Creating a Culture of Faculty Empowerment through Professional Development[1]

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Abstract

This article presents a model for professional development at a teachers' college in Bogotá, Colombia. Based on the methodology of curriculum development, researchers proposed a five-stage model which consisted of needs analysis, action plan, teacher development, creation of academic community and evaluation. Data was gathered through questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. Results of each one of the phases indicated that faculty may be empowered through on-going professional development enhanced by implementation of academic dialog through collaborative groups. However, some work needs to be done to guarantee a follow-up of its different modes. The evaluation of this model let researchers propose a Professional Development Policy for Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana (ÚNICA).

Resumen

Este artículo presenta un modelo de desarrollo profesional para una institución formadora de docentes en Bogotá, Colombia. Con base en la metodología de desarrollo curricular, los investigadores proponen un modelo de cinco pasos (análisis de necesidades, plan de acción, desarrollo profesional, construcción de comunidad académica y evaluación). Los datos se recolectaron mediante el uso de cuestionarios, entrevistas y análisis documental. Los resultados de cada una de las fases indican que es posible empoderar al grupo de docentes mediante un programa de desarrollo profesional continuo enriquecido con la implementación del diálogo académico a través de grupos colaborativos. No obstante, a pesar de los resultados positivos después de la implementación, se requiere hacer un seguimiento sistemático de los diferentes modos utilizados. La evaluación del modelo les permitió a los investigadores proponer una Política de Desarrollo Profesional para la Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana (ÚNICA).

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to share a research experience related to professional development carried out at Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana (ÚNICA). This university's main goal was to determine the characteristics of a professional development program for its professors by identifying the needs for both full and part time faculty. The product of the research described in the paper was a professional development program.

ÚNICA is a ten-year-old, private bilingual college located in Bogota, Colombia. It offers a teacher preparation program in Bilingual Education. Thus, students are required to take credits in areas such

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as research, pedagogy, linguistics, literature, and educational administration. Special attention is also devoted to the continuous professional development of its current staff as stated in the vision and mission of the college (http:www.unica.edu.co). The continuous development demands the consolidation of professional development (PD) practices that also respond to national policies. This desire to implement a PD policy and framework has its roots in some guidelines and regulations given by the Colombian Ministry of Education and other organizations as shown in the table below:

Colombian Ministry of Education Chapter III, Art.6 Decree 272, 1998	Colombian General Law of Education Chapter I, Art 104	Higher Education Quality Assurance Committee and National Accreditation Council (CONACES & CNA)	Mission and Vision of ÚNICA
Faculties of Education may create academic networks to offer professional development, carry out research, and provide continuous education programs. These contribute to qualify staff in higher education.	Educators should receive training and professional development since they are the main agents in the teaching and learning processes.	Some of the factors included in accreditation and quality assurance include students, professors, academic processes and curriculum guidelines, involving also research, and capacity to innovate.	The mission contributes to the improvement of education in Colombia and the fostering of bilingualism through a teacher preparation program whose members have an impact in the country through teaching and research. The vision involves the development of pedagogical practices and institutional management oriented towards continuous improvement.

Table 1 Colombian and institutional regulations for PD

These regulations show the importance any professional development program has in terms of qualifying education and in the way cross-curricular work and academic networks may be strategies for teachers to gain knowledge while putting it into practice according to current times and contexts. Professional development lets educators respond to cultural, social, and economic needs, to name a few.

It is in the hands of university administrators to guarantee that opportunities for professional development are given. Danielson and McGreal (2000) mention that administrators need to create a culture of professional learning in which all are involved. Although many teacher preparation programs have incorporated some of these practices, a rigorous establishment of an official program of PD is needed and within it, specific policies need to be adopted as a result of a meticulous implementation of such a PD model.

Rationale

The Ministry of Education in Colombia has established the professional development of its own professors as a factor of quality assurance for any higher education institution (Institución de Educación Superior, IES). As a result, teachers' preparation becomes a fundamental issue to be considered by any university willing to accomplish this quality indicator in regards to both national and international contexts.

In Colombia, the Political Constitution of 1991 (Art. 68) states the conditions and profile of educators:

> *Teaching will be in charge of people of recognized ethical and pedagogical competence. The law guarantees the professionalization and dignity of the teaching activity. (authors' translation)*

The teaching profession is enriched through the creation of academic communities, research and academic dialogue. The Political Constitution states ethics and pedagogy are two characteristics of any educator and it is the responsibility of the state to watch over the professors' honour. This means that the Colombian government has some regulations and laws that promote the respectability of the profession.

As stated before, Decree 272 of 1998 established the requirements for the creation of teacher preparation initiatives for both undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Another important policy that has affected the conception of teacher training in Colombia has to do with the implementation of professional development policies as part of the Ministry of Education *Plan Sectorial de Educación 2002 – 2006 and* later the *Plan Sectorial 2006 – 2010* and *Políticas de Formación Docente 2012* which emphasize teachers' professional development as a strategy that assures quality:

> *Well rounded development is possible when it is guided by teachers who, with their knowledge and enthusiasm, invite their students day after day to enjoy knowledge, to share with others their differences, to develop basic life competences and to identify the road they will follow in their personal and professional future. Teachers' daily work contributes to the construction of a better nation... (Colombian Ministry of Education, p. 85, authors' translation)*

Furthermore, Law 115 known as Ley General de Educación (General Law of Education), Article 104 states the mission of teacher preparation programs as follows:

> **Teacher training institutions.** *Correspond to the universities and other higher education institutions which have a faculty of education or any other academic unit devoted to education, professional education, postgraduate education or* **teacher refresher courses**. *(authors' translation)*

This means that the professional development process requires knowledge, research, academic dialogue and refresher courses that provide quality for the educational system. The regulations described help identify the need to clearly state teaching profession standards for the Colombian context as well as the need to carry out rigorous work in terms of professional development in such a way that institutional policies are stated in favour of quality assurance.

Research Questions and Objectives

Based on the background provided by Colombian law and regulations, as well as the perceived needs at the institution, the researchers (the academic dean and a part-time professor) decided to carry out this

study using the following research objectives and questions as a guide:

Research Objectives

    a. To determine the characteristics of a Model for a Professional Development Program at ÚNICA.

    b. To describe different professional development activities as part of a professional development program at ÚNICA.

    c. To establish a professional development policy at ÚNICA.

Research Questions

Main Question

    1. What are the characteristics of a model for a professional development program at ÚNICA?

Sub-questions

    1. What are the professional development strategies that a professional development program for undergraduate professors at ÚNICA could include?

    a. How can the specific professional development needs and interests of faculty members at ÚNICA be established in an institutional policy?

Theoretical Framework

In order to be better informed about the most appropriate way to approach the creation of a professional development program, there was an exploration of PD initiatives in other countries as well a previous study done in the area. Additionally, some theories that provided a sound foundation for the organization of the PD program were explored as well as for the expected outcomes and shortcomings.

Professional Development

Professional development is a complex term to define since it has been used in connection with other aspects of teaching such as training, appraisal, supervision and professional identity. The following chart summarizes some definitions given to PD:

Wallace (1991)	Training and development differ. Training indicates that the action is played upon teachers by someone else, usually an expert or supervisor, while development indicates an action taken by the teachers themselves in order to gain new learning experiences.
Day (1999)	PD is the set of natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities whose purpose is to benefit the individual, group or school directly or indirectly and which contribute to the quality of classroom education.
Díaz-Maggioli (2003)	PD is the construction of a professional identity by means of an on-going interaction with learners and colleagues and by a systematic reflection on the pedagogical action in order to promote effective teaching.

Robalino (2007)	PD refers to the actions taken by the teachers in their education process throughout their lives in order to guarantee the development and strengthening of professional competences in a profession which is always under construction.
The Ministry of Science and Education (MEC) of Spain (2012)	PD is any systematic action of changing practices, beliefs and professional knowledge of university professors towards a purpose of quality in teaching, research and management. In the same line of thought, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2003) mention that the success of educational reform depends on the teachers' understanding and incorporation of skills and attitudes present in the new approaches and on their ability to unlearn old teaching practices.
Colombian Ministry of Education (2009)	PD is "the set of components and actors committed in the execution of policies of teacher development which promote programs, projects, strategies and actions towards the achievement of goals of improvement in the processes of initial and continuous teacher development […] It is an open, dynamic and flexible system. Open because it aims at responding to the needs of the context; dynamic since it has a purpose the transformation of in the education processes, through the articulation of actions of the different actors within the system and flexible, because of the relationships it fosters and develops" (p. 88).

Table 2 Definitions of professional development

When looking at the different definitions of professional development, there are some common elements. First of all, it is an on-going process of education starting with the initial formation, going on to continuous development with service by means of formal educational programs. The second common element is the purpose: professional development has as an immediate goal of strengthening technical, social, ethical and emotional skills to carry out the job of teaching. In addition, the ultimate objective is the improvement of the quality of education offered. Other common elements of PD are the involvement of free will, reflection and change.

For the purpose of this article, professional development is defined as the voluntary on-going process in which teachers are involved in acquiring, renewing or broadening their knowledge and practices to benefit themselves, their students, the educational institutions and education in general. It implies a commitment to reflection and change in order to maintain a critical stance to established theories and practices and their relation in particular contexts.

PD and Empowerment

One of the ideas behind offering a PD program at ÚNICA was to empower faculty. By means of the needs analysis, the research team identified that many professors had knowledge and skills which could be of use in the PD program.

Empowerment is a term which originated in business and administration and has spread to other areas such as human sciences and education. In education, it refers to giving all faculty members

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the chance to participate in the decisions that will affect them. Soppelsa (1997) explains faculty empowerment as "the ceding of power to faculty by administration so that they can make decisions about the educational setting in which they work" (p. 123). Nonetheless, empowerment also involves the creation of an atmosphere of trust and tolerance to change and risks as well as a consolidation of effective means of communication and the fostering of autonomy and accountability.

Kreisberg (1992) and Short (1994) define teacher empowerment as the process in which faculty members develop the competence to take charge of their own growth, solve their problems and meet the needs they require for their particular workplace. Smith and Lotven (1994) add that empowerment entails the exercise of power in the search for occupational improvement, professional autonomy and the improvement of education in general. Dunst (1991) explains empowerment as consisting of two aspects: first, the provision of enabling experiences within the organization in order to promote autonomy, choice, control and responsibility and second, the opportunities for individuals to display existing competences that support and strengthen functioning. The PD program aimed to attain these two features of empowerment by re-creating and revitalizing that space for discussion of choice and responsibility and by unveiling those existing skills members of staff possessed.

Richardson, Lane and Flanigan (1995) mention that empowerment should create the conditions for facilitating improvement, innovation and continuous growth for all the university bodies. These authors also seem to agree that essential conditions of empowerment consists of an effective exchange of information in an atmosphere of trust, a provision of a solid structure for the empowerment project and a participatory philosophy conveyed through teamwork.

Models of PD

There are numerous taxonomies to classify models of professional development. However, Wallace (1991) has provided an explanation of three classic models for PD in which the others can be embedded: the craft model, the applied practice model, and the reflective model.

The craft model is similar to the apprenticeships established in the late Middle Ages. In this model, the student teacher imitates the model provided by a more experienced teacher with the purpose of learning the know-how.

In the applied science model, the teacher is limited to the application of the theories created by expert researchers based on their experiments. These two models have the limitation of separating theory from practice since the craft model does not provide opportunities for enriching practice based on research and the applied science does not take into consideration the particularities of contexts

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and how the results of the application may not be the expected ones due to errors in experimentation or scientific basis.

The third model, the reflective model tries to bridge this gap between theory and practice. The reflective model has the purpose of linking received knowledge, obtained by means of research, with the knowledge acquired through practice. In this model the experiences of the teachers are valued since they enrich research and foster professional competence. Knezevic and Scholl (in Freeman & Richards, 1991) explain that reflection has the power of helping the teacher to connect experience with theoretical knowledge to use the area of expertise more efficiently. The authors also affirm that if there is a lack of reflection, teaching is guided by intuition and routine and as a result, knowledge is tacit; that is why one of the tasks of people in charge of professional development is to elicit that knowledge during the programs by means of the reflection upon pedagogical practice based on a sound theoretical basis.

Other models have been put forward by various authors. Yet most of these can be associated with the three models explained by Wallace (1991). Gaible and Burns (2005) suggest a division of PD programs as standardized, site-based and self-directed. Kennedy (2005) provides another classification where PD programs are divided in training, award-bearing, deficit, cascade, standards-based, coaching/mentoring, community of practice, action research and transformative programs. Each model will be explained and discussed in relation to each other and to the PD program proposed in the study.

Requirements for an Effective PD Program

There are many elements which need to be considered in order that a PD program be effective. One of these elements is the transformation of theoretical knowledge into something useful for daily practice and also, the transformation of attitudes, beliefs and routines of participating teachers. Flores (2002) describes in detail the different transformations teachers have to experience by means of a PD program: transformations in the competences and skills, transformations in the conceptualization and ways of thinking informed by theory, and transformations in daily practice.

The first step, when trying to offer a PD program, is carrying out a needs analysis. Day (1999) identifies the following needs to be addressed in these programs:

- Objective: specific needs of a particular group, for example, age or proficiency.
  - Content: expected increase in knowledge or awareness.
  - Usage: expected impact on the curriculum and application in daily practice.

- Process: the mode of delivery of the program
- Leadership and modelling: experience of the facilitators in relation to enthusiasm and group dynamics.
- Time and energy: They refer to the opportunities given by the program to abstract from worries of classroom life. (pp. 147-148)

Other features for PD programs mentioned by Day (1999) are to guarantee spaces for systematic reflections of different kinds, to be aware of the teaching context, the school cultures and subcultures and the teachers' experiences, as well as to promote the opportunities to question individual and institutional beliefs in relation to practice. In addition, characteristics of PD programs also involve being conscious of the limitations of individual learning and therefore, fostering learning alliances, setting the classroom practice in wider contexts of institutional practices, societal needs and students' lives, and ensuring the revision and support in renewal of moral purposes, professional expertise and emotional intelligence of teachers involved. Finally, professional development needs to encourage development, change and practices through the teachers' participation in activities designed to generate results which are of direct or indirect benefit for them, their students and their institutions.

Modes of Teaching and Learning in PD Programs

Depending on the purposes for learning and teaching, a PD program can use one or several modes for delivery. Table 3 describes the different modes of teaching and learning in PD programs.

Workshops	A workshop is a short-length activity emphasize the completion of a practical task (Wallace, 1991) by means of the application of theory, work experience and/or background knowledge. Richards and Farrell (2005) also explain that workshops provide opportunities of acquiring specific knowledge and skills which are expected to be put into practice by the participants.
Mentoring	Mentoring is understood as the accompaniment of a professor with another who has more experience or knowledge in relation to the context. Pollard (1997) defines mentoring as "the provision of support for the learning of one person through the guidance of another person who is more skilled, knowledgeable and experienced" (p. 19).
Action research	Dìaz-Maggioli (2003) describes it as involving a group of colleagues who diagnose a situation, plan and intervene in order to better the current situation.
Observation	Pollard (1997) defines observation as "a way of actively, carefully and self-consciously describing and recording what people do while one is also part of the action" (p. 51). The emphasis of this activity based on the description, therefore, the recording of this information can be done by means of field notes, audio and video recording.
Team teaching	Team teaching is understood as a pair or group of teachers planning, conducting and evaluating the learning activities for the same group of students.

Peer coaching	This type of coaching refers to pairs of teachers who work together with different purposes which may range from reflecting on their practices, acquiring new skills, and refining or expanding old ones to undertaking research or solving common problems (Díaz-Maggioli, 2003). Wong and Nicotera (2003) specify four kinds or practices within peer coaching according to its purposes: 1) "to establish a culture of standards", 2) "to improve instructional capacity", 3) "to support on-going evaluation", and 4) "to connect classroom practices and institutional policies" (p. 3).
Academic/Professional dialogue	Garmston and Wellman (1998) explain that a dialogue implies a process of reflection in which group members try to understand each others' beliefs and viewpoints in relation to the educational process.
Academic reading	Depending on their needs and their areas of interest, professors will select scholarly reading such as books or articles in order to enrich their practice.

Table 3 Modes of teaching and learning in PD programs

Research Design

Curriculum Development

As the purpose of the project was to develop a professional development program which met the needs of the faculty at ÚNICA, the research team decided to follow the model of curriculum development proposed by Graves (1996) which permits course developers or curriculum specialists to design appropriate programs. As in this specific case, the goal was to design a professional development program. This methodology provided the necessary steps for our own proposal. Curriculum design provides a baseline to organize any proposal that implies a series of steps in any program implementation; it is not exclusive to syllabus or course design. The chosen framework states that any program design should begin with a needs analysis and setting of goals, which allow curriculum developers to choose content and materials so that activities may be formulated. Other steps include the content, selection and developing materials. The process ends with an evaluation. In short, any project that expects to create programs should consider the following steps.

Needs Analysis is the key aspect when designing programs. It provides information concerning the participants, their interests and needs, and possible resources, among other aspects. In this research project, specific information on professors' educational and professional background along with their needs in terms of PD was considered. Since the goal of this project was to plan the PD structure for undergraduate professors, the recommendation was to carry out a needs analysis at the beginning of each semester so that decisions could be made based on hired staff needs.

According to Graves (1996), **determining goals and objectives** helps state the intended outcomes and purposes of any program. In this regard, Brown (2007) says goals need to be achievable and realistic. Although Graves says that curriculum developers or

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researchers have to distinguish goals (general) from objectives (specific), in this research project the objectives were stated since the general goal was inferred by saying researchers expected to design a PD model. For this research, objectives were oriented to personal and professional growth.

Content is understood as the concepts or aspects that will be taught. In this research there were two kinds of content. First, researchers determined the structure of the model which responded to specific needs and objectives. However, later when the program started, new analysis and decisions had to be made in order to determine the content of the different PD options.

Selecting and developing materials, according to Graves (1996), is another step. She mentions that "For many teachers, course development starts not with determining objectives or contextualizing content but with ideas about the course in action. They think about materials they will use, activities their students will do, techniques they will employ" (p.26). Putting this in PD terms, many universities select a PD mode/structure thinking it is the most appropriate for their instructors; some even choose topics beforehand without knowing the real needs and/or interests of the staff. Using Graves' (1996) words, this research project expected that materials and activities would provide a "clear sense of why they will be used, how, and by whom (p.28). All in all, every decision made during the PD process as part of the PD Model at ÚNICA had to be well-informed and realistic to current times, not only at the university but also the country and the society.

Finally, **evaluation** lets curriculum developers and researchers assess what has been learnt; of course, selecting assessment tools is crucial. When thinking about course development, the evaluation not only responds to content achievement but also to efficacy and efficiency, to determine the impact.

Based on the previous description, curriculum development may be defined as a framework of stages to design, modify or renew curriculum. First, designing a curriculum involves flexibility since the needs analysis will provide the starting point to set goals, objectives and the path to achieve them. There is not anything created in advance. It is in the hands of the developer to set a route to attain the stated goals. Second, modifying implies making adjustments – not necessarily dramatic changes – to certain elements to respond to those needs. Adjustments are usually made to certain parts of the curriculum although they may impact it on the whole. Third, renewing involves changes that may be made on one element at a time or on the whole curriculum which generally signify innovation.

Implementation

Model for a Professional Development Program at ÚNICA

The Mission at ÚNICA involves not only forming professionals in bilingual education but also fostering the participation of its entire staff in programs of continuous professional development. To promote the process of professional development in bilingual education according to the Colombian context, and institutional needs, the professional development program for full time and part time teachers at UNICA required attendance to at least a twelve-hour certified training course during each semester.

Most of the professional development options were offered by ÚNICA. Topics and modality were determined by the Academic Director based on the needs analysis carried out at the beginning of each semester. The following graph shows the Professional Development Model proposed which consisted of five phases based on the model of curriculum development suggested by Graves (1996):

Graph 1 Professional Development Model at ÚNICA

Professional Development Model at ÚNICA

Goals

The goals of the Professional Development Model were the following:

1. To provide teacher development in the areas ÚNICA professors consider relevant.
b. To empower faculty.
c. To assure quality in education by providing opportunities for professional development

The execution of each one of the different phases of the Professional Development Model is explained in the following sections.

Phase 1 – Needs Analysis

Following the proposed steps for curriculum development stated in the model, the research team carried out a need analysis by means of a questionnaire. The purpose of this instrument was to gather information to identify professors' academic background, areas of

interest, experiences, and expectations to plan Phase 2 of the Professional Development Program Model.

In general terms, the diagnosis showed that all of the professors had more than five years of experience working at different educational levels, including postgraduate courses. Also, 83% had worked at ÚNICA for less than four years. In relation to their participation in PD courses or opportunities, 64% stated they had been involved in professional development programs, which used workshops as the main mode of delivery. As for the modality, they would prefer for the PD at ÚNICA, 27% of professors suggested workshops related to topics they perceived as necessary for the institution, such as content-based instruction, action research and academic writing. Another question explored if teachers were willing to participate in the program in an online environment, an *in-situ* environment or in a blended learning (*bLearning)* one. Concerning the online environment 43% of the teachers preferred it while 36% preferred a *bLearning* professional development program. Since one of the purposes of the professional development program was to empower the faculty of the BA in Bilingual Education, teachers were asked about their willingness to offer professional development opportunities to their colleagues based on their areas of expertise. Concerning this question, 55% affirmed they would offer training to their colleagues while 45% said they would not.

Another instrument used to identify current needs was a questionnaire for the Academic Deans of other universities. This questionnaire gave the research team a point of reference of what kind of professional development opportunities were being implemented in other departments of education. The target population was a group of twenty deans from different departments of education. Ten out of twenty questionnaires were answered.

This instrument showed us that most of the PD programs in many universities had a double function. First, they were used for securing accreditation and secondly, they are used for promoting teachers' knowledge in topics of interest. The modalities more frequently used were seminars and conferences with occasional workshops and observations (two to eight hours). These PD opportunities were coordinated by the Academic Dean, the Research Department, the Vice-President or Department Chair and in a few cases, the PD Division. In relation to the evaluation carried out in these programs, follow-up meetings, writing papers or doing curriculum evaluation were mentioned. That is to say that the efficacy and effectiveness depended on the type of program. It is possible to infer that the first indicator of efficacy was teachers' impact on current practices reported through articles and/or workshops. This needs analysis (from the Academic Deans' questionnaire), the analysis of documents

and the information from the professors' questionnaire unveiled that professors preferred workshops as a PD mode.

Data showed that in other universities, the academic dean or someone else was appointed the PD coordination. In terms of themes, professors wanted to be informed and/or to be updated on methodologies and activities related to the mission and vision of the university, such as the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) methodologies. The following table summarizes the main findings:

Mode	Workshop
Modality	Blended
Areas of interest	• Bilingual methodologies • Learning strategies • Assessment • ICTs • Writing process stages and techniques
Willingness in offering PD	55% of faculty

Table 4 PD needs at ÚNICA

Phase 2 – Action Plan

The information gathered through the needs analysis and the theoretical constructs allowed the structuring of the program. Forasmuch as one of the goals of this project was to empower faculty and assure quality in education, different options were either identified as already being used at the teacher preparation program or proposed as new alternatives to grow professionally, both used as a route for quality assurance. The following table presents the different options that seek to attain PD:

Academic dialogue	Team teaching
Workshops and seminars on methodologies, approaches and/or strategies	Research on different topics
Observation	Academic readings
Conferences and symposiums	Collaborative groups
Pursuing postgraduate studies	Mentoring and coaching programs

Table 5 Professional development strategies offered at ÚNICA

Phase 3 – Professional Development Strategies/Modalities

Hudson (2010) mentions that building leadership capacity and a professional collaborative culture can be achieved by creating a democratic community, by fostering skills and practices of leadership, and by embedding PD in the daily life. As a consequence, a careful PD structure was proposed in such a way that everybody could become a

leader. The PD alternatives for professors at the university are explained in the following:

Workshops and seminars

Before carrying out this project, professors had the opportunity to attend workshops and seminars offered by guest speakers at ÚNICA. However, since one of the main goals of this proposal was to empower current staff, professors were invited to design two-hour workshops for colleagues. Professors were chosen by the Academic Director based on two aspects; first, their area of expertise and second, their willingness to become active members of this program.

a. Virtual Coaching - Moodle

As stated before, national policies demand that educational institutions include ICTs (Ley General de Educación, Art. 22. Par. G; Art.33 and National Decree 1860 of 1994; Lineamientos para la Acreditación de Programas de Pregrado, p. 37) in their programs. Considering the university had a virtual platform, a coaching program was implemented whose main goal was to encourage faculty to use it in their teaching. After Moodle workshops, a coaching relationship was created among the facilitator and the participants. Teachers wanted personal support when needed and they also participated in virtual coaching, if preferred due to time constraints. During these proposed activities the facilitator or Academic Dean logged on the website to see the progress. The results of this PD mode were shared at the end of the semester to motivate professors.

b. Mentoring and Coaching Program

Novice and new teachers in the faculty received support in institutional practices through a mentoring program. Keeping in mind that the university offers a bilingual program and it has adopted sheltered instruction as a model, teachers needed to incorporate the principles of Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol into their lesson planning. To guarantee that every new teacher was aware of SIOP, a coaching program was offered. Experienced teachers involved new teachers by inviting them to their classroom to observe, to discuss the application of this model, and to answer any questions that arose during this mentoring and coaching process.

c. Reading Academic Articles and Documents/Academic Discussions

Once professors belong to a department, they are part of an academic community and are treated as such. During the semester different opportunities to read academic documents were given, for instance, during research groups and faculty meetings.

d. Research

The Ministry of Education in Chapter I (Art.3, Decree 272, 1998) decrees that all academic programs in the area of education should prepare professionals to understand and solve educational problems

of human development through the development of research competences as section (f) explains:

> *Developing and keeping an inquiring attitude that, enriched with research theories and models, allows a disciplined reflection on the educational practice and the advance in didactic and pedagogical knowledge. (authors' translation)*

Professors were invited to participate in a call for research to carry out educational research. The research lines included teacher training, ICT, and educational and curriculum development. During the research process, teacher-researchers received academic support to finish their projects successfully. This PD structure lets full-time-professors move from the role of receivers of knowledge to the one of producers, empowering the faculty.

e. Conferences and Seminars

ÚNICA sponsored professors who wanted to present in diverse events. In this sense there were multiple options to participate in local, national or even international events. In addition to this, the university created its own institutional event – Research in Action – whose main goal was to publicize the research projects in progress or those finished by undergraduate students and professors.

f. Study Groups

Stanley (2011) has examined existing literature on professional development within teacher communities to analyze the factors that contribute to their success or failure. The author provides recommendations to focus in particular on the needs of teachers. One of the recommendations is to engage the teachers in collaborative study groups. Some principles of collaboration were implemented resulting in increased confidence in professional knowledge and more reflection on current practices.

g. Team Teaching

Co-planning and tutoring were implemented. However, at present it is not possible to provide results of this practice due to time constraints. The intention is to conduct an evaluation and documentation of this practice in the future.

h. Observation

During the semester there were both announced and unannounced observations. In both cases, the Academic Director provided feedback as needed.

In conclusion, the PD structure offered at ÚNICA may be defined as diverse, inviting, structured and goal-oriented. First, there were different options to participate in. Second, it involved everyone in the academic field (students, professors, researchers) and third, each one of the options was well organized and documented. Finally it will

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serve the accreditation processes the university might eventually carry out.

Phase 4 – Creation of an Academic Community

With the execution of this project, the faculty was empowered in different ways. First of all, networking concerning the areas of research interest was fostered. Additionally, faculty members who were able to offer PD opportunities nationally and internationally were identified. Lastly, participating members contributed by motivating other professors and even students to pursue new PD initiatives.

Results

Phase 5 - Evaluation of PD process

The instruments used for the evaluation were a questionnaire to all participating professors and an interview to the five full time professors. These professors were chosen for the interview not only because they were full time professors but also because they had been part of the faculty for more than five years which means they had knowledge to judge previous and current practices. The results of the questionnaire indicated that 90% of the faculty participated in workshops, 70% were observed and 60% attended conferences. Half of the surveyed population participated in action research projects, were mentored, received personal assistance in the use of technology and sustained academic dialogues with colleagues during faculty or informal meetings. The following graph shows the participation in the PD activities based upon the three response options used in the questionnaire: "yes, no and not applicable":
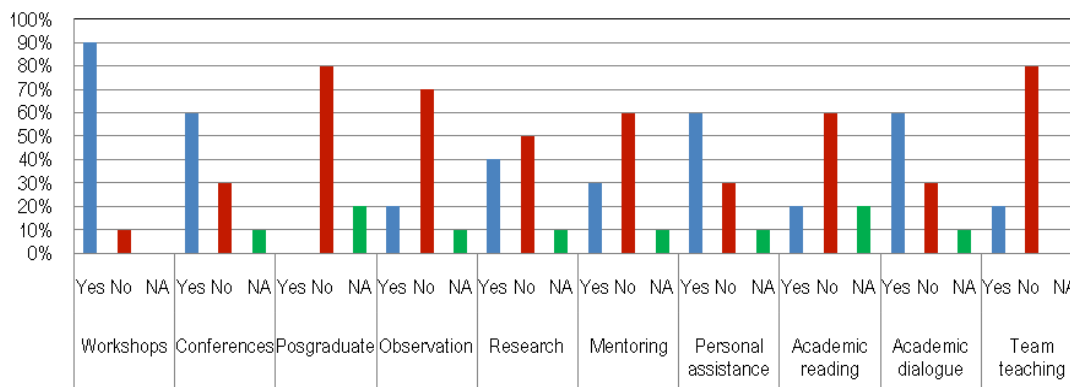
Graph 2 Participation in PD activities

Regarding the impact of the PD program on daily practice, 80% commented that the workshops had a moderate impact. Very few participants considered mentoring and observation had some sort of impact on their practice, possibly because not all members were engaged in these activities, but only new staff. Professors also expressed that some of the topics to pursue in further training could deal with the creation of class activities, promotion of team work, and

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resolution of problems of technology and action research. Graph 3 shows the impact of the PD activities.
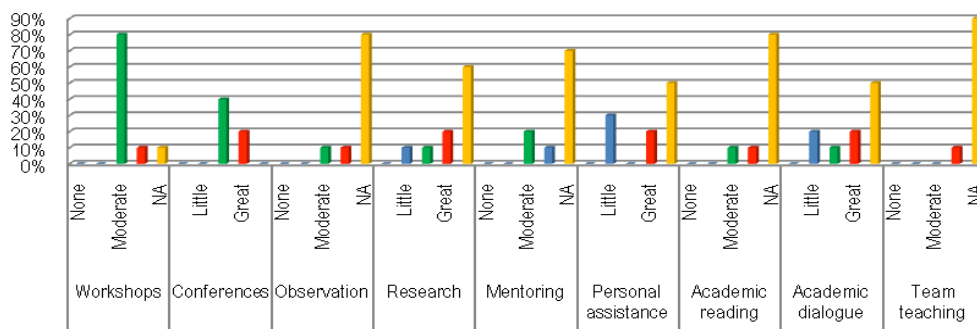
Graph 3 Impact of PD activities

When asked about the effectiveness of the different modalities provided in the PD program, 40% of participants considered workshops, academic dialogue and team teaching as the most effective, followed by conferences, research, mentoring and personal assistance with the use of Moodle with 20% each. In relation to the aspects that faculty appreciated concerning the program, they mentioned the fact that some of the sessions had been directed by the same faculty due to their attitude and academic background, as well as the relevance of the topics selected. What faculty considered as least positive aspects were the topics, the relevance and the schedule, each one with 10%. Nonetheless, it is necessary to mention 70% of the population considered these as positive characteristics. Finally, the topics suggested for further sessions were curriculum development, action research, academic writing, assessment, differentiated instruction, critical pedagogy, and technology applications in the classroom.

The last two items in the questionnaire aimed to find out about who or which entity that the members of the faculty considered could be in charge of offering PD programs and additional suggestions to make the experience more enriching. To the first question 70% of faculty affirmed faculty members should be empowered so that they are able to take charge of PD sessions and 50% agreed on this but with other universities experienced in the area. As for additional suggestions, some professors suggested to plan the sessions before the beginning of the semester and also to have these sessions more frequently, for example, twice a month. Another member suggested sustaining more systematic academic dialogues after each PD session.

Additionally, five full time professors and two part time professors were interviewed to inquire about their perceptions after their experiences in the program. The interviewees recurrently mentioned the characteristics of efficacy, innovation, quality, pertinence, standardisation, and visibility. Concerning aspects to improve, they mentioned background knowledge and time.

Efficacy referred to the improvement in the variety when planning lessons and also, the recognition of colleagues as professionals. Innovation implied the incorporation of new practices found in examples or the sharing of colleagues during the PD sessions. Quality referred to the contribution PD makes when involving professors in quality assurance processes, especially when forming future educators. Pertinence meant making a connection with the PD sessions and the teachers' current needs. Professors also appreciated the opportunity to understand the variety of visions of a concept which also resulted beneficial to class planning. Teachers expressed standardization as a way for the teachers to share a common language after PD. This common language did not go against their autonomy but on the contrary allowed for professional growth. Also visibility was mentioned because of the fact that the products generated by professors can be shared in other scenarios. Time was a key factor because a PD program is time consuming and requires professors to spend more time away from their hectic daily routine. One of the interviewees suggested providing academic readings beforehand so that professors had more background before attending lectures or workshops.

Another important factor that the research team wanted to explore during the experience of the PD program had to do with the empowerment of faculty. It can be affirmed that this project was a first step in attaining this goal. When asked, the interviewees mentioned the PD program generated the following characteristics:

- **Belonging:** No matter how novice or experienced the professors were, they all wanted a working environment that valued them as the professionals they were. This environment is one of trust and professionalism.
- **Challenge:** Professors mentioned technology may be threatening for some faculty but through PD it became a challenge they were willing to face.
- **Organization:** Teachers expressed they had become more organized with time and they have also learned how to meet deadlines concerning administrative paper work. They acquired organizational skills such as scheduling, selecting resources, planning, meeting deadlines and time management.
- **Self-confidence:** Some of the professors mentioned an increased confidence when presenting their research projects to colleagues. They also noticed that students gained confidence as student-teachers and as researchers because of an event they participated in called Research-in-Action. Additionally, this confidence in students challenged professors to prepare their classes better since professors were aware of what these students' prior experiences.

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- **Cross curricular work:** Professors worked together while enriching the curriculum. However some professors said that one of the disadvantages of having faculty members leading the PD sessions had to do with the fact that they knew each other and perhaps were aware of their colleagues' field of expertise.

Despite these positive outcomes, it has been observed that it will take longer to create a more solid culture of empowerment which implies convincing professors that what they know is valuable so that they can take on more of leadership roles in the PD sessions.

Conclusion

We can perceive that professors considered the strategy of workshops as one the most appropriate ways implemented in the PD program. The topics selected were considered relevant by 33% of the professors which demonstrated the importance of carrying out a needs analysis before establishing how the PD program would work. Also, 60% of the professors explained that one of the reasons for not participating in the program was a lack of time due to their commitments to prepare classes, grade and attend to students. In the case of part-time professors, they sometimes could not participate because of their commitments with other institutions.

In conclusion, the results show that professors have appreciated the usefulness of workshops and have suggested ways to strengthen this PD strategy by including other strategies such as academic dialogue and team work. As with most of PD programs, the most common limitation was a lack of time, because daily practices tended to absorb most of teachers' time. Additionally, professors were concerned about the demands that institutional changes create and therefore, they would like to be informed about upcoming needs such as curriculum development, action research and academic writing.

Needs are expressed as PD outcomes in an institutional policy. This means that the proposed action plan for Phase Two may be set as guidelines for professors to pursue professional development in a more systematic way. Additionally, stage three (teacher training) is presented at the beginning of each semester resulting in the organization of academic communities. Each one of these stages should be put together in the university PD policy document from one semester to the next.

Finally, professional development is defined as the voluntary on-going process in which teachers are involved in acquiring, renewing or broadening their knowledge and practices to benefit themselves, their students, the educational institutions and education in general. It implies a commitment to reflection and change in order to maintain a critical stance to established theories and practices and their relation in particular contexts. This process empowers professors by creating a sense of belonging, challenge, organization and self-confidence.

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