties and Schools of the University of the Basque Country with the aim of implementing a comprehensive strategy for educational development. Last three years the Educational Advisory Service has worked with dean-teams in order to agree 25 key performance indicators, related to both educational innovation and quality enhancement (Gordon, 2011).

Introduction

What kind of University Schools/Faculties-based change initiatives support deans to undertake student-oriented curriculum development? In recent years there has been increasing interest in the challenge of changing the university as a whole (Gibbs, 2009) and influence organizational, institutional and cultural. In Europe concern about this topic has risen with the generalisation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which has encouraged many countries and universities to ask themselves about what kind of policies, programmes and strategies might favour these changes.

Within the Spanish state, universities have tackled educational change from the perspective of educational training launching in a generalised way a plethora of courses, seminars and workshops aimed at developing skills related to instructional processes (Fernández & Marquez, 2014). Nonetheless, research about the efficacy of this kind of strategy concludes that, while it influences the individual practice of university teaching staff, it is not sufficient to undertake a transition to a learning-focused curriculum (Gibbs, 2009, 2013). Faculty training and development are necessary but not sufficient to bring about thoroughgoing educational change.

Given the "limited" effectiveness of such strategies for faculty development, the concept of educational development is being overhauled in order to open up new perspectives of practice and research. The bibliography in English defines educational development as those processes aimed at stimulating development - professional, instructional, that of leadership and organisational – (Wilkerson & Irby, 1998) and which gives rise to changes in teaching conceptions and approaches, as well as in learning itself by students and in organisation culture (Kirkpatrick, 1994; Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; Prebble et. al. 2004; Cilliers & Herman,

2010). Recently Lynn Taylor and Rege Colet (2010) went even further; they alluded to the fissure brought about in the concept of faculty or academic development and theorised about the concept of educational development. They point to an umbrella concept which brings together all levels of development - instructional, professional, curricular, academic and organisational-, and which enables universities to become organisations that optimise their capacity for teaching and learning.

In the general meaning of the term, educational development or strategic educational development, besides considerations of an economic and political nature that are linked to competitiveness within a globalised world and requiring accountability and responsibility for delivering results from universities, there are two aspects which operate as "tensors" for change in Higher Education (HE). The first refers to how teaching-learning processes are interpreted and the other is linked to the characterisation of the university as an organisation.

With respect to the first, the research by Marton and Saljo (1974), Barr and Tagg (1995), and Prosser and Trigwell (1998) introduced the idea of a paradigm change, focusing attention on learning by students rather than on teaching. Their research showed that teaching in itself is not relevant except with regard to the effect caused in the learning process. Underlying this new conception about what should be student-centred curriculum lie two theoretical approaches. One from a psychological perspective, identifiable with Entwistle Tait's research (1990, 1994), and the other, a socio-critical approach from Barnett (1994; 2000) and which aims to stimulate reflexivity and critical action amongst students in HE. Currently the emphasis is becoming less predominantly psychological and more sociological, seeing the students as social beings which interact within a group, and the academic staff as communities of practice, with values, power relations and culture (Nagy y Burch 2009; Gibbs, 2013).

With regards to the second "tensor" of change in HE, it is important that universities define themselves as organisations, given that the way of undertaking this will determine the path followed in order to achieve this. In this respect, theorisations can be represented as two archetypes of organisation: that emerging from a managerial conception and typical of the industrial model, and the other, which the authors situate in the parameters of a learning-based organisation.

There are many examples in which neoliberal policies have led universities to adopt managerial styles towards a growing concern for obtaining quantifiable and measurable results, in such a way that they respond to homogenous standards. Without denying that social control over the institutions of HE may be necessary, it is also true that managing and governing them based on "indexes of production" is somewhat banal. Teaching at universities has little to do with these top-down cultures, within which a small group of experts design the work which employees repeat in a clone-like manner (Candy, 1996). There is no single standardised and homogenous way of teaching at the university, but multiple situations requiring practical judgement on the part of the teachers which help them to resolve the problems that they face on a daily basis with their students. There is no production line that can be quantified and typified, but a complex contextual wisdom that teaching staffs should reconstruct reflexively in practice; in short requiring persons capable of developing non-standardised solutions for non-recurring problems. We are referring to knowledge-based organisations, a learning habitat within which the human factor is crucial. Today we have available interesting research which, while not prescriptive for us, does lead us to think not only of the academics or students, but also about how to operate using more organisational

and institutional parameters (Senge, 1992; Martin, 1999; Gibbs, 2009, 2013; Hargreaves & Harris, 2010).

Now, how is all this being put into practice? How does one put into practice strategic educational development? What might encourage Educational Development Units (EDUs) or similar services to optimise the capacity for learning of a university? What experiences are being drawn on in the quest for new alternatives? The research carried out has turned its attention to the departments and disciplines as an alternative way to explore (Lucas, 2000; Scott, 2003; Trowler et. al. 2003; Roy et. al. 2007; Gibbs et. al, 2008; Healey et. al. 2013), but so far no attention has been paid to university Faculties or Schools and their leaders as potential agents for strategic educational development. This is undoubtedly an interesting approach, because departments are basic organisational units and contain and reproduce the culture of each discipline. Now, within the context of universities within the Spanish state, the departments are, moreover, units that compete with each other for echelons of power and hegemony; on many occasions they operate from a logic of contraposition and status in which the private interests of the discipline predominate over the common interest represented by the learning of students within a particular degree course.

Added to this, the generalisation of the EHEA has converted university faculties and schools in the Spanish state in key elements in the development and accreditation of the new degrees. Faculties and schools are the custodians of the processes of assurance of quality, they are called into account, and have the "overall" academic responsibility for learning processes, and go beyond disciplinary fragmentations. This is why they can be conductors of and agents for change in the university (Justice et. al. 2009). This involves a complex change that encompasses the vision and policy of the university, institutional leadership, teaching-learning practices and, finally, the university culture itself. Nonetheless, we do not have sufficient practical experience or researchers to tackle the potential that the academic leaders of university faculties and schools have as agents for strategic educational development that guarantees the transition towards a model of university that is really focused on learning.

Method

The research we present here is precisely a programme of strategic educational development based around the university Faculties and Schools of the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU). We present the context in which it has arisen, the importance that defining a model for common educational development throughout the whole university (model IKD), the key role that enhancing quality and educational innovation, the characteristics of the *ehundu* programme (*ehundu* means "to weave" in Basque) and results of the programme after four years of development play in the juxtaposition of logics.

a) The context: constructing IKD model
The University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU) is the only public university in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, offering 80 degrees in two languages (Basque and Spanish) and located on three campuses and made up of 31 university Faculties and Schools from all areas of knowledge (experimental, human, social, health and engineering sciences). Currently, there are 4,500 academic staff and some 40,000 degree-level students.

The incorporation of EHEA gave rise to the challenge for the University and, more concretely, for the Vice-Chancellor for educational quality and innovation, to design a strategy to help the academic staff and the Faculties and Schools to prepare for this transition. A process of reflection was undertaken, helped by external experts (the *Tecnológico de Monterrey* in Mexico and McMaster University, Canada), in which those responsible for faculty development, quality, faculty assessment, as well as teachers and students (a total of 25 persons) participated and where the history of the university was analysed and ideas about how we would like its future to be were put forward. In this way, the idea of IKD arose (*ikaskuntza kooperatiboa eta dinamikoa* – cooperative and dynamic learning). IKD as sense making (Kezar, 2001: 99) is the metaphor representing a university policy aimed at making sense of educational development in our university. The cognitive-social model identifies greater potential for change in internal structures rather than external ones and demonstrates the importance of giving life to an icon that connects with the identity of the institution and the various perspectives cohabiting therein. Other authors such as Hargreaves and Harris (2010:5) round off this idea and point out that institutions that go beyond expectations, aspire to and articulate an "improbable" and collective "fantastic dream" which goes beyond the idea of the plan and even of its vision (common in teleological models of change).

In drawing up an educational model for the UPV/EHU, the principal elements taken as reference are: 1) meeting Higher Educational needs of Basque society with criteria of quality, and harmonising this desire for developing their own university identity; and 2) provide guidelines and apply common sense to all university actions that enable undertaking curricular development for our university degrees in a comprehensive manner. This is why, IKD presents four important characteristics: a) it has its centre of gravity in student learning; b) it is dynamic and active as it has to respond to requirements of adaptation and change (learning-based curriculum, and so on) and to the emerging demands for training (ongoing and non-presential), all of which throw up new organisational and methodological challenges; c) it is plural: its interpretation is local and diverse, having to flexibly take into account each undergraduate and each University Faculty or School, but responding to a common identity and, d) it is based on the cooperation amongst the players making up the educational community overall: students, teachers, administration and services personnel, departments, social centres and players, all of these sharing projects and initiatives in Teaching-Learning processes, within a climate of mutual trust.

IKD has also made its own analysis of strategic educational development and puts its main focus on curricular development, understanding the processes of teaching/learning at degree level in broad terms, and has deployed four areas of development which should have influence on and contribute to it: professional development, social and territorial development, institutional development and the active education of students. In this sense, it goes beyond the definitions established by the literature because it incorporates the social and territorial environment, as well as students, into the model.

IKD is moreover represented in the logo of the UPV/EHU, designed by Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida and representing the tree of science, but with the University motto "eman ta zabal zazu" (give and spread knowledge) - a design that also highlights the tree of Gernika, the symbol of identity of the Basque people.
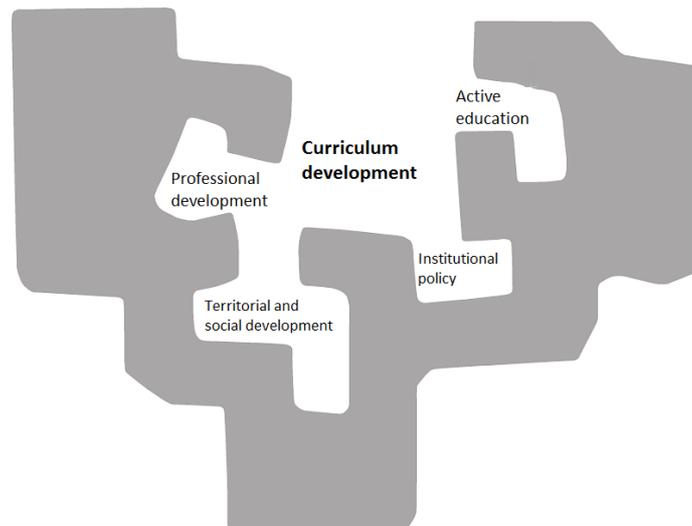
Figure 1: Projection of the IKD model on to the logo of the University of the Basque Country "eman ta zabal zazu" (give and spread knowledge)

b) The experience: Ehundu, a programme for strategic educational development centred on the University Faculties and Schools.

Once this tentative model was sketched, the challenge was undoubtedly to create concrete strategies that would enable us to construct this "dream" within such a large and complex university as ours. There appears to be a certain consensus in the scientific literature in admitting that constructing a learning-orientated university must be helped by strategic educational development policies, but there is a paucity of publications demonstrating concrete experiences in which Educational Development Units encourage and put into practice such large-scale complex processes. How does one undertake strategic educational development? What mechanisms can be put into place for it to be a reality?

As we have mentioned, the University of the Basque Country launched the *ehundu* programme in which 29 Faculties and Schools at the University voluntarily participated.

This programme was built with the following major premises:

a) The University fosters an effective alliance between Teaching-Learning (T-L), innovation and Quality Assurance (QA) processes based on the unification in 2009 of both policies in a solid and well established structure and with a senior leadership (http://www.ikasketa-berrikuntza.ehu.es/p272-shikdhm/es/). This Alliance ensures a coordinated rationale which focuses not only on processes but also on the final results. We should point out that, in universities in the Spanish state at least, EDUs and services for quality enhancement usually work independently and are poorly coordinated.

b) University Schools and Faculties are the agents of leadership and educational change. They are responsible of planning and developing the curricula, and fostering strategies for T-L enhancement (Gordon, 2011). In our concrete case the Faculties and Schools teach one or more degree courses and, within these, a number of different departments are involved. The advantage of focusing on Faculties and Schools is that the logic of the curriculum obliges each department to look and see beyond its discipline and involve itself in a rationale of interaction with the other departments with which they share a common responsibility: the learning by students in each degree course.

The strategies put in place to implement the *ehundu* strategic educational development at the university are:

a) Constructing direct interlocution between the Vice-chancellor and her Educational Advice Service and Quality and Institutional Evaluation Service on the one hand and the deans and its teams on the other, in order to agree on strategies and concrete commitments to develop the degree courses. This interlocution is at its zenith during the negotiations of the documents of commitment, but enables thus a much more active and committed role, by both the services and by the decanal teams. Consolidating a climate of trust and communication is key to the process being fluid.

b) Empowering local Committees Responsible for QA in which effective participation of staff and students is fostered. The decanal teams are not alone in this curricular responsibility.

c) Monitoring the process through key performance indicators negotiated with all the Faculties and Schools (29), making outcomes publicly available (no financial constraints of the programmes in place).

d) Training and assessing of Programme Coordinators (distributed leadership)

e) Training and mentoring of Teaching Teams.

The Vice-chancellor for Academic Quality and Innovation has provided a budget for this programme in such a way that each centre receives additional financing on the basis of the agreement for 25 key performance indicators. Each Faculty or School invests this money in actions such as focused training, development support and dissemination of innovation, aid for training in other universities, relations with the public and, in general, in all that deemed necessary for supporting IKD development. The role of innovation and quality services is to support and advise the centres, as well as to organise training activities aimed at leadership in the degree courses (coordinators, the decanal teams and quality technicians).

While the 25 key performance indicators have changed over the programme's three calls for proposals, they have maintained the same structure and character:

1. They are defined according to the areas referred to in the IKD model (area 1: curricular development; area 2: professional development; area 3: territorial and social development; area 4: institutional development; and area 5: active education).

2. They have a twin character. Thirteen indicators are monitoring ones, i.e. those that gather the exigencies of the external evaluation and accreditation agencies (the Spanish ANECA agency and the Basque Unibasq agency), and twelve are IKD qualitative and procedural indicators, linked to the outlined philosophy (Table 1).

TABLE 1. List of objectives and indicators for IKD development (2010 – 2012 academic years).

	Objectives	Indicators	IKD	Quality
AREA 1: CURRICULAR DEVELOPMENT	Academic performance [1]	Performance rate in first academic year		X
		Initial drop-out rate through cancellation of registration		X
		Initial drop-out		X
	IKD educational practice (action)	Number of subjects with active methodologies in comparison to total degree subjects	X	
		Number of active academic teams compared to number of lecturers assigned to the Centre	X	
	Plurilingualism	Number of subjects taught in Basque in comparison to total degree credits	X	
		Number of subjects taught in English in comparison to total degree credits	X	

	Objectives	Indicators	IKD	Quality
AREA 2: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	Training in new methodologies	Number of academics who complete the ERAGIN development programme on active methodologies	X	
		Number of academics who accredit training in active methodologies	X	

	Objectives	Indicators	IKD	Quality
AREA 3 : TERRITORIAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT	Communication	Public information of the degree course (web)		X
	Dissemination of knowledge	Number of academics participating in congresses/ educational innovation seminars, in comparison to total university teaching staff	X	
	IKDjendartea	Number of external visits by students related to learning in degree courses	X	

	Objectives	Indicators	IKD	Quality
AREA 4 : INSTITUT ONAL DEVELOPMENT	Academic coordination	Number of accredited coordinators involved in the *ehundu* training programme compared to total number of coordinators	X	
	IKDguneak	Number of social/cooperative work spaces with moveable furniture	X	
		Number of hours of opening of non-presential learning spaces	X	
	Academic offer	Number of degree course places offered to new students		X
		Ratio of demand to offer for places (overall and first option)		X
		% increase in registration		X
		Average grade for access		X
		% of newly students, registered in first option		X
	Institutional profile	% of credits given by PhD Staff compared to total of degree credits offered		X
	Institutional climate	Degree of satisfaction of students with academic education received		X

		Rate of resolution of complaints and claims linked to qualifications		X

	Objectives	Indicators	IKD	Quality
AREA 5: ACTIVE EDUCATION	Reception	Reception programme for new students		X
	Participation in university activities	Number of students who participated in School´s Commission for Quality	X	

Together with the annual negotiation of these commitments, various training strategies, aimed at degree course and year coordinators have been put into practice. The principal objective was to fire a real coordination dynamic which would set out the minimum bases for shared work amongst all the academic staff involved in any particular degree and course. It should be pointed out that the academics giving classes to a determined group of students are never from the same department and course coordination has been the way of putting them into contact in order to deal with academic topics. The training developed with the coordinators focused attention on how to work on key competencies within academic teams, as they are learning experiences that go beyond the more specifically discipline-based learning. Nonetheless, underlying this explicit objective lay another, more subtle, one – to create a collaborative work ethic in environments where to date they have never worked together. The direct responsibility for this training was entrusted to the Educational Advice Service (SAE in its Spanish initials)

Besides the training of coordinators, various training sessions aimed at management teams, quality technicians and members of quality commissions were drawn up. These actions had a more transitory nature and aim to support decanal teams in the compliance of specific requisites and the solution of problems that arise transversally in this type of process. In this case, responsibility was entrusted to the Quality and Institutional Evaluation Service, although on occasions this has been shared with the SAE.

Replace this text and tell the reader how you designed your study and why you designed it in this way.

Findings and discussion

General results of the *Ehundu* Programme over its four years of implementation.

Ehundu is a programme in which the Faculties and Schools have participated voluntarily. In the first call for proposals, 26 centres participated, in the second and third, 29, and, in the current one, 30 (out of a total of 31 centres). So, in this sense, one can say that the response from the centres was very high.

The level of compliance with the agreed objectives was also high. To date, we have final data for the first two calls for proposals and we are at the closing stage for the third. The data reveals that there was a drop in the level of compliance in the second call; we do not know

exactly why. Two questions may have influenced the result. The first is that, in the first call, the behaviour of the management teams when negotiating commitments was quite conservative (i.e. some centres negotiated about objectives that they were certain could be achieved, amongst other reasons because it coincided with the course in which new degree courses were implemented). In the second year there was a more daring trend, tending more to make commitments to innovation which, at times, turned out well and, at others, not so well. Nonetheless, we believe that the levels are highly satisfactory and the preliminary data for the third call point to the maintaining of the level of achievement of objectives at about 85%.

Achievement of the objectives (Quality & Innovation)

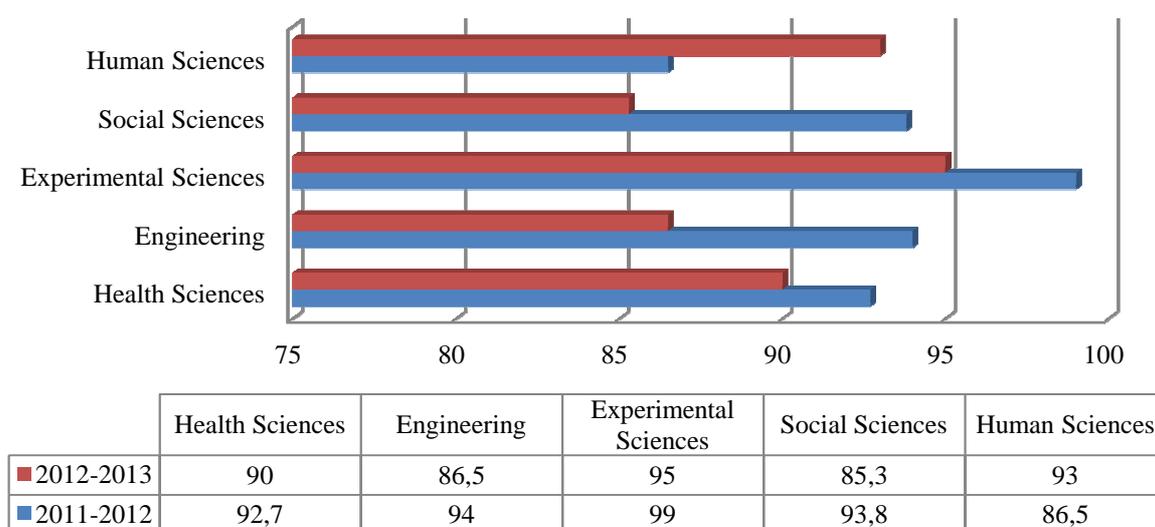|	Health Sciences	Engineering	Experimental Sciences	Social Sciences	Human Sciences
2012-2013	90	86,5	95	85,3	93
2011-2012	92,7	94	99	93,8	86,5

Figure 2: Level of compliance with the agreed objectives (%).

Beyond the quantitative data, it is necessary to highlight the effects that this programme is having on the ways of managing the curriculum by university leaders, management teams, coordination structures, teaching teams and groups of trainers. These are the following:

1. The decanal teams have interjected a role of responsibility with respect to degrees. In this sense *ehundu* has served for learning to measure and register results each year, sharing them in their environments (Faculty Boards and Commissions of Quality) and, above all, reflecting on and seeking ways of improving the mentioned Indicators. This might appear obvious but, at least in our University, it was not general practice.
2. The decanal teams have taken a pro-active attitude when putting forward focused training initiatives in their Faculty or School, those that are very close to the needs of the teaching staff. The SAE in this case plays an advice and support role, and when the strategies deployed officially accredit more than 25 hours for this training.
3. At all the centres dynamics of basic coordination have been established, although some have gone much further and have produced design and evaluation materials for key competencies.
4. There is a total of six degrees which have incorporated substantial changes in their way of conceiving and designing the curriculum.
5. Leaders of the University have taken a pro-active attitude in the development of this project, expressing it clearly and explicitly in internal and external dissemination events.

6. Also, greater integration of this *ehundu* programme has been achieved with two others of great importance, in this example of strategic educational development: the Eragin programme for the active development of methodologies and the Docentiaz programme for academic evaluation. The fact that the concrete commitments of these programmes are incorporated into the annual indicators favour initiatives that affect the university academics more individually and acquire institutional visibility.

The principal difficulties that the programme has come up against are cultural and political. The cultural ones are to do with individualistic visions and ones not very open to cooperation – the majority in the University. Gaining the trust of decanal teams and working together in the resolution of their difficulties is an essential step for strategic educational development to work. If there is not mutual trust and cooperation, all the rest loses sense and perspective. This trust has been growing in certain sectors within the University but its general acceptance is still a challenge.

The difficulties of a political nature are to do with the place occupied by the teaching in the set of values of the present-day Spanish university. The idea that what is important is research, criticised by Boyer (1991) two decades ago, continues to be a mantra which, moreover, is fed by the Government-encouraged measures in recent years. Working with effort and determination to improve learning by students is not what the system is rewarding. At the University of the Basque Country great advances have been made, but these two types of factor are constant impediments to those committed to a more comprehensive, integrated and diverse idea of what a university is.

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