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Contributions of Best Practices in Teaching to Improving Higher Education Instruction¹

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Abstract: Interested in improving the quality of teaching in Higher Education Institutions (IES), we integrate research on good teachers, carried out by both the author and other researchers. These studies are distinguished by having used different methodologies, being carried out at different times and in different places; however, there are important coincidences. The results were grouped into five categories that distinguish good teachers: 1) their didactic ability and mastery of the subjects taught, 2) have adequate interpersonal relationships with students, 3) the importance they give to their work, 4) possess certain visions and beliefs about teaching and 5) the motivation, commitment and responsibility with which they carry out their role. The results provide a base for an educational policy that could be applied to educational institutions: the selection of new teachers, the promotion and appreciation of good teaching, as well as the criteria for teacher evaluation, incentive programs academic productivity and for teacher training. This proposal contributes to making good teaching a common practice in educational institutions and not just an isolated result of personal motivations and commitments.

¹ This is an unofficial English translation provided by the author and has not been peer reviewed in English.

Key words: higher education; teaching in higher education; good teaching practices; teaching quality; educational policy

Resumen: Interesados por mejorar la calidad de la docencia impartida en las Instituciones de Educación Superior (IES), integramos investigaciones sobre los buenos docentes, realizadas tanto por el autor como por otros investigadores. Estos estudios se distinguen por haber empleado diferentes metodologías, ser realizados en distintas épocas y en diversos lugares; no obstante, hay grandes coincidencias. Los resultados fueron agrupados en cinco categorías que describen al buen docente: 1) su capacidad didáctica y dominio de los temas enseñados, 2) tener unas adecuadas relaciones interpersonales con los alumnos, 3) la trascendencia que da a su labor, 4) poseer ciertas visiones y creencias sobre la docencia y por 5) la motivación, compromiso y responsabilidad con la que desempeña su función. Lo integrado lo usamos para fundamentar una política educativa que las instituciones de educación superior podrían aplicar para: la selección de los nuevos docentes, el fomento y aprecio de la buena docencia, utilizarlos como criterios en la evaluación docente y en los programas de estímulos a la productividad académica y apoyar la formación docente. Deseamos que lo propuesto contribuya a que la buena docencia sea una práctica común en las instituciones educativas y no solo resultado aislado de motivaciones y compromisos personales.

Palabras clave: educación superior; docencia en educación superior; buenas prácticas de enseñanza; calidad docente; política educativa

Contribuições de boas práticas de ensino para o aperfeiçoamento de professores no ensino superior

Resumo: Interessados em melhorar a qualidade do ensino nas Instituições de Ensino Superior (IES), integramos pesquisas sobre bons professores, realizadas tanto pelo autor como por outros pesquisadores. Estes estudos distinguem-se por terem utilizado diferentes metodologias, sendo realizados em diferentes momentos e em diferentes locais; no entanto, existem grandes coincidências. Os resultados foram agrupados em cinco categorias que distinguem os bons professores: 1) sua habilidade didática e domínio dos assuntos ensinados, 2) têm relacionamento interpessoal adequado com os alunos, 3) a importância que dão ao seu trabalho, 4) possuem certeza visões e crenças sobre o ensino e 5) a motivação, o compromisso e a responsabilidade com que desempenham o seu papel. Utilizamos os resultados para apoiar uma política educacional à qual as instituições de ensino podem se candidatar: a seleção de novos professores, a promoção e valorização do bom ensino, bem como os critérios de avaliação de professores, programas de incentivo para produtividade acadêmica e para a formação de professores. Esperamos que o que é proposto contribua para que o bom ensino seja uma prática comum nas instituições de ensino e não apenas um resultado isolado de motivações e compromissos pessoais.

Palavras-chave: Educação superior; ensino no ensino superior; boas práticas de ensino; qualidade de ensino; política educacional

Contributions of Best Practices in Teaching to Improving Higher Education Instruction

This article has two goals: first, integrate the results of studies on best teaching practices in higher education carried out at different times and places; next, use them to support educational policies that seek to improve higher education instruction.

In the first section we describe studies on best teaching practices in higher education, highlighting their main findings and the coincidences in their results, and in the second section we use them to design educational policies to help improve teaching quality at this level of education. Although there are different proposals of innovation in teaching, such as active methodologies, learning-centered teaching and IT-based methods, we focused on the actions good teachers carry out, which they are recognized for by their students, colleagues and superiors.

We did so because we found several advantages to using the results of best teaching practices, one of which is that they are usually not taken into account educational policy designers, according to Harris (2016, p. 176):

Many well-intentioned initiatives, innovations and interventions in teaching created by individuals who operate in the political sphere are disconnected from classrooms, where change is most important. Public policy managers do not take into account knowledge about the most effective teaching practices and they ignore the experience of professors, who are best placed to assess and share what works.

Furthermore, best teaching practices have the advantage of representing real teaching situations, since they are reports of professors' way of teaching, observations of their teaching practices, or interpretations of students' opinions of what they feel is a good teacher. We believe this facilitates the transfer of findings to teaching practice because it avoids the problem of artificiality, a limiting factor in educational research which has generally been carried out in conditions different from those teachers face daily and which explains why they are in turn difficult to use to solve teaching problems in the real world (Pogrow, 2017). This is supported by Goodyear & Hativa (2002, p. 3): "Knowing more about how teachers do what they do is also the key to making educational research more relevant to its practice."

If one of the main goals of higher education institutions is improving teaching, this is a viable alternative to achieve it (Coudannes & Lossio, 2017; Goodyear & Hativa, 2002). According to Zabalza (2004):

Teaching itself is an important component in students' instruction. Good teaching makes the difference between universities. What students learn depends on their interest, effort and capabilities, but also on whether they have had good or bad teachers (p. 115).

According to Zabalza (2012), the study of teaching allows one to make best teaching practices visible and provide them to teachers as examples, since knowing how good teachers teach can help others modify their teaching practices (Azureen et al., 2014).

The good teacher is the type of professor we hope predominates in universities (San Martin et al., 2014). The main benefit of all of this is that it encourages learning in students, who can thus acquire knowledge and skills which will be useful to their successful integration in the workplace (OCDE, 2019).

Characterization of Best Practices in Teaching

We will begin by defining best practices in teaching as the sum of actions carried out by teachers to enable student learning, instruct them integrally and stimulate their complex cognitive processes (critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, etc.). They are distinguished by their evaluation by students and colleagues in terms of reaching goals remarkably well.

Good teachers do their job because they enjoy teaching, not for external gratification (Carlos, 2008). Rank is of little importance: their performance is more a result of their own interest, motivation, commitment, responsibility and self-criticism (Carlos, 2014) than the result of institutional policy. This is why we provide alternatives with which to reverse the present situation and create the conditions and institutional incentives needed to encourage and recognize good teaching to the point where it becomes the norm and not the exception.

In order to achieve this, we suggest higher education institutions carry out several actions. We focus on four of them which directly impact teaching. This is why we believe the results we found concerning good teachers provide guidelines, criteria and strategies to help educational institutions respond effectively to the following challenges:

- a) Recruiting new faculty.
- b) Retaining and recognizing good teachers so that they may serve as examples and emulation models for their colleagues.
- c) Making faculty evaluation and productivity incentive programs tools to help faculty improve their teaching practices.
- d) Providing institutional guidelines so that teacher training includes a teaching philosophy based on what good teachers do that can be shared by all teachers, regardless of the subjects or disciplines they teach.

Main Findings on the Study of Best Practices in Teaching

Which characteristics or qualities do teachers display that generate recognition from their students, colleagues and superiors? To answer this question, we will use two sources. First, research was carried out by the author on 40 outstanding professors of psychology, engineering and medicine² at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), who were interviewed in-depth (Carlos, 2006, 2008, 2018) and selected through student surveys and questionnaires, and the opinions of their colleagues and superiors³ (Carlos, 2014). Secondly, we incorporated the results of other research on best teaching practices and effective teaching. These studies were selected because they had been carried out at different places and times, because they used different methodologies and because their results coincide with our research and support our findings; these references will be cited when appropriate.

We will be presenting the main implications of the results of these studies. We sought to summarize what we found in different sources to highlight their common points and describe good teaching in higher education.

Which characteristics distinguish good teachers? We will organize our answer to this question in the following categories, which summarize the results found by us and other researchers on the topic. Good teachers are characterized by:

² These subjects were not studied for any particular reason other than that the institutions had a faculty evaluation system and that both the authorities and professors agreed to participate.

³ For more information on the participant selection process, methodology used and selection criteria, we recommend you consult Carlos (2006 and 2014). It is not possible to do so here because of space limitations.

1. Displaying good pedagogical skills.
2. Mastering interpersonal aspects.
3. Giving their work a sense of purpose.
4. Having certain views and beliefs about teaching.
5. Bringing commitment, motivation and responsibility to their work.

In each category we will include what we found in other studies to support our results and highlight the many common opinions on how good higher education professors teach.

Displaying Good Pedagogical Skills

What sets these professors apart from others is the fact that they know how to teach well, which means their students feel they learn their course contents. How do these professors teach? We identified the fact that their teaching is characterized by full mastery of the topics they teach and by carrying out different actions to facilitate the adequate acquisition of knowledge. Their teaching distinguishes itself by being clear and using accessible language to explain complex concepts, tailoring contents to students' level of knowledge, considering their interests and needs, being organized and relevant, properly selecting the amount of contents taught, and challenging students. All of these characteristics of good teaching have also been identified by authors such as: Aguirre & De Laurentis, 2016; Azureen et al., 2014; Bain, 2004; Blanco, 2009; Bolívar & Domingo, 2007; Chiatti & Sordelli, 2019; Cid et al., 2009; Coudannes, 2016; Coudannes & Lossio, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Fernández et al., 2012; Flores & Porta, 2013; Flores et al., 2013; Friesen, 2011; García & Rugarcia, 1985; Gutiérrez et al., 2017; Hativa, 2000; Ibarra, 1999; John, 2017; Loredó et al., 2017; Loredó et al., 2008; Mcber, 2000; Patiño, 2015; San Martín et al., 2014; Sgreccia & Cirelli, 2015; Sgreccia et al., 2016, and Zabalza, 2012.

We found that good professors make the contents they teach attractive, which is in agreement with other authors such as Azureen, et al. (2014) and Kember & Kwan (2002). They also project enthusiasm and show passion for knowledge and teaching (Aguirre & De Laurentis, 2016; Coudannes & Lossio 2017; Chiatti & Sordelli, 2019; Flores et al., 2013; Friesen, 2011; Gutiérrez et al., 2017; Hattie & Yates, 2014). This is exemplified by García & Rugarcia (1985), quoting one of their students: "a class that is well-prepared, profound, serious and not boring at all." (p. 4). In much the same way, Day (2006, quoted in Flores et al., 2013) remembered his good teachers: "passionately interested in stimulating their students and developing their taste for learning." (p. 185).

Patiño (2015), who worked with humanities and social science professors in a private Mexican university, found other characteristics of good teachers, which she identified as the artistic or intuitive style, in which teachers combine fun, creative and imaginative elements; the therapeutic style, in which teachers get involved with their students in a more emotionally profound manner, touching their affections and feelings, placing themselves in a horizontal, rather than vertical, position; the Socratic style, in which the most frequently used tools are dialogue and question formation, as teachers seek to encourage critical thinking and reflection, coinciding with Chiatti & Sordelli (2019), and finally, the so-called academic style, similar to the Socratic style in terms of its emphasis in promoting reflection, but placing priority on academic expectations and on students reaching expected quality standards, qualities also identified as important by Sgreccia et al. (2016).

One characteristic that defines good teachers is that they connect what they teach to real or applied situations. To quote one of the teachers we interviewed: "I try to connect contents to daily experiences, or those students might have in the working world." (Carlos, 2014, p. 276). García & Rugarcia (1985, p. 5) reported something very similar: "I applied theory to practical situations of everyday life." They respond to their students' demands to not just cover topics in an abstract or purely disciplinary manner, but rather to teach them tangible principles and concepts, showing their

connection to real-life problems (Coudannes, 2016; Coudannes & Lossio, 2017; Gutiérrez et al., 2017; Ibarra, 1999; John, 2017; Tapia et al., 2017; Yáñez & Soria, 2017). One student put it this way: “Good teachers clearly “download” theory to practice” (Flores & Porta, 2013, p. 43). Doing so stimulates knowledge retention, as demonstrated in cognitive research on this topic (Hattie & Yates, 2014).

Good teachers pursue two main goals: first, integral instruction of their students, not just academically but also personally and ethically, which is why they implement different actions in their classes, such as doing what they say, being impartial, establishing and applying classroom rules include to themselves, seeking to be an ethical model to emulate (Patiño, 2015); second, achieving student learning: all of their work is directed towards reaching this goal.

With regards to teaching, they take into account the type of knowledge taught. Their teaching adapts to the epistemological nature of the discipline (Casillas et al., 2016; Coudannes & Lossio, 2017; Ibarra, 1999; Mcber, 2000); their teaching practice is diverse, since they employ different teaching strategies (Chiatti & Sordelli, 2019). For example, psychology professors emphasize mastering theory; in engineering, students must learn to apply knowledge, and professors of medicine emphasize the pertinence of contents and problem solving. This quality is synthesized by Bolívar & Domingo (2007, p. 27): “students’ progress is the result of the successful application of knowledge of the subject and of specific teaching methods, using a combination of appropriate teaching skills and professional characteristics.” This describes differences in teaching practices, but it coincides in the goals and manner of teaching, because it is done systematically, emphasizing the key points of the topic (Bolívar & Domingo, 2007; Chiatti & Sordelli, 2019; García & Rugarcia, 1985).

From the very beginning of the course, it is clear to the students what the purpose of the course is and what is expected of them. Both of these factors encourage learning (Hattie, 2012). The activities and forms of evaluation through which the level of attainment of course objectives are assessed are also clearly established.

Teaching encompasses several phases: a receptive phase, in which the teacher lectures and often models what he or she wishes the students to do, and another phase in which students exercise their knowledge, called guided practice (Hattie & Yates, 2014). In this phase, the student’s work is corrected. Finally, the student’s level of understanding of the topic taught is evaluated.

Contents are scaled up according to their level of difficulty. Teachers explore topics in greater depth, always taking into account what students already know. They avoid frustration by soliciting tasks they know students can carry out with the teacher’s help, but not so far beyond their current capacities. These are micro actions, as Mcber (2000) labeled them, in which teachers help students construct their knowledge step by step. Several of these activities are recommended for better teaching by Reigeluth (2013), and this is precisely what Vigotski labeled the creation of the zone of proximal development and stacking provided by the teacher (Moll, 1993).

Continuous dialogue takes place in class and the teacher checks whether or not the students understand. If comprehension is lagging, the teacher makes pertinent corrections. The teacher uses the barometer, a mechanism identified by Hativa (2000), which consists in monitoring students’ verbal and non-verbal behavior to see whether or not they are paying attention to the class, if they are distracted or tired. Based on this information, the teacher decides whether to continue, take a break or rest, modifying the classroom dynamics, because he or she knows there is no reason to continue if students are not paying attention.

In several phases, the progression is “first I do it, then we do it together, and finally you do it by yourself.” (Valls, 1993). Other activities which foster the retention and assimilation of the contents presented include review, allusion and connecting contents continuously to other topics and concepts, as suggested by Meirieu (2005). To summarize, they teach in an enjoyable, accessible manner, which characterizes effective teachers (Bain, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Gutiérrez et al.,

2017; Hativa, 2000) and coincides with the qualities identified by students as good teaching and they liked (Chiatti & Sordelli, 2019; Gutiérrez et al., 2017; Nabaho et al., 2017; Tapia et al., 2017).

Students actively participate in building their knowledge, which is not something that is merely received; good teachers employ different strategies to ensure students' involvement (Azureen et al., 2014; Fernández et al., 2012). This is considered to be essential for learning (Del Val, 1997; Hativa, 2000). Therefore, the practical portion of class does not merely consist of doing exercises. The most critical aspect of class is the feedback students receive. Usually, during class, students solve problems, correct themselves, and the teacher answers their questions (García & Rugarcia, 1985). The teacher encourages teamwork, during which the students themselves first review the work done by their classmates: thus, they have the opportunity to be corrected, not only by the teacher but also by their peers (Gutiérrez et al., 2017). The benefit of doing this is that instructional feedback is one of the main mechanisms through which to facilitate learning (Hattie, 2012; Shute, 2008).

Teachers are concerned by their students' learning (San Martin et al., 2014) and they feel responsible for achieving it (Bolívar & Domingo, 2007). Another distinctive characteristic is their strong capacity to motivate students to get enthusiastically involved in academic activities (Bolívar & Domingo, 2007; Chiatti & Sordelli, 2019; Fernández et al., 2012; Gutiérrez et al., 2017; Patiño, 2015; San Martin et al., 2014; Sgreccia & Cirelli, 2015).

Here, we provide five examples which synthesize the way in which good teachers give their classes. The first three are expressed by their students: "First, the teacher taught us the theory and explained it to us; then, the teacher answered our questions; next, the teacher gave us a simple example and we did a more complicated exercise together, and finally, if there were any questions the teacher explained again." (García & Rugarcia 1985, p. 6). The students interviewed by Patiño (2015, p. 105) described their professor in this way: "We are impressed with the number of things the professor knows, the calmness with which he transmits knowledge and the clarity with which he communicates, especially on such complicated topics." Another student put it this way: "The teacher knew how to prepare his classes very well, and personally I reached the goals he had set for me. His explanation helped me read the documents afterwards: he had lots of resources and good pedagogy, in addition to his knowledge." (Coudannes, 2016, p. 14). Furthermore, John (2017, p. 19) summed up the teaching practices of good teachers: "They prepare classes which reflect the mastery of important concepts, connect concepts to skills, explain clearly, answer students' questions correctly, master different teaching strategies and complete the syllabus and curriculum."

One of the professors we interviewed used similar terms when asked to define a good teacher:

It's not just someone who knows a lot, it's someone who knows how to transmit knowledge, who expresses it clearly, who is up to date, who doesn't just know the contents by heart and repeats them...No! It's someone who does creative things with students and presents them in many different ways, who always finds a way to make learning significant. (Carlos, 2008, p. 21)

In conclusion, the teaching practice implemented by good teachers is distinguished by its pedagogical excellence and mastery of the subjects taught. They have an outstanding way of combining what and how to teach, which has specific characteristics because it is adapted to the type of discipline taught, but there are also common aspects, such as clarity, organization, coherence, using different teaching strategies, exemplifying what students must do, encouraging practice of what has been learned, correcting students' work, connecting their teaching to real-life problems, emphasizing course evaluation, making student learning their main goal and stressing the ethical sense of work in order to fully educate students.

Mastery of Interpersonal Aspects

In order to teach well, teachers cannot be content with just mastering psychopedagogy which as we have seen is a critical element of teaching; it is equally important to create a climate of trust, warmth and support for learning in the classroom, where creating good interpersonal relationships with students is vital (Bolívar & Domingo, 2007; Casillas et al., 2016; Flores et al, 2013; Porta & Flores, 2014) and where, as Hattie (2012) writes, making mistakes is welcome and is not grounds for punishment. The professors we interviewed expressed their wish to be close to their students, to support them as much as possible and to treat them as individuals despite having several class groups, because their students are important to them as people, not just as numbers or as just another face in the classroom. Some teachers even said they openly offer their students friendship. In this sense, there is a great coincidence between the results we found and those reported by other authors. For example, Patiño (2015) expresses it this way: “(Good teachers) have a marked interest in establishing an emotional connection with their students, basically generating a climate of trust in the classroom.” (p. 39). A student interviewed by García & Rugarcia (1985, p. 7) expressed it this way: “Kind inside and outside the classroom, with a good sense of humor, smiling, not petulant, light-hearted, comes to class happy”, and one of the teachers we interviewed put it this way: “I try to create a climate of kindness in the classroom...when I manage to connect that mental circuit with them, I feel really gratified.” (Carlos, 2014, p. 211). The authors stress the enormous importance of creating a climate favorable to learning and achieving an emotional link with students. These results coincide with other studies despite the heterogeneous nature of the groups studied, who were in different places, times, types of institutions and fields of study.

The teachers we studied are empathetic, a quality also identified as being important by authors such as Azureen et al. (2014), Gutiérrez et al. (2017) and Patiño (2012). Teachers transmit positive emotions (García & Rugarcia, 1985; Hattie & Yates, 2014), they are kind and they treat their students well (Aguirre & De Laurentis, 2016; Casillas et al., 2016; Chiatti & Sordelli, 2019; Coudannes, 2016; Sgreccia & Cirelli, 2015). They are generous, since they “share their ideas, productions, knowledge, time and materials” (Sgreccia et al., 2016, p. 311). Thanks to the emphasis they place on the interpersonal relationship with their students, they are open to their opinions and suggestions, they help them resolve their questions, even outside class, and above all, they respect their students (Aguirre & De Laurentis 2016; San Martin et al., 2014).

What stands out is their effort to create a context of trust and stimulation for learning in their classes, where the atmosphere remains light-hearted in spite of the hard work. Creating this atmosphere is also highlighted as being important for learning by Hattie (2012), Mcber (2000) and Patiño (2012). Nonetheless, professors make it very clear that this closeness does not make it any easier to pass the course; that is to say, emotional proximity does not imply a lack of rigor as to students’ work (Azureen et al., 2014; García & Rugarcia, 1985; Loredó et al., 2008; Patiño, 2012; Porta & Flores, 2014; Sgreccia & Cirelli, 2015).

The justification for behaving this way is not just for the intrinsic value placed on the relationship; it is mainly for pedagogical reasons, since professors consider that this type of interrelationship favors learning and not having it makes learning more difficult. This coincides with Azureen et al. (2014): when teachers demonstrate support and create positive interpersonal relationships with students, they tend to become more actively involved in their learning.

In our findings, despite teaching vastly different subjects, professors agree on the value students place on their teaching. Teachers’ efforts are more than compensated, since students, in turn, hold them in high esteem, creating a cycle of mutual affection.

We found (Carlos, 2006) that for the teachers we interviewed, their main source of feedback is the one they get from their students: they make changes and correct their teaching based on the

observations students make, which they actively solicit, encourage and take into account. This mechanism helps them avoid slipping into routine, helping them continuously perfect their teaching. On the other hand, professors who remain closed to this feedback and ignore their students' opinions are likely to stagnate as teachers.

Professors' interest in student learning and emotional well-being was also measured in a study carried out in 218 colleges and universities in the United States, in which students were asked for their opinions on the criteria of good teaching. The most frequently mentioned quality (89.6%) was interest in students and their learning (Okpala & Ellis, 2005, cited by Nabaho et al., 2017). A similar situation was reported by García & Rugarcia (1985, p. 7) when they cited these comments of a student regarding his teacher: "Interested in our learning, interested in others, interested in helping you, interested in students' learning, gives advice, has a warm relationship with students, respectful towards students, values our work, a good person, open to dialogue."

From a student perspective, it is appreciated when professors are respectful, fair and impartial (Azureen et al., 2014; Butsch, 1931; Casillas et al., 2016; García & Medécigo, 2014; García & Rugarcia, 1985). Students expressed what they valued in an efficient professor: "the way they address students" and the "way they treat students" (Loredo et al., 2017, p. 34).

Other personality traits valued by students of good teachers are proximity, sense of humor, sensitivity and patience (Casillas et al., 2016; San Martin et al., 2014; Sgreccia & Cirelli, 2015). We found that for the professors interviewed, students are the main source of teaching gratification (Carlos, 2006, 2014).

As we stated previously, while not denying the importance of pedagogical instrumentation, we wish to emphasize that teaching is much more: the affective relationship is just as important. This quality has been recognized by different researchers, such as Butsch (1931), who discovered that students more generously evaluated professors they liked, and Torgerson (1934), who wrote that teaching is essentially a human relationship, an opinion agreed on by more recent authors like Veenman (1984), Entwistle and Walker (2002) and Altet (2005). The relevance of this aspect was summed up by Van den Berg (2002, p. 586), who wrote: "A growing number of educational researchers are convinced that teaching and learning are not only involved in knowledge, cognitive processes and skills, but also affective components and emotional practices."

The relevant role played by strong interpersonal relationships between professors and students is synthesized by Hattie & Yates (2014, p. 20): "It makes sense to conclude that the quality of the professor-student relationship depends on how much of time teachers interact with individual students in a non-coercive and friendly manner."

The results found in our own study as well as others coincide in that teaching is not just a technical activity consisting in applying pedagogical strategies, but that above all it is an interpersonal relationship. This means it is a particular kind of human interaction, and as such it generates maximum benefits when it is done correctly and, in professors' opinions, it contributes to achieving one of the main goals of teaching: learning.

We wish to conclude this section by nuancing the generalization of the personal qualities reported here. Many of the characteristics of proximity and good relationships between the professor and students which we have cited as being common to various studies carry a cultural bias which may not be found in other societies, such as Asian cultures, in which the student-teacher relation is very formal and hierarchical (Nabaho et al., 2017). What is clear, when summing up what has been reported, is that affective relationships between professors and students are critical to fostering student learning.

Giving Purpose to their Work

Teachers are guided by vital and humanistic purposes. In the case of the professors we interviewed, the purpose of teaching is defending and feeling pride for public education (Carlos, 2006). Others emphasized that they did it for their country and their profession (Carlos, 2014). Patiño (2012) found that they were motivated by the desire to improve their students' lives. What also stands out is the ethical sense of the teaching profession (Fernández et al., 2012; Flores & Porta, 2013). Teaching does not just have academic value, it goes beyond here and now, which is why the appreciation students feel for their professors and their fond memories even years after having had class with them is easily understandable (Bain, 2004).

According to Bain (2004) and Patiño (2012), the main criterium mentioned by students to designate a professor as being a good teacher is that he or she changed their life. Indeed, one of the peculiarities of good professors is that they go beyond just wanting their students to acquire a certain amount of knowledge in their subject; they seek to transform the vision students have of their existence and make them better people.

Teaching is not just a job they are paid to do, it is something that gives a sense of purpose to their lives, and this is reflected in the way they act. They consider themselves to be, as Bain (2004) documented, a single element in the great educational enterprise. This is why their actions generate an emotional impact in students' lives. To illustrate this effect, we cite a comment by a student referring to his professor, quoted by Patiño (2012):

Beatriz's (sic) classes have meant a lot to me. It's difficult to explain the magnitude of personal enrichment, I can just say that in these six months I've grown a lot more in many ways than I had in the entire rest of my life. This course changed my life, it made me think and it made me grow. I feel very fortunate and grateful to this school for having given me the opportunity to share a very interesting course with one of the finest professors and persons I have ever met. (p. 30)

One of the professors we interviewed explained the impact of his work in this way: "You realize (what the effects of your teaching were) way down the road when a student comes up to you four or five years later and says, "teacher, everything you taught me has been useful to me" (Carlos, 2014, p. 214). Another professor used similar terms: "What I enjoy the most is students' recognition" (Fernández et al., 2012, p. 55). Being an inspiring teacher was also highlighted in the study carried out by Azureen et al. (2014).

We found many similarities between our findings and those reported in other studies, whether they had been done in public or private institutions, in different times or places or in different subjects, convincing us of the validity of the characteristics described.

We also wish to highlight the sense of purpose and ethics of the teaching profession as an antidote to these times of uncertainty, relativism and cynicism, as described by Meirieu (2005).

Views and Beliefs of Professors on Teaching

The highly relevant role played by views, beliefs, thoughts and personal definitions of teachers regarding teaching, its objectives, their concept of learning and evaluation has been widely demonstrated (Clark & Peterson, 1990; Entwistle & Walker, 2002; Fernández et al., 2012; Five & Buehl, 2008; Figueroa & Páez 2008; García et al., 2008; Goodyear & Hativa, 2002; Kane et al., 2002; Kember & Kwan, 2002; Loredó et al., 2017; Jiménez, 2016; Mateos et al., 2003; Monroy & Díaz, 2001; Van den Berg, 2002; Zabalza, 2012), or on mind frames, as Hattie (2012) calls them. Identifying a teacher's type of thinking is important because we regularly act the way we think. As Goodyear & Hativa (2002) indicated: "Fundamental changes to the quality of university teaching will be unlikely to

happen without changes to professors' conception of teaching" (p. 71). Similarly, Fernández et al. (2012) established the fact that the increase in the quality of university teaching is linked to a better knowledge of what excellent professors think and do, since their conceptions affect learning.

Therefore, in the light of the results found, what are these beliefs, concepts and views that good professors have? The professors we interviewed have particular ways of conceiving teaching, which was defined as an action which deliberately seeks to achieve the acquisition of certain contents. Although most professors emphasized the transmissive function of teaching, they do not view it in a passive manner, but as an action which requires full involvement on the part of students, for whom motivation and academic background are crucial factors in achieving learning. Their vision of teaching is centered on learning, like in the models described by Biggs & Tang (2009), Martín, Prosser, Trigwell, Ramsden & Benjamín (2002), and they display a close connection to learning, as described by Biggs & Tang (2009), Kember & Kwan (2002) and Ramsden (2007). Thus, they have a sophisticated, complex conception of teaching, a quality which outstanding educators possess (Azureen et al., 2014; Entwistle & Walker, 2002). Several professors we interviewed pointed out that teaching is a vocation and that not everyone is able to do it, which coincides with reports by Blanco (2009), García & Rugarcía (1985), Ibarra, (1999); Loredó et al. (2008) and Patiño (2012).

As we established in previous sections, their learning objectives distinguish themselves by deliberately seeking student learning and not just "teaching class." For them, teaching fulfills its purpose when students fully acquire the knowledge that is reviewed, which is why they hope what they learn can be useful to them beyond the end of their studies (García & Rugarcía, 1985; Patiño, 2012), because their goal is to prepare them for the problems they could face in the working world. Next, as we mentioned previously, we noted their wish to educate students integrally. Their vision of teaching is not just for students to master selected academic contents; it is just as important to stimulate desirable attitudes, and generally speaking, contribute to their personal and ethical development.

With regards to learning, for the professors interviewed it is a personal process of content construction linked to students' needs and interests; change occurs as a result of teaching and becomes visible when students apply what they have acquired. How they implement this method will be explained in the pedagogical skills section.

They mentioned factors which encourage full learning, including students' motivation, an adequate academic background, professional commitment and a favorable learning environment. They also pointed out what makes learning difficult, mainly students' academic deficiencies and lack of motivation. The first point coincides with Ausubel, Novak & Hanasian (1976) and Martín & Solé (2001): learning is facilitated when it is connected to existing knowledge, and if this process is non-existent or deficient, learning is more difficult or impeded.

This vision also coincides with several principles of learning described by Huba & Fred (2000), systematized by the American Psychological Association (APA, cited by Hativa, 2000) and described by Ramsden (2007). They say human learning is stimulated when teachers seek students' full involvement: this depends on the previous knowledge required for the contents to be taught. Students are encouraged, the benefits of learning the proposed contents are explained to them and they are presented with attainable challenges. All of this takes place in a context of respect, trust and support, in which the professor, in an orderly, stable manner, carries out actions so that students can gradually acquire knowledge through constant correction of their work.

Evaluation has always been a controversial, touchy topic, and this was confirmed by several of the professors we interviewed: there were different versions, but the most widely cited one is seeing it as a verification mechanism to validate achievement of what has been taught in the course. Another view was to use evaluation to generate feedback. For 70% of our professors, these conceptualizations are focused on learning and not so much on accreditation, which curiously was

not mentioned. This accentuates the congruency of their views, which are characterized by having student learning as their objective. Therefore, their methods of teaching and evaluation are designed along these lines.

Although most professors use exams to measure their students' level of achievement, they also check it through assignments or other work done during the course, coinciding with Darling-Hammond (2000), who writes that we know students have learned when they are capable of generalizing their learning, and above all, when they integrate learning and remember it at the end of the course (Carlos et al., 2015).

Given the findings regarding their views on their work, it is easy to understand how they came to be so highly evaluated by their students and colleagues, since there is congruency between their ways of thinking, which are reviewed in this section, and their ways of acting, illustrated in the teaching practices we presented previously. They have a different level of performance because they believe their mission is to encourage student learning. This is why they make use of all available methods, whether pedagogical or interpersonal, to achieve this. They have a personal commitment to reach course objectives, and they offer students all the possible support to achieve this. They believe student learning depends greatly on the activities they ask them to do, so they verify the adequate acquisition of knowledge (Hattie, 2012).

These views contrast with those of another type of professor who is content to "teach" without worrying about whether students learned or not as a result of their teaching, showing little interest in adapting content to students' level of knowledge, using overly formal or excessively technical speech, avoiding modeling assignments or giving homework without sufficient explanation of what is expected, playing the role of simple information transmitters and blaming their students for academic failure without questioning their teaching methods, or having little commitment to their teaching work.

In order to avoid these situations, we recommend guiding professors' beliefs and views towards ones in which they take on responsibility for student learning, in which they feel confident that their teaching can positively impact students' lives and in which they have a profound vision of learning, teaching and their objectives.

Commitment, Motivation and Responsibility in Teaching

Being a good teacher requires effort, dedication, and above all, motivation, which is why the consensus among the good teachers we interviewed was that teaching is gratifying in and of itself; they are passionate about knowledge and sharing what they know. This was also identified by Patiño (2012), who reports what one professor said about what it means to be a teacher: "the best job in the world." (p. 33). One professor interviewed by the author indicated, "I would even pay for the privilege of teaching class." (Carlos, 2014, p. 237). That is to say, they teach not so much for the salary they receive, but because they enjoy doing it.

They also encourage this motivation in their students, according to Patiño (2015): "The professors studied dedicate a considerable amount of energy to awakening and maintaining their students' intrinsic motivation for the subject studied." (p. 135).

As part of their motivation, we identified that they find it enjoyable to perceive their teaching's effects on their students, that is, they enjoy noting the positive repercussions of what they do, especially when they achieve their goal: student learning.

Teaching, when it is done properly, requires both disciplinary and pedagogical preparation. One of the professors we interviewed put it this way: (teaching a good class) "...requires us to do much more work" (Carlos, 2006, p. 191). In a similarly way another teacher added: "I believe you have to dedicate time, affection and hours to teaching." (Fernández et al., 2012, p. 62).

Other professor put it this way: “It’s not a job I just clock in to, there’s a constant commitment, I’m always thinking about how to improve my methods, make classes more dynamic, give them more sense for students, so that they learn more, so classes are useful to them and to their body of knowledge.” (Sgreccia et al., 2016, p. 306).

What stands out is that good teaching requires effort and dedication on the part of the professor, since teaching is a job that is systematic and requires rigorous planning, adequately applying both pedagogical methodology and evaluation tools (Fernández et al, 2012). This means that in addition to the motivation they feel towards their occupation, the professor’s commitment and responsibility to work hard are also crucial (Aguirre & De Laurentis, 2016; Flores & Porta, 2013; Flores et al, 2013; John, 2017).

Therefore, achieving positive changes in students is not the result of chance or luck, but that of effort, dedication, self-criticism, hard work, skill, and the teacher’s desire to do his or her job in the best way possible. It is something they fought for and which, according to their students, they achieved. In this manner, despite having 150 to 200 students per semester, they prepare classes, design exercises and materials, regularly prepare and apply tests at least twice a month and correct them. This contradicts the idea that good teaching is incompatible with large class groups. Even without studying this aspect more in depth and within certain parameters, it seems possible to provide good teaching to large groups of students, as long as professors are capable, committed, motivated, hardworking, doing their best for students and mastering different pedagogical strategies with which to assist student learning, such as those applied by the professors interviewed.

In order to be good teachers, they must also improve continuously and avoid stagnating, constantly update their disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge, change their classes each semester, not teach the same old contents or use the same materials or exercises, but rather renew themselves and change what they believe was not so effective while testing other activities. We have already discussed the important role student suggestions play in this aspect. This coincides with what was cited by a professor interviewed by Fernández et al. (2012): “I keep my morale quite high, I constantly set challenges for myself, I believe I have improved in my knowledge and especially in my techniques.” (p.55).

Another demonstration of responsibility in the professors we interviewed is their wish to not be absent or late. They all reported that, except for circumstances beyond their control, they are always present for classes, they always prepare them and have materials ready, as was also reported by García & Rugarcia (1985) and Loredó et al. (2017), regardless of the time they had been teaching, since the professors we interviewed had an average of 21 years of teaching experience.

So, what motivates professors to want to teach better, often in very difficult conditions? With respect to the identification of some of these factors, Hativa (2000) reports on a study performed on professors at prestigious US universities, which found that the three main reasons why professors want to teach well are, in order of importance, personal satisfaction for doing their job well, student feedback, and evaluation leading to raises and promotions. The first two items coincide with the results reported in our study.

Among the non-gratifying aspects of their work, a few professors we studied mentioned lack of support from authorities in terms of providing the necessary conditions in which to do good work, however this was not used as a basis for complaint. We wish to point this out because for other professors this would be an excuse for underperforming.

We hope to have demonstrated the characteristics of good teaching at the higher education level. Based on our own findings, we can demonstrate how they have also been reported by other researchers. This is why we can conclude that good teachers distinguish themselves by mastering pedagogical aspects, including the topics they teach, having adequate interpersonal relationships with students and creating an environment conducive to learning. They also give a sense of purpose to

their work that goes beyond just teaching concepts, seeking to transform their students in a positive manner, and they display certain views and beliefs with regards to teaching and its objectives, learning and evaluation. They also enjoy teaching class, feel responsible for student learning and do their work with responsibility and commitment.

Contributions to Teaching Improvement Policies in Higher Education

In this second section, we will outline a series of educational policies and strategies with which the results of the best practices reported in the first section of this article may be put into practice. We wish to clarify the fact that we are offering these proposals for educational decision makers to take into consideration. We hope they will be taken into account as they have been fully justified by educational research. We call educational policy the set of actions and activities promoted by an authority in order to reach a goal (Rizvi & Lingard, 2013).

Therefore, we must first analyze the institutional conditions that would favor the implementation of the suggestions we make; next, we will describe the policies to improve teaching quality which have recently been implemented in Mexico, and finally, we will present the way in which what we described in the first section on what good teachers do can serve to recruit new teachers, institutionally recognize and encourage professors, use their actions as criteria for faculty evaluation and productivity reward programs, and apply them in teacher training.

Institutional Conditions for a Policy Which Considers the Contributions of Best Practices in Teaching

The first comment we would like to make is that any educational authority would love to have professors like those we have described. This is why we will now outline some of the institutional conditions necessary to encourage this type of teaching.

As we stated previously, we will propose policies which will ensure that good teaching becomes a generalized characteristic in higher education institutions, avoiding what happens nowadays: existing good teachers are driven more by personal commitment and motivation than by deliberate, systematic actions by educational authorities. The importance of doing so is that best practices in institutional contexts help improve the educational culture of everyone involved in the institution (Zabalza, 2012). In much the same way, Loredó et al. (2017) wrote that educational institutions shape and stimulate certain kinds of teaching practices, which in turn influence the types of beliefs and views their professors have. We hope good teaching will receive all the recognition it deserves and that it will be promoted by higher education authorities.

However, in institutions there are important obstacles and conditions that are unfavorable to teaching innovation. One of them is the existence of professors lacking pedagogical training, since this is rarely considered when hiring new professors (Estévez et al., 2015; Moreno, 2013). It is important to remember that there is no specific training for teaching in higher education like there is for elementary and secondary education, for example, the Master's degree in Secondary Education (MADEMS) awarded by the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, that is to say that many higher education professors have acquired their pedagogical skills in the field.

We accept Wenglinsky (2002) and John (2017)'s theory that the best prepared teachers produce better learners. Therefore, the question is what can higher education institutions do to recruit, stimulate and encourage the best professors?

It is becoming clear as a result of our research that improving students' academic performance and attainment of academic goals depends largely on their approaches to or views on student learning. Professors and academic authorities have a great influence on student academic achievement (Biggs & Tang, 2009; Ramsden, 2007).

Therefore, in order to achieve important changes in educational systems we must identify, question, and in some cases, modify these approaches, since they are one of the requirements to improve educational quality.

It has been determined that educational authorities can have either superficial and simple or deep, complex approaches to learning. For example, educational authorities have a simple approach if they are only concerned with administrative aspects for the inertia or comfort provided by a “whatever happens, happens” attitude, when they exercise power for power’s sake or for the sole interest of controlling faculty and students, if they only place importance on maintaining the status quo and the privileges of interest groups, when their administration is wasteful and uninterested in saving resources, when they create a poor working environment and display little commitment towards stakeholders; in short, when directors act with little concern for education and when everything comes down to slick little speeches.

On the other hand, the profound approach places the priority on education over all other interests (Hattie, 2012). There is a clear sense of purpose among authorities and professors in which all institutional efforts are directed towards students mastering course contents, which in turn results in an improvement in academic achievement and in the working environment. This coincides with what was expressed by Reimers & Chunk (2016):

Educational opportunity is created when students and professors get involved in learning activities driven by a strong sense of purpose in which they work together in several ways to ensure student progress...to summarize, educational opportunity requires an effective system to foster learning, including adequate support mechanisms, resources and policies (p. 25).

Educational authorities’ decisions have a great impact on institutional functioning, which is why it is important for them to implement policies centered on achieving student learning and promoting integral education. In order for innovations to have a better chance of replacing inadequate institutional practices, there need to be people to promote innovations, talk about their benefits and have the time and resources needed to produce the desired changes (Díaz Barriga, 2013).

A first important aspect required to achieve this is having a *sense of purpose*, which means that the entire staff of the institution must be headed in the same direction and functioning in a coherent manner. It must also be clear to all what the mission and vision of the school are, and staff must share an educational philosophy so that their actions foster the constant improvement of educational quality.

Consistent application is needed, and resolutions and actions must be congruent. This is achieved through uniform educational policies in which compliance is verified, maintaining actions and methods which have been determined to be successful while discarding those which were not. It is easier to accept standards and rules when they are part of the institution’s general culture and are not seen as being imposed upon staff by the director.

Therefore, implementing policies such as those we suggest requires authorities at the institutional level to be willing to face the challenges which would arise from adopting these policies, be proactive and not reactive, seek innovation and change and not just maintain the status quo. In order to adequately face these challenges, a director needs to have the necessary political support to do so, as well as the support of a majority of the faculty.

The institution must also have a series of checks and balances, both internal and external. Its actions must be judged by academic criteria and merit, emphasizing student learning. One must avoid simulation and demonstrate achievement of the critical nature of the educational act, not focusing on the superficial or easily measurable but on academic achievements, as we will describe later.

This involves prioritizing the results or effects of teaching above other criteria, as postulated by Hattie (2012): “Teachers, school and system need to be consistently aware, and have dependable evidence of the effects that all are having on student performance.” (p. 149). This can only be achieved, according to this author, when daily teaching and learning practice is improved. This is the result of constituting a school culture in which teachers demonstrate their success, measured by both the academic performance obtained and by whether students consider learning to be valuable. Teachers must be able to count on their director’s support, and the focus must not be on: “What is being taught, and how?”, but rather “Did the students acquire essential knowledge and skills?”, “How do we know” and “How can we use that evidence of student learning to improve instruction?” (Hattie, 2012, p. 154). Therefore, results should be emphasized over intentions or wishes. In order to do this, we need to know what has been done in Mexican higher education institutions (IES) and describe the policy proposed to improve these actions.

Public Policies Implemented in Mexico to Support Quality Teaching in Higher Education

Mexican higher education institutions (IES) can be any one of three types: federal, state or private. The two first types depend on public funding, whether it be federal or state, which can be of two types: regular funding or extraordinary funding, which includes several programs aimed at improving quality, expanding educational coverage and solving structural problems. Private universities sustain themselves through student tuition, sales of services and donations (Mendoza, 2018).

In Mexico, since the 1990s two federal programs guide faculty development in higher education institutions, especially state universities: the Faculty Improvement Program (PROMEP) and the academic performance incentive for acting faculty. These are the two programs most closely linked to faculty, which is why we will describe their main characteristics and results.

PROMEP has had different goals, one of which is to award scholarships to acting professors so that they may obtain PhDs; the second goal is to support faculty with equipment and finance their research, and the third has consisted of creating teaching positions so that they may be filled by candidates, with preference for PhDs. A result, 8,406 new full-time teaching positions were created between 1996 and 2005; whereas in 1998 only 8% of total full-time faculty held PhDs, this number increased to 22% in 2006 (Gil et al., 2012).

While the support received by faculty for academic development is worthy of recognition, the problem with this program is the priority placed on training researchers, not professors. It also lacks indicators with which to measure the impact of its actions on improving teaching quality. It assumes that all problems will be solved simply by professors becoming PhDs despite the fact that it has been fully proven that demanding that faculty get PhDs will not improve their teaching, since degrees alone do not make professors teach better (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Estévez et al., 2014; Wayne & Young, 2003). To better illustrate this, if a professor obtains a PhD in biochemistry, it will not make him or her a better chemistry professor.

Another policy aimed at improving the quality of the higher education system has been the use of the evaluation, accreditation and certification of academic programs (Díaz Barriga, 2008; Mendoza, 2003), as well as faculty incentive and faculty evaluation programs (Rueda, 2008). The hypothesis has been that teaching quality will be improved by evaluation (Díaz Barriga, 2008; Moreno, 2017).

Despite progress towards the achievement of this goal, these programs have not been sufficient to improve the quality of higher education, because educational institutions have applied them using procedures which evaluate only the simple, static aspects of education, instead of recognizing their complexity, among other reasons (Carlos & Moreno, 2013). They have focused on applying administrative criteria more than academic ones (Carlos & Zaragoza, 2014) and they have

failed to use evaluation results to correct what was evaluated, a function which gives evaluation its purpose and importance (McMillan, 2001). In short, there has been a predominant focus on evaluating formal or easily evaluable aspects such as degrees, while failing to incorporate what was reviewed in the previous section, that is, more complex concepts which have a greater chance of positively impacting higher education teaching.

In this sense, we also need to change the practices of accreditation and certification organizations which are common in higher education institutions: the vast majority of institutions are accredited without this being visible in the quality of their graduates (Carlos & Moreno, 2013). Therefore, we dare say that there is a great deal of simulation in these types of practices.

Pogrow (2017) similarly criticized the educational policies applied in the United States which promote effective practices based on reported results, used as standards so that schools may apply them and granting financial support to those who adopt them. The author finds serious methodological deficiencies in these practices, which sheds doubt on whether or not they really work. For example, 60% of the results of the studies cannot be replicated. What stands out is that there is a great difference between the real world, that is to say what happens in educational institutions, and what researchers identify as an educational practice. Thus, using as the sole criterium of validity for something as rigorous as a “gold standard” can be criticized. The reason for this is that purely experimental studies are very simple because they only study certain variables in an isolated context, bearing little similarity to the complex problems of educational environments in which it is impossible to control influential factors.

We believe evaluative actions hardly help improve teaching quality because they do not affect the variables directly involved in teaching. Awarding professors scholarships or demanding PhDs, or superficially evaluating the functioning of institutions, will not help professors teach better, since they are not using the knowledge, we have about the mechanisms that help people learn better. This is why we recommend other policies focused on pedagogy, because we believe they will have a better chance of achieving true student learning. We do so recognize the crucial role professors play in positively impacting the results of student learning, above and beyond external factors (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Hativa & Birenbaum, 2000; Hattie, 2012; Nye et al., 2004; Wayne & Young, 2003).

We fully support what was written by Bolívar & Caballero (2008, p. 28): “There is an extensive body of knowledge, founded on research, which demonstrates that some of the professor’s actions and skills have positive effects on student learning.” This is why we wish to apply this body of knowledge as a basis for a policy which acts on different aspects for the improvement of teaching in higher education. We also point to the evaluation performed on direct or explicit instruction as one of the best tools for students to acquire knowledge, as opposed to the weaker impact of indirect or inductive teaching (Hattie, 2012), since “complex learning rarely happens through osmosis or discovery” (Hattie & Yates, 2014, p. XVI). The professor makes the difference in student learning, which is illustrated by Patiño (2015, p. 35): “The teacher is responsible for students’ learning either being limited to simple transmission and repetition of information or being a constructive, enriching experience.” In short, good teachers make for good teaching.

Suggestions for Educational Policies to Improve Teaching Quality in Higher Education

To put into practice what was previously described, we consider that the results of best practices in teaching can be incorporated into institutional policies whose main goal is to improve higher education teaching in at least four aspects:

- 1) Procedures for selecting new faculty.
- 2) Recognizing and retaining good professors.
- 3) Determining the criteria and dimensions of faculty evaluation and academic performance incentive programs.
- 4) Updating and training faculty.

Procedures for Selecting New Faculty

In the 1970s and 1980s, Mexican higher education institutions had a policy of widespread hiring due to the need to handle growing student demand. For this reason, admission criteria were not very strict in terms of degrees. It is calculated that during this period three quarters of professors only held Bachelor's degrees (Gil et al., 2012), and even fewer of them received teacher training. Many of them learned in a way similar to that mentioned by Hativa (2000), through "trial and error", as the author says many mistakes must have been made in order for professors to learn how to teach.

The expansion of Mexican university faculty during those decades is demonstrated by the following numbers. According to the information provided by Buendía & Oliver (2018), between 1961 and 1970, 4.3 professors were hired daily; from 1970 to 1982 there were an average of 11.9 hires. This was necessary in order to cope with the enormous growth of the student population. Whereas in 1960 there were fewer than 30,000 students in Mexico, by 1970 there were 250,000; the half million mark was reached five years later, and by 1980 there were 800,000 students (Schettino, 2007).

According to the most recent data, in the 2019-2020 academic year there were a total of 394,189 professors in Mexican higher education institutions teaching and a student population of 4,065,644, making up 11.13% of total enrollment in the Mexican educational system. These students attend one of the 5,716 currently active higher education institutions; of these, 70% are private and 30% are public (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2020). This means there will be continued need for new faculty to handle this constant expansion, although the proportion will be lesser than in the 1980s. Furthermore, there will be a need to refresh faculty in order to replace retiring professors (Moreno, 2013).

As we mentioned before, quality teaching requires quality teachers (Oppenheimer, 2005), and according to the Singapore educational authorities, an educational system is only as good as its teachers (Ng, 2016). Therefore, rigorous teacher hiring procedures are needed, whose purpose must be to recruit professors who display commitment, fully master pedagogy and the topics taught, are responsible, motivated, show a will to progress and have a positive attitude, just like the professors we have described beforehand.

One first obstacle to this is the fact that in recent years the main requirement for the hiring of professors has been a graduate degree. Thus, from 1999 to 2008, 38% of faculty held a Bachelor's degree, 37% had a Master's degree and 24% held a PhD (Gil et al., 2012). What is certain is that the proportion of PhDs has increased in the past few years due to the incentive to hire them. Although achieving an increase in the number of PhDs in higher education institutions is certainly worthy of recognition, it will not necessarily improve teaching because PhDs are experts in their field, not expert teachers. Some institutions provide training courses for their candidates or recently hired professors, but they are brief, and aspiring university professors cannot be required to have formal pedagogical training, as we mentioned previously. This problem is very clearly explained by Moreno (2013), who states that the focus is not on the professor's pedagogical training, but rather on disciplinary knowledge. This has been a serious mistake in the selection and integration of university professors: "The price we are paying and will pay for our clumsiness will be very steep." (p. 49). Helping reverse this trend is the very reason for the strategies we suggest in this publication.

According to Buendía & Oliver (2018), the usual procedure for hiring university professors is a review of the candidate's CV followed by an examination during which the candidate demonstrates his or her teaching skills. We wish to improve these procedures; therefore, we propose a hiring process in which candidates go through several sequential stages in which different criteria are applied. First, we believe an institutional committee should be charged with overseeing the entire process. This committee should include members of the institution, but it should mainly be made up of persons from outside the institution, who should be academically prestigious and should be experts in the disciplines candidates are applying to teach. The objective is to avoid conflicts of interest, endogamy, or promoting candidates linked to political groups within the institution who put their personal interests above academics.

We suggest four stages, whose purpose is to hire the candidates who display the best skills to be good teachers. The first step would be to review their CV, since, as we mentioned previously, this is a common requirement which is generally called for in institutional procedures. The second step should be passing an exam on their mastery of the topics they are applying to teach and on their handling of psychopedagogical aspects (for example, knowledge of the mechanisms of learning, psychological development, pedagogical strategies, forms of pedagogical planning and different ways of evaluating learning, to name a few). Candidates who pass the exam would be interviewed in order to identify their motivations to teach, their expectations, to identify their views and beliefs on teaching and learn more about their personal characteristics.

The candidates who make it through the three previous stages then go on to a fourth stage which consists in presenting a topic from the course they are applying to teach to a group of students. This serves to observe and analyze their teaching performance. If this is not possible, the candidate could provide a video of him or her teaching class. The methods may be different depending on the institution's conditions and resources, but what is really important is to see how the candidate teaches. The candidate's performance must be evaluated according to criteria we will describe in the faculty evaluation section.

Candidates offered a position would have to go through a trial period in the institution before being definitively hired. The goal of these different filters is to make it more probable that new professors be only those committed to teaching, able to demonstrate their teaching skills, fully committed to what it means to be a teacher, aware of the responsibilities involved and committed to their students. All of these steps would increase the certainty that new professors would bring commitment and prestige to the institution.

It would be a shame not to profit from the knowledge we have of the ways in which people learn better, which we have illustrated through examples of best practices in teaching, to recruit the best possible candidates based on what we know, especially now that conditions have changed so much since the 1970s and 1980s. As Gil et al. (2012) wrote: "Will we return to the improvisation procedures of the 1970s, except with more pre-certification? This would signify not just of an absence of memory, but also of the perception of the importance of institutional faculty." (p. 122). We certainly hope not!

Recognizing and Promoting Good Professors. Stimulating the *Educational Ethos*

Professors who make a difference in students' lives should have great importance in institutions. Good teachers do not just work for institutional recognition or for a better salary, but because they like and enjoy teaching (Carlos, 2006, 2014; Patiño, 2012). Institution should recognize and reward this type of teaching. Doing so sends out a message that what teachers do is crucial and that a committed teacher who strives to do his or her best for students, who is responsible and has broad pedagogical skills, is not the same as a teacher with pedagogical deficiencies, who is irresponsible, indifferent and does not strive to improve.

We recommend improving the institutional context so that good teaching performances may be recognized and worthy of emulation, and to stimulate proximity between professors. In this context, educational authorities' commitment will be to provide satisfactory conditions in which to foster the emergence of better professors. It would also be a good idea to publicly recognize the best professors.

Teachers in general, and especially good teachers, need to feel respected and considered in decisions that concern them. This is why it is important to create a climate of involvement, responsibility and ownership for student learning. Therefore, institutions need to stimulate collaboration, respect and mutual support among faculty.

To summarize, there should be an atmosphere in educational institutions in which it is clearly visible that student learning is very important, that it is the top priority and that it is the standard by which the results of the actions and efforts undertaken are judged, along the lines of what Hattie (2012) proposed, described in a previous section. In order to achieve this, good teachers are essential.

Criteria and Dimensions for Faculty Evaluation and Academic Performance Reward Programs

Faculty evaluation systems exist in many higher education institutions, but their function is more of a requirement or an obligation than truly helping improve teaching. Furthermore, many staff members responsible for faculty evaluation do not have the required training to adequately carry out this task, often using instruments developed in other institutions without adapting them to their needs (Rueda, 2011).

The end result is that faculty evaluation, as it is done currently, is of little use to help professors teach better because it does not provide them with tools to detect the strong and weak points of their teaching practices, and above all, it does not provide them with guidelines to correct their flaws.

We believe there are elements which can allow us to better judge teaching activities in what we presented in the first part of our work. We also believe that in the five dimensions we presented there are aspects which would allow teaching to be evaluated with more of a spirit of assistance and improvement than punishment.

Of these, two stand out: pedagogical skill and interpersonal aspects. This is why we recommend that professors be recognized if they are clear and capable of making complex topics accessible, if they take into account what students already know and adapt teaching to their level, set challenges, model or exemplify what they are looking for, give feedback, create an environment favorable to learning, do not abuse of their power, and especially, respect students and treat them well. They should also not just lecture, but rather apply different teaching strategies to the pedagogical situations for which they are best adapted. They must master different evaluation tools, especially rubrics and portfolios, and use them for the types of contents they are the most appropriate for. They must also manage their classroom correctly, be organized, coherent, and demonstrate concern for their students. Therefore, we believe in the need for all higher education institutions to have faculty evaluation systems, with tools which are designed technically to evaluate the substantive, critical aspects of teaching, incorporating the aspect we have just presented. An evaluation based on these considerations should serve as a tool to measure the performance of teaching candidates mentioned in the previous section. For a suggestion of how to carry out faculty evaluation according to these guidelines, we recommend a review of Carlos (2016).

Most higher education institutions, especially public universities, have programs to reward the performance and productivity of full-time faculty. These programs have existed since the early 1990s and they consist in evaluating different aspects of academic activity. Based on the results, the professor receives a bonus in addition to his or her salary. As an example, we will present the system

used at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) for its faculty members: 1) Studies and overall academic or professional background, 2) Teaching and human resource training work, 3) Academic productivity, 4) Outreach and extension work and 5) Institutional participation and community service (UNAM, 2014, p. 3).

The effects of these programs have been mixed. On one hand, they have led to significant extra income for faculty and they have encouraged an increase in postgraduate studies and academic productivity. On the other hand, its application has been overly focused on quantitative criteria, leading to so-called “point-itis.” In other words, faculty only carry out activities which count towards their evaluation, neglecting other activities which do not count for points. This can weaken teaching effectiveness, and this is a consequence of higher education’s preference for research over teaching (Cid et al., 2009; Fernández et al., 2012; Moreno, 2017).

Another criticism is that in order to avoid controversy institutions only focus on the most tangible, concrete aspects of teaching, such as degrees or number of courses taught, while the substantive aspect of teaching or its effects are not evaluated. Pogrow (2017) warned of the negative effects on education of using simplistic criteria as a basis for educational policy. This author suggests as alternatives 1) Focusing on what schools are doing well and reproducing these achievements 2) Using other criteria to judge best practices, not just quantitative criteria based on statistical analysis and 3) Using simple research without control groups to measure the effects before and after educational interventions.

We agree with these suggestions, especially the last one, which is why we propose that the value-added model be used to evaluate teaching activity (OCDE, 2011), in which teachers are evaluated according to student learning as an effect of their teaching. This is done by measuring the level of knowledge of students at the beginning and end of the course. The difference between the two scores represents the knowledge gains achieved by the teacher and his or her students. In other words, we recommend focusing on the effects or results of educational actions more than on their static or formal aspects. As Hattie (2012) wrote, this involves focusing more on the software (the programs in school) and less on the hardware (buildings, resources). This author explains that teachers must know when learning is occurring or not, that is, they need to continuously verify whether or not their teaching strategies are working. Based on this information, they decide whether to pursue their way of teaching or make changes. For an example of how to evaluate the effects of teaching and its results, we recommend reading Carlos, Martínez & Verdejo (2017).

One suggestion we wish to make for teaching incentive programs is to evaluate research and teaching work differently: they cannot be judged on the same criteria. For example, for researchers, scientific productivity measured by the number of journal publications is important. For teachers this is not advisable: it is more important to consider their students’ opinion, the number of class groups taught, pedagogical skills, faculty training, responsibility, punctuality and commitment to teaching, and above all, as we mentioned previously, the effects of their teaching.

Faculty Training and Updating

The main issue with teacher training is its lack of effectiveness in modifying classroom teaching practices (Loredo et al., 2017). It is more useful to the teacher’s CV than as a tool to truly improve teaching.

If one thing stands out about teaching, it is the different ways in which it manifests itself and the diversity of educational contents (for example, earth and social sciences, mathematics, art, physical education, etc.). Thus, we can see that teaching has a wide range of facets and differences, and each teacher gives it his or her personal touch. This is why we do not support making teaching homogeneous, standard or rigid. We would rather tailor it to each discipline’s characteristics.

As we explained in the first section, good teachers have varied teaching practices. We wish to encourage this diversity, but as we have demonstrated, there are common elements that institutions should promote regardless of the subject taught, such as the teacher's mastery of pedagogical aspects, the ability to create a learning-friendly environment in the classroom, and above all, being self-critical. This requires continually reflecting on teachers' teaching practices, making changes based on students' opinions, on teachers' own self-evaluations and on the learning results obtained. These constitute the contents that teacher training should include in its courses and workshops, in addition to any other contents the institution deems necessary. We consider it vital to give pedagogy and interpersonal relationships their true value.

We also must change the ways in which training is delivered. In higher education institutions, training is usually in the form of isolated courses. Most courses focus on updating disciplinary knowledge, not on pedagogy. Thus, we can understand the scant impact teacher training has on modifying teaching practices.

According to Estévez et al. (2014), we need to encourage the use of different teaching strategies in specific contexts. In order to achieve this, we recommend that training be linked to teachers' true difficulties and weaknesses. This must be the focus of training, and teachers must be continuously advised in order to help them solve the problems they face and reinforce what they already do well. They must also be given a theoretical review of the psychopedagogical aspects of teaching. It would be crucial to encourage them to incorporate innovations into their manner of teaching, follow up on how they apply them in the classroom and advise them on how to overcome the challenges they face. In order to measure the impact of training, the students' level of knowledge must be compared between the beginning and end of the course. All of this requires modifying the way in which faculty training is currently carried out in higher education institutions.

It has been demonstrated that the most effective element in teacher training is cooperation, which consists of sharing ideas, getting and giving feedback on teaching, learning from each other and working together to improve curriculum delivery. These aspects have been proven to be the most important for improved student learning (Hattie, 2020). This is reaffirmed by Harris (2016, p.178), when he writes:

The challenge in transforming an educational system is incorporating what really works. In order to reform a system, there is no room or time for trends; what matters is the extent to which teachers can work as a team in teaching and learning. If an educational system's most important resource is its teachers, developing their skills, knowledge and abilities must be the top priority.

In conclusion, we believe institutions must commit to achieving teaching excellence by shifting the way they currently train faculty to personalized advising to help them solve the problems they face in teaching, encouraging collaborative exchange and mutual support among faculty members. All of this would contribute to their continuous, pertinent professional development (Bolívar & Caballero, 2008; Fernández et al., 2012; Moreno, 2013), and its effects on student learning could be verified.

Discussion and Conclusions

Our recommendations are based on two hypotheses: first, there is a body of knowledge based on research on best practices in teaching that enable students to learn more and better; second, this knowledge has not been fully used to drive policies to improve university professors' teaching practices. As Moreno (2013) stated, good teachers are made, not born.

In the first section, we described the most noteworthy results of studies on best practices in teaching, using the author's own research as well as other research carried out in different places and times. Despite these differences, the results coincide, which allows us to declare that what has been described constitutes the fundamental elements of good teaching. Indeed, these elements are similar enough to be adopted by professors as well as by the directors of educational institutions, regardless of discipline, type of institution or location.

We hope to have demonstrated that procedures exist which, if properly employed, constitute tools which faculty can use to help their students learn the contents of academic curricula while educating them integrally. Best practices are behavioral models which faculty can emulate with confidence knowing that they are based on educational research. In our first section, we wished to demonstrate that there are standards of good teaching which can be used as guidelines with which to design teaching quality improvement policies.

However, we found that this body of knowledge on efficient practices is not fully used in teaching quality improvement programs in Mexican higher education institutions; neither is it used in the criteria and procedures for accreditation and certification of academic programs, nor in faculty evaluation. We found that the actions implemented so far have focused on the formal and simplistic aspects of education, which are more administrative than academic, or on implementing policies that will hardly improve teaching because they do not affect the variables and factors which directly influence learning. The solutions do not correspond to the nature of the problems to be solved. Evaluation in and of itself will not help faculty teach better because there is no follow up or advising to help them correct their weaknesses. We agree with Moreno (2013) that meeting the demand for new professors and ensuring that they teach well can be compatible: conditions are not the same as in the past and we can now use our knowledge on the best strategies for appropriate student learning to improve teaching.

We know that in order to have an impact on improving educational quality in higher education institutions, we need to apply different policies to different environments and education levels. Thus, we recognize that other policies than those we have discussed here may also contribute to improving teaching quality. But we focused on pedagogical aspects basically for two reasons. First, they are usually not considered in educational policies despite their importance. Second and most importantly, because of their very nature they have a greater probability of positively influencing teaching, since they have a direct impact on the features of efficient teaching practices, fostering student educational achievement.

We focused on four proposals we believe to be viable and correctly supported, which can be applied with adequate adaptations to any public or private institution. They are suggestions for institutional authorities to use as an integral educational policy placed at the center of institutional efforts to achieve full student knowledge of pertinent and relevant contents as well as integral education. We are aware that this requires authorities to have a commitment to educational quality, courage to face challenges, and above all, an interest in their students' future. In order to achieve this, the need to intelligently handle the political aspects, mobilize the different power groups inside the institution to commit to the task, and constitute the necessary conditions, along the lines of what was suggested by Hattie (2012).

We provide recommendations and specific proposals which can be used as part of a program for educational authorities and which are useful to teachers because some elements can be used to teach better. It would be a shame not to use what we know about best practices in teaching to avoid past mistakes, for example, recruiting professors without adequate pedagogical training, forcing them to learn on the job. We understand that circumstances were difficult at the time, but now conditions have changed and an effort can be made so that courses in higher education institutions are taught only by professors who have demonstrated their ability, motivation, responsibility and commitment.

We firmly believe that this result should not be the product of luck, but rather that of a deliberate policy. We know the road ahead will not be an easy one, but the benefits, such as offering our students a brighter future through adequate education, will make the efforts worthwhile.

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