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IDENTITY AND ACADEMIC CULTURES IN TRANSIT IN PROCESSES OF CURRICULAR INNOVATION

IDENTIDAD Y CULTURAS ACADÉMICAS EN TRÁNSITO EN PROCESOS DE INNOVACIÓN CURRICULAR

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Abstract

The worldwide higher education paradigm has changed from a paradigm based on teaching to one based on learning. This change has led the development of new identities and teaching cultures in higher education. This study studies these key elements in an innovative modular system created and developed within the Degree of Social Education at the University of the Basque Country. A communicative methodology is proposed mixing different techniques (interviews, discussions and analysis of data) and considering different agents (44 professors and students). All the data was transcribed, registered and qualitatively encoded using NVivo10 program. The results have revealed that this innovative degree structure helped in the transformation

of identities, from individualistic to collaborative. Furthermore, although there was a previous teacher culture concerned with innovation, this now has been consolidated into an innovative teaching culture. Moreover, four key elements that fostered identity and cultural change, but also personal and collective transformation were identified and labelled as: to grow and learn, take care of oneself, to connect and to integrate. Finally, the curricular and structural changes occurring in this transformation process were also analyzed and systematized. In conclusion, this work provides evidence to support the value of transformative change in academic identity and Higher Education teaching culture. Such change requires certain conditions and resources, including an assumption of teamwork and careful management of daily teaching work.

Likewise, the design of university degrees plays a key role in this transition towards a culture of innovation.

Keywords

Teaching identity; academic identity; higher education; teaching culture; educational change.

Resumen

El paradigma mundial de la educación superior ha cambiado de un paradigma basado en la enseñanza a uno basado en el aprendizaje. Este cambio ha llevado al desarrollo de nuevas identidades y culturas académicas en la educación superior. El presente estudio analiza estos elementos clave en un innovador sistema modular creado y desarrollado dentro del Grado de Educación Social de la Universidad del País Vasco. Se propone una metodología comunicativa que combina diferentes técnicas (entrevistas, discusiones y análisis de datos) y que considera diferentes agentes (44 profesores y estudiantes). Todos los datos se transcribieron, registraron y codificaron cualitativamente con el programa NVivo10. Los resultados han revelado que esta innovadora estructura de grados ayudó en la transformación de las identidades individualistas a colaborativas. Además, aunque anteriormente existía una cultura docente preocupada por la innovación, ahora se ha consolidado en una cultura docente innovadora. Además, se identificaron y etiquetaron cuatro elementos clave que fomentaron el cambio de identidad y cultural, pero también la transformación personal y colectiva: crecer y aprender, cuidarse a sí mismo/a, conectarse e integrarse. Por último, también se analizaron y sistematizaron los cambios curriculares y estructurales que se producen en este proceso de transformación. En conclusión, este trabajo aporta evidencias que respaldan el valor del cambio transformador de la identidad académica y la cultura docente de la Educación Superior. Dicho cambio requiere de ciertas condiciones y

recursos, incluyendo la asunción de un trabajo en equipo y un manejo cuidadoso de la labor docente diaria. Asimismo, el diseño de los títulos universitarios desempeña un papel fundamental en esta transición hacia una cultura de la innovación.

Palabras clave

Identidad docente; identidad académica; educación superior; cultura docente; cambio educativo.

Introduction

Changing education, teaching and learning processes in Higher Education (HE) necessarily requires that also university teachers change. It entails the necessity of changing the teaching practices, the understanding of the teaching–learning processes and also the ways in which to relate to students and colleagues (Monereo & Pozo, 2011). As a result, teachers' identity and teaching culture also changes in regards to their interactions with the diverse communities they are part of (department, research groups, other teachers' associations or groups, etc.). These concerns have raised an international interest from several authors as both local and global phenomena (Samuel & Mariaye, 2016). The academic accounts of the two research contexts confirm a complex scenario in which both, continuity and the need for change interact. This represents a scenario of transformation in HE that influences and delimits the whole process, which also leaves room for the determination of each teacher and the community involved.

Nowadays, academic identity is becoming more relevant as a field of study (Monereo, 2019). Numerous research projects and publications from the last two decades show the importance this field of research is achieving. Approaches from different perspectives are proliferating (Alonso et al., 2015), nevertheless there is a

consensus that academic identity in HE is a complex reality that is not easy to define. We can normally find within HE a very diverse range of identities influenced by the own institution or the discipline among others (Hoang & Pretorius, 2019). In this context some elements of their identity are shared not matter their field of study (Jawitz, 2009).

Alonso et al. (2015) carried out a review of the literature on university professional identity, highlighting six key elements: a) biographical representations related to professional roles (Dan, et al., 2019), the conception of the teaching-learning process, and the emotions or feelings (Zhang, Fu, Li & He, 2019); b) values and their ethical dimension (Fitzmaurice, 2013; Laiho, et al., 2020; Maaranen, et al., 2019); c) interaction with colleagues (Dan, et al., 2019; Kreber, 2010), with students and other social actors (Fitzmaurice, 2013; Van Lankveld, et al., 2017); d) professional knowledge of a different nature related to areas of their academic work (teaching, research and management) that allows teachers to deal with situations related to their professional work (Caballero & Bolívar, 2015; Monereo & Domínguez, 2014); e) institutional and university culture (Van Lankveld, et al., 2017); and e) integration as a permanent process in which each professional responds to the different situations they will have to face during their professional life (Pozo, 2011; Siegel, 2009).

Agency and community of practice: Theories for the understanding of identity and academic culture

The conceptualization of academic identity recognizes the influence certain structural aspects, such as the current global process of managerialism and the merchandising of HE have on the identity (Arvaja, 2018; Ylijoki & Henriksson 2017) and agency (Mckay & Monk, 2017) of its

academics. Specifically, we refer teachers' ability to intervene and influence their environment beyond HE institutional influence and global structural constraints, and the margin each has to trace their own way in their academic work (Kreber, 2010). Different investigations carried out at a micro level show that, even in the same scenario, the strategies developed by different teachers and the transformations produced are not the same (Ylijoki & Ursin, 2013; Mckay & Monk, 2017). We could add that in a scenario of commodification and competitiveness, identity transformation is often still marked by traditional academic values (Kreber, 2010; Fitzmaurice, 2013), by growth and professional improvement (Shams, 2019) and by greater collaboration (Alonso et al., 2019).

Likewise, academic identity is built around social participation and is constantly renegotiated (Alonso, et al., 2015). In this sense, the department, research groups or teaching teams (Kálmán, et al., 2019), are communities in which each teacher participates in a shared system of rules that, in one sense, limits their individual inclinations and capacities, but, in another, allows them to be part of forming new meanings and practices. Different investigations (Arthur, 2016; Teng, 2019) into academic identity precisely incorporate an understanding the theoretical perspective of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). This shows a process by which each teacher, through formal and informal moments of interaction and collaboration, incorporates the established practices of their community, recreates their own practice, and negotiates areas they think are necessary to contribute to or modify (Alonso, et al., 2015), thus constructing a specific professional culture (Caballero & Bolívar, 2015).

In this sense, it is important to highlight how the literature on teacher collaboration in HE shows that collaborative practices have a positive

effect on the professional development of teachers (Alonso, *et al.*, 2019; Heinrich, 2015). Heck, Bacharach and Dahlberg (2008) highlight its implications in: a) learning new teaching strategies and the discovery of teaching materials; b) the diversification of didactic strategies and methodological resources; and c) fostering a critical and reflective view of teaching practice and style. Gómez, Escofet and Freixa (2014) also specify that being part of a stable teaching team that is productive generates a greater sense of belonging in the teaching staff, both individually (being part of the same team based on positive interpersonal relationships of help and collaboration) and in a broader sense (forming part of a more global project).

The present case of study: Curricular innovation within the Degree in Social Education at the School of Education of Bilbao (UPV/ EHU)

The worldwide higher education paradigm has changed from a paradigm based on teaching to one based on learning. This change has led the development of educational innovation processes centered on coordinated teaching teams that try to overcome individual forms of working and curricula focused only on disciplines (Alonso, *et al.*, 2019; Margalef & Pareja, 2008; Gómez, *et al.*, 2014; Heinrich, 2015). In this context, specifically the framework of adaptation to the European Higher Education Area and the response to this challenge at the UPV/ EHU (Fernández *et al.*, 2013), curricular innovation of a modular and interdisciplinary nature within the Degree in Social Education at the UPV/ EHU has been designed and is underway. The development of this proposal began in the 2010-2011 academic year. The new features it incorporates (figure 1) are a modular structure (Arandia & Fernández, 2012), interdisciplinary module activity, specific teaching teams and a coordination team. All conform to the principles of curricular innovation and of the identity and

cultural change that is being promoted by UPV/ EHU and which is analyzed below. The goals of the present project in the aforementioned framework are:

- To analyze how processes of change in curricular innovation operate in Social Education studies, with reference to identity, by analyzing the roles and practices of teachers.
- To assess the impact teaching teams, interdisciplinary module activity and the coordination of teaching teams are having in the construction of a new teaching culture and the identities of teachers within the Degree in Social Education.
- To identify the elements that favor the transition to a more collaborative identity and teaching culture, involves teachers in an active commitment to processes of profound educational change, but also guard against any difficulties that might occur.

Modular Structure

Teaching modules are organized around problematic or thematic nuclei, which act as a single subject of knowledge for the entire teaching-learning process.

The subjects that participate in each module are organized according to their relevance to provide knowledge to each of the central questions or problem areas.

Teaching Tea

The faculty participates in the development, planning and assessment of the modules, assuming their interdisciplinarity before development of the competences to be achieved in relation to the set of subjects.

Each team has a coordinator that is also part of a collegiate coordination team for the Degree.

Interdisciplinary activity of the Module

In each module, there is an interdisciplinary module activity common to all subjects, representing 15% of the teaching load. The purpose of the interdisciplinary module activity is to promote the realization of autonomous, collaborative, deliberative and questioning work by students, developing a global professional perspective using the so-called "active" methodologies (Project Based Learning, Cooperative Learning, Learning Based on Problems and Reflection-Action Process in the Action-Research line).

The main objective of this research is to make a case study to analyze how this new modular structure in higher education has influenced the identity of teachers and teaching cultures.

Methodology

This case study is contextualized within a framework of qualitative research (Tracy, 2011; Denzin, 2012), and specifically within the communicative methodology that seeks to obtain knowledge from interaction with the people investigated on terms of equality. This methodological approach is developed in a context known as the "dialogical turn" of current society (Gómez, 2018). In this sense, it encourages incorporating voices that are part of the researched reality, in this case teachers and other agents, into the research process. In this way, the meanings constructed depend on the interactions produced in a context of egalitarian dialogue based on reflection, self-reflection, collaboration and inter-subjectivity (Gómez & Diez-Palomares, 2009).

The sample of participants in this case study is composed of teachers and students within

the school of education of the University of the Basque Country. The research was carried out in several phases between 2014 and 2016, and, overall, 44 people were interviewed and their responses analyzed. The segmentation was based on the following criteria:

- Three holders of executive positions in the organization: the director of the center, the head of studies and the degree coordinator have participated in in-depth interviews.
- Twenty eight teachers: 10 teachers took part in the in-depth interviews, nine in the communicative groups, five in the advisory council and nine in the participant observation.
- Ten third-year students were part of a discussion group.

The techniques used to obtain information/ data production were:

- The analysis of documents related to the design and implementation of the Degree (minutes and documents of the design process and implementation of the Degree, minutes of the Center, minutes of evaluations of Module and Degree, etc.)
- 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted. Each interview followed a process of preparation (selection of the informants, contact and preparation of a script for the interviews), interview, transcription and discussion of the transcript with the informants.
- Throughout the investigation, communicative observation has been

conducted (Flecha, Vargas, & Dávila, 2012) by participating in two meetings as an external observer: a) a two-day meeting of the coordinators of the modules and two external persons, and b) an evaluation meeting, in which coordinators, managers, teachers and students participated.

- Two communicative discussion groups, one with ten teachers and another one with 10 students.

Finally, the communicative organization of the research has been guaranteed through the creation of an advisory council (Flecha, *et al.*, 2012) composed of five teachers related to the research. This council has met at two points (in the middle of the process and at the end)

to discuss the results and analysis, in order to integrate their findings into the final report of this investigation.

Analysis of data

All the data have been transcribed, registered and encoded using the NVivo 10 program for qualitative analysis. Throughout the process, new data resources have been incorporated, such as field notes, memoranda, etc. and, using the NVivo Program, an analysis of the discourse has been carried out identifying and focusing on topics that naturally emerged. The first coding allowed the creation of a categorization, achieved in an inductive way, that was, after a second analysis, reorganized to give rise to the definitive categorical system below (see Table 1), and therefore a regrouping of the data.

Table 1

Categorical System

Teacher identity construction	Factors present in the identity process	Social changes
		University culture
		Institutional culture
		Teaching culture
		Personal factors
	Dynamics of identity change	Ethics and values
		Interaction
		Integration
		Tensions
Identities and teaching culture in transit	Driving dimensions of change in teacher culture and identity	Teachers' teams
		Interdisciplinary Module Activity
		New teaching roles Coordination
		Degree-Society Relationship

Results

Identities and teaching cultures in transit in the Degree in Social Education Prolonged fieldwork and the triangulation of different techniques (interviews, discussions and analysis of data) and agents (professors and students) have allowed us to illustrate the transition in identity

and culture that the teachers in this case study are carrying out. The following table 2 reflects, from the perspective of curricular innovation in the Degree in Social Education, some of the changes observed in the identity of university teaching staff. We are talking here about the representations, the conceptions of the teaching and learning processes, and the feelings associated with them (Monereo & Pozo, 2011).

Table 2

Summary of the changes in identity and cultural teaching in the Degree

<u>Teaching identity of origin</u>	<u>Identity that is reached</u>
<i>Individualist identity:</i>	<i>Collaborative identity:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each person decides whether to collaborate or not. • Teaching is solitary. • Separation of teaching and research. • Management and volunteer leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate collaborative strategies into the teaching function through teaching teams. • Generate synergies for collaboration in teaching and research. • Share leadership
<i>Teacher culture concerned with innovation</i>	<i>Innovative teaching culture</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important group of teachers who implemented innovative learning experiences. • Coordination and innovative collaboration among teachers. • Relationship with professional agents in specific initiatives. • Students participate in the field of the subject. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational innovation is imposed and carried out by all teachers. • Teamwork is incorporated transversally. • Collaboration with professional agents is institutionalized. • Even in an initial state, student voices are entirely incorporated into the Degree.

As reflected above, university professors can be characterized by their individuality. In these cases, their academic role is conducted only with reference to their department and any informal collaboration he/she might have with colleagues when participating in research groups. These circumstances are transitioned to a new situation, which is characterized by:

- Greater collaboration among teaching staff, either in the module teaching teams, or in the research subject field. A large part of this collaboration arises from the relationships that are being built in the teaching teams.
- Greater integration of teaching and research, due to the synergies that arise between teachers and agents from the professional and institutional world.
- The inclusion of shared leadership, which is shared between the module coordinators, the teaching teams and the degree coordinator, and in all areas: management, teaching, innovation and research.
- Extending the culture of innovation fostered by some teachers in their teaching-learning processes to the whole degree.
- A focus on student learning, which is developed through active methodologies or assumptions related to the professional skills to be mastered.
- Advancing an interdisciplinary conception of the approach to the teaching–learning process.

- An understanding that student learning is not only individual but is largely collaborative.

- A consideration that the role of the teacher as a guide and mediator in the learning process encourages students to take a greater role.

- Generating greater interaction among teachers when it comes to making explicit the strategies used to encourage reflexive processes, which seek common learning through mutual support.

It has also been possible to observe the transformation of both positive and negative feelings associated with teaching in solitary ways; where negative feelings related to discrepancies and disagreements between different teachers existed, a transition had occurred to an identity where:

- They show, in general, positive feelings in relation to working together, to collaboration and feeling part of a common project that communicates with the values that drive their teaching and personal projects.
- Feelings of worth and achievement related to fostering a common teaching innovation are expressed, as these enable new paths in teaching, management, research and collaboration within the network.
- There is satisfaction in promoting a project that makes sense to the commitment to student learning, the profession of Social Education and social transformation.

- Negative emotions and feelings, related to stress or the fear of new ways of teaching, the effort and time involved, and incompatibility with other university demands sometimes arise. These can also emerge in relation to conflicts, discrepancies and misunderstandings within the teaching teams or the negative feedback and managing unrealistic student expectations.
- There are greater opportunities for interaction around negativity, and spaces in which to explain and reflect on the feelings and emotions that occur in teaching and academic activity.

These identity changes do not occur in the same way in each teacher. External demands, vital moments, different stages in the professional's career or personal interests and motivations are variables that influence the rhythm and depth of change each teacher faces. Nevertheless, the transition will be taking place at the level of the whole degree, which demands a cultural transition in the understanding of work at the School of Education as a whole. We are talking here about a new culture in which collaboration and coordination is not just the product of a group of teachers, but of all the teachers within the Degree program. The way in which it is assumed, although with different implications, that there is a shared responsibility to the project is another aspect we should emphasize. A teacher reflected on the complexity of the transition:

[T]here is movement: new and interesting things have been set in motion, but limitations have also been found. The difference between ideas, objectives, what we want to change, and reality (...) we now see that we have gone

from one side to the other. That the group did not work at all, and now suddenly it means everything... and you have to look for balance, but (...) what I do find interesting is the interdisciplinary work within the module (...), the integration with the subjects (...) a closer approach of the training to the professional reality and to thinking and reflecting in practice to do something suitable using knowledge ... (FC2GDD2).

Key elements in understanding the process of identity and cultural transformation

To understand the changes described above it is necessary to identify what elements foster identity and cultural change, but also personal and collective transformation. The results of this study indicate that four elements are deeply relevant: to grow and learn, take care of oneself, to connect and to integrate. Each of these elements are described below:

- To grow and learn. Identity transformation, largely, is possible thanks to the perception of growth each person or group has, which motivates participants because the process is going in the right direction. For teachers it is important to feel more competent, more effective, to have new opportunities and significant challenges, to have influence over the educational innovation that is being carried out, both individually and together with colleagues, and being a part of their institution. The aforementioned are necessary conditions for the organization and for its members to turn the process of identity transformation into a learning opportunity. Trust in colleagues, collaboration and fulfillment of goals becomes essential. In this sense, one participant teacher explained:

(...) I think that personal involvement and transformation is the basis of my motivation in teaching. Another important thing for me is my desire to learn, so I can share that knowledge with other people. It is not something you can keep for yourself; these are spaces to share learning (FC2GDD1)

This, and other testimonies, show that growth is not only experienced as an individual process but as something that emerges, that is developed and built with others, whether colleagues or students.

- To take care of oneself refers both to taking care in relation to others and to self-care. It is a basic self-reflection to become aware of where our limits are and not to exceed them. To prevent overstretching ourselves we should accept the complex reality of this movement towards change, but also assume that there are aspects that may not be solved. Self-care is related to the sustainability of the whole process, so that there is no regression. Commenting on the practice of self-care, one interviewee said:

I don't think we have to be accomplices to that madness, right? Be aware of our own limits, or take them into account, because this seems positive to me, but I detect there is also fatigue and anger (...) (FC2GDD2)

- Connection. A process of identity change such as this, although it is individual, always allows interconnection between teachers and the different elements with which they share time and space.

As long as it is possible to use these connections, knowledge and resources, a transformative process can be generated.

Connection is about achieving goals together where doing so alone is impossible. The new teaching demands, together with other issues such as leadership or connection with the professional world, require building a network of mutual support to be successful. The following section gives some examples that highlight the importance of this aspect.

- Integration is the linking of the different aspects of the system that are found within each teacher or group of teachers. Integration allows identity and cultural change to be carried out in a flexible and adaptive way. A lack of integration hinders this process by pushing teachers into a state of chaos or rigidity.

Integration brings together different issues, some apparently opposed, related to identity transition: emotion and reason; the past and the future; the individual, the group and their context; different academic functions; capabilities and their limits; and activating new steps and dealing with difficulties. With regard to integration, one participant said the following:

I would say on [the subject of] my identity (...): "I am looking for balance while I'm in continuous movement, but also, because this change is happening between my personal, academic and the emotional part (...)" (FC2GDD1)

These interviews suggest that if spaces, actions and dynamics for transition are enabled together with the elements growth, care, connection and integration, a greater openness to identity

change can be generated. We should however be aware of the difficulty of facilitating these elements in a university culture historically marked by cognition and reason, for which these are new challenges.

How to turn the critical aspects into transformers. The importance of changes in this context

In the previous section, we described the conditions necessary to foster the achievement of a profound identity and cultural change.

We also explained how this is related to the provision of spaces to practice personal and group communication skills. At this point, it is also necessary to underline the importance of the curricular and structural changes occurring in this process. As we will show below, teachers regularly face critical situations that challenge the progress of their teaching identity transformation. These situations can entail either a blockage resulting in the reinforcement of the previous identity, or a process in which the problem becomes a challenge that generates positive identity and cultural change (see Figure 1).

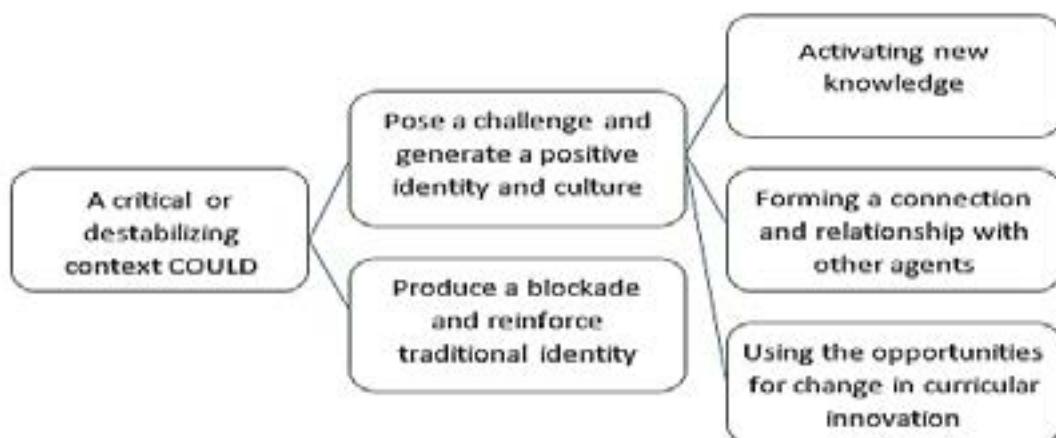


Figure 1. The process of conversion of critical aspects in transformation

Three examples where teachers faced challenges to their teaching practice are:

- Teachers who did not have previous professional experience as social educators and found themselves unable to integrate effectively and profoundly access professional knowledge in teaching.
- Teachers who perceived great difficulty with integrating teaching and applied research.
- Teachers who questioned the teaching work itself, citing the lack of connection

between the subject and the professional reality; these often did not have a character open to the transformation process.

The following Table 3 shows the important steps that were taken to perform identity transformations within the Module Interdisciplinary Activity team, the Certification Council and the teaching teams, including knowledge activation, forming connections with different agents and changes made to the curricular organization.

Table 3

Cases of conversion of the critical aspects in transformers

	Professor 1	Professor 2	Professor 3
Crises and difficulties in teacher identity development	Not having professional experience as a Social Educator and being unable to effectively integrate professional knowledge with teaching.	Perceiving great difficulty with the integration of research and teaching, particularly applied research.	Questioning the teaching work itself due to the lack of connection of the subject with the professional reality and its transforming nature.
Activation of knowledge	Theoretical knowledge of the field of social education and the agents that participate in it (Practicum and other spaces).	Knowledge and resources for research those teachers and other colleagues have developed throughout their academic careers.	Knowledge related to the Service Learning methodology of different teachers of the School. Knowledge of the professional field.
Connection with other agents	Connection with educators and organizations involved in socio-educational action.	Connection with educators, organizations, reflection processes and socio-educational networks.	Connection with teachers who have worked with a similar methodology and organizations that want to be involved in these processes.
Taking advantage of synergies in curricular innovation	Use the design from real "Interdisciplinary Module" cases, in addition to the subjects, to incorporate these voices and knowledge into the curriculum.	Use the Certification Council as a network of professionals, teachers and students that allows developing applied research processes, among other activities, tailored to the demands of the reality of the professional world.	Take advantage of the collaboration that arises in the modular teaching team structure to generate a support network that drives this change across subjects in a coordinated manner within the module.
Identity and cultural challenge and change	Incorporate the voices and knowledge of teaching professionals and the processes of teaching-learning complementing the work developed by each teacher.	Incorporate the research work into the teaching work, through participation in research processes inside or outside the Council.	Incorporate into teaching in several professional subjects, projects in which the students work together to achieve the curricular objectives.

These results point to the importance of curricular innovation as a process that favors identity transformation. Without curricular innovation changes and the processes of improvement such as those reported would occur, but not in the same way or with equal breadth. Such improvements would remain related to the private practice of each teacher, or their immediate colleagues, without influencing structural cultural change in the whole context.

Discussion

The processes of identity and cultural transition, such as the one analyzed in this case study, are slow and need time to stabilize (Padilla, 2012). In order for the cultural change to be sustainable, certain aspects are required: a positive and caring environment for people via the dynamics of the teams must be borne in mind (Hargreaves & Harris, 2011; Loher & Schwartz, 2003); time management to combine teaching demands with other requirements of an academic career and personal life (Fitzmaurice, 2013); the consolidation of collaboration networks (Alonso, *et al.*, 2019); advances towards a learning community in which the diversity of knowledge and skills, instead of being an obstacle, becomes an opportunity for the development of collective talent and personal growth (Kreber, 2010); and, greater institutional recognition of the approach to the work that is being done (Alonso, *et al.*, 2019; Heinrich, 2015; Margalef & Pareja, 2008).

The results of this research support re-centring identity and cultural transformations in the motivations, values and methodologies of researchers (Heck, *et al.*, 2008; Gómez, *et al.*, 2014), but also its values (Fitzmaurice, 2013; Laiho, *et al.*, 2020; Maaranen, *et al.*, 2019). This idea might explain some of the reasons why most of the teachers of a grade assume to leave their comfort zone and embrace all the benefits and difficulties this entails. This study also contributes to the literature on academic identity by demonstrating the importance that the design

of a university degree has on the potential to promote an ideological and cultural transition among professors. Likewise, care is vital to achieve long-term efficiency, both individually and collectively (Loher & Schwartz, 2003). It requires generating a process in which each member can develop healthy habits, satisfying relationships and feel recognized. Considering situations of stress due to a possible overload of work are foreseen here, fostering spaces for quiet reflection and that at all times connect to the ultimate goals and purposes that drive the whole process of identity transformation.

The analysis of this case study has allowed us to verify the importance and the complexity that teaching identity presents in HE and in other processes of institutional and cultural change. In this sense, the results of this research validate the conclusions of previous works (McKay & Monk, 2017; Samuel & Mariaye, 2016; Ylijoki & Ursin, 2013) that have emphasized the value of the dimensions of structure and agency in processes of identity change in HE. Although structure alludes to the existence of a series of external factors that determine, at global and local levels, the possibilities and limits of identity change, there is also the capacity for agency and for creation and recreation in each concrete context. Similar processes in different contexts, even at the same university, offer different possibilities and results. This study showcases how the School of Social Education's vision, in terms of innovation and quality, when adapting to the EHEA (The European Higher Education Area) and the policy proposed by the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), by setting in motion various intervention programs, providing resources for teacher training in new methodologies and for the institutional development of schools and faculties, have had an important effect on the quality and sustainability of academic identity transformation (Fernández, *et al.*, 2013).

Conclusions

This work provides evidence to support the value of transformative change in academic identity and Higher Education teaching culture. Such change is not without problems or tensions, and requires certain conditions and resources, including an assumption of teamwork and careful management of daily teaching work. Likewise, the key role that the design of the university degrees plays in this transition towards a culture of innovation, considering the specificities of each teaching culture, provides a reference to propose future changes in curriculum organization and ways of understanding and relating to other colleagues.

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