

TEACHING SKILLS

Continual Teaching Training

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to discuss and comment about teaching skills and to present a plan to improve them through what we can call Continual Teaching Training.

First, it should be determined what teaching skills are. It is difficult to answer this question but it might be agreed that teaching is about how we provide information to others, to create interest in obtaining such information and to be able to boost critical thinking. From my point of view our Law School should provide training on teaching skills for the school's professors.

As you might know, there are two main groups of teachers at our Law School. On the one hand there are the professors and on the other one the auxiliaries. All professors and auxiliaries belong to several tenures led by a head professor.

Courses are in charge of the head professor or an assistant professor. At the same time, they are both helped by three different categories of auxiliaries: Assignments Teachers, First Auxiliaries and Second Auxiliaries.

According to the regulations, Assignments Teachers are able to teach 50% of the subject. At the same time, First Auxiliaries and Second Auxiliaries can sometimes deliver a topic in class as long as there is a professor present.

Both, professors and auxiliaries obtain their tenure through public contest. However, the main difference is that once the position is obtained, the auxiliaries begin their training in teaching skills and the professors do not.

Auxiliaries do have a very well organized and developed teaching program of courses and seminars at the Teaching Department of our Law School. This program has four Modules of 30 hours each. They consist of University Pedagogy, General Didactics, Special Didactics, Teaching Practice, and Seminars and Workshops on writing, reasoning practice and theory, and voice management. On the contrary, once professors obtained their tenure, they do not receive any kind of teaching courses or seminars whatsoever.

Therefore, professors begin, continue and end their teaching life, without any formal teaching training. Obviously, those professors who were previously auxiliaries have received training as such. However, after obtaining the tenure they receive no more training during their entire carrier as professors that might last for more than 40 years.

It goes without saying that teaching provides training while you teach. Moreover, some professors have real inborn teaching skills. Nevertheless, here we are discussing about formal training.

Continual Teaching Training

Together with the Teaching Department of our Law School (Professors Nora Goggi and Cynthia Kolodny) we have implemented an experimental project in order to provide continual training to a group of professors. The aim of this experimental project is to enhance continuous improvement of legal education and research.

My tenure approached the Teaching Department of our Law School with the idea of analyzing evaluation techniques and the best way to give exams mostly when you have about 40 students in class. However, after a first meeting with the Teaching Department and both the professors and auxiliaries, the focus changed as the general interests was posed in selecting the contents and answering the question what to teach, as it is not possible to teach everything. The questions posed were mainly what should be taught? How to make the selection? What is important, what are the basic contents, which are the relevant or complex ones?

Meetings between professors, auxiliaries and the teachers from the Teaching Department took place from September to December 2010. Now, in 2011 we will turn to evaluation techniques and other issues.

This teaching training experience involves all the teaching staff, including the head professors, the assistant's professors, and the auxiliaries, who showed real commitment to the program. They are neither isolated, nor individual initiatives. On the contrary, they are intended to be taken as a continual team formation.

Which are the solutions that Continual Teaching Training can provide?

It gives the opportunity to analyze several pedagogical-didactic matters. Through Continual Teaching Training we can end with encyclopedic teaching that is also related to authoritarianism in class. As a consequence, authoritarianism may lead to students' defection that is one of the problems we face nowadays.

Through Continual Teaching Training we could also focus on encouraging teachers to foster students' critical thinking while at the same time we promote investigation among the faculty.

We should take into account that most of the professors are part time professors, and that they practice law, most of them being active lawyers or belong the justice system. Therefore, there is a strong relationship between practice and teaching. We can analyze the positive and the negative aspects of the relationship between being a professor and an active lawyer. The positive side is that the professor can provide students with their experience as lawyer. The negative aspect is that professors might try to influence courts with the tenure's opinion and through school books just to obtain more work at their law offices.

Conclusion

As it has been stated before, our law school should provide Continual Teaching Training. It is not acceptable that once the tenure is obtained professors do not receive more information about new methods, new experiences and techniques related to teaching. As it has been mentioned, Continual Teaching Training can encourage teachers to foster student's critical thinking; can contribute to end with encyclopedic teaching, can enhance

democratic practices in class which in turn will contribute to reinforcing democratic practices in the society.

In summary, through Continual Teaching Training, we might obtain a stronger Professor's commitment to teaching in order to promote legal education as an instrument of development.