



# Expanding conceptions about academic development: mediate effects of a research-training process with academic developers from a Chilean university

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## Abstract

This contribution reports part of the results of a qualitative doctoral research, which aimed to analyze the trajectory of change in the conceptions about the academic development that triggers a process of inquiry-training with Educational Developers (ADs). Here we present the results regarding the permanence and transfer of the conceptual change produced by the inquiry-training, one year after the end of this process. The group of participants corresponds to eleven ADs who exercised this role in an Educational Development Unit (EDU) of a Chilean public university. We used the focused interview technique to follow-up on the effects of the implemented process in permanence and transfer of the conceptual change. The results highlight the positive effects of the inquirytraining in strengthening the professional identities of the participating PDEs, as well as in the permanence of global and academic approaches (SoTL), which involve a comprehensive approach to the complex nature of university teaching and educational change in higher education. However, the transfer of conceptual change to the performance contexts of the participants was limited by adverse institutional conditions.

KEYWORDS: ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT; SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING; ACADEMIC DEVELOPERS; CHANGE CONCEPTIONS.

## Introduction

The current trend in studies from different countries, especially from English-speaking university contexts, shows a change in the approaches that guide teaching development practices in higher education. On those contexts, it has been found that the shift towards a university focused on student learning does not occur through instrumental university teacher training designs focused on their individual development, in which simple, restrictive and non-academic (unscholarly) ideas about teaching and educational change in higher education.

The trend in this sense aims to recognize the academic nature of university teaching (SoTL), at the same time that under the concept of educational development, it is understood that the teaching and learning processes, as well as their development, take place in a complex ecosystem, which requires a holistic and nuanced understanding of educational change, conceiving it as a process of cultural change that operates at different levels of the organization and in an interrelated manner (Dorner y Mårtensson, 2021; Geertsema, 2021; Gibbs, 2013; Roxå y Mårtensson, 2012).

The production of knowledge about these trends has been the core of a research project that we carried out with the participation of a group of ADs from a Chilean university. Through the implementation of a participatory process called inquiry-training, we proposed to facilitate the change of conceptions of the participants, from instrumental notions to a global conception framed in the educational development and SoTL approaches. In this communication we focus on reporting the results of one of its specific goals, referring to the monitoring of the effects of inquiry-training on the permanence and transfer of the change of conceptions in the participating ADs, one year after the end of the implemented process.

## Literature review

### *Previous empirical research*

The line of research regarding the change in conceptions about the academic development of teaching of ADs has been very little explored and recent. The literature reports two training experiences with this purpose, a Postgraduate Diploma implemented in South Africa (Quinn y Vorster, 2014; Quinn et al., 2019; Skead, 2017; Vorster y Quinn, 2015) and a program called "Strategic Academic Development" that has had several versions in different countries (Mårtensson y Roxå, 2021). In both cases, the reports highlight the broadening or modification of the approaches of the participating ADs, resulting in a more systemic understanding of educational development and change in universities, as well as the benefits of promoting a scholarly-oriented practice during training. Regarding the permanence and transfer of these conceptual changes to performance contexts, no follow-up studies have been found.

### *Theoretical and conceptual references*

In this research, we use main references of literature, the current of thought called educational development and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). The first, originating from the United Kingdom, emphasizes the creation of conditions that support teaching and learning at the university, seeking to achieve a learning-oriented university (Madinabeitia and Fernández, 2017). The second, originating in higher education in the United States, has given university teaching an academic character, and with it, a perspective that places it as a complex and scientific activity (Paricio, Fernández and Fernández, 2019). Also, based on the approaches of Porlán et al. (1997), we understand educational conceptions as a framework for interpreting reality made up of evolving systems of ideas, which refer to a set of professional knowledge, susceptible to being enriched, modified and complexified.

## Method

Within the framework of an interpretive qualitative research design, we used the focused interview (Canales, 2006) to follow-up on each participant individually. The interviews were conducted on a single occasion during the year 2023, were recorded on audio and transcribed. The analysis was carried out with Atlas.ti 8 software. The entire research was subjected to evaluation and approved by an accredited Scientific Ethics Committee.

## Results

The results of the follow-up showed that the changes on the conceptions in the participants had settled and remained valid. The content analysis of the interviews carried out corroborates the permanence of four sets of approaches associated with specific frameworks of thought and capabilities: a) global approach; b) approach focused on student learning; c) SoTL approach; and d) scholarly practice.

Regarding the transfer, the analysis of the narratives allowed us to identify five sets of new practices that have been incorporated individually: a) initiatives to contribute to educational change at the micro and meso levels of the organization; b) concretize the scholarly practice; c) grow in the practice of SoTL; d) participate critically in specialized conversations at the local level and beyond; e) share their learning and advise others. However, as a result of an organizational restructuring, the transfer planned by the ADs from the EDU itself was made impossible, in order to influence institutional educational change under the keys of an academic and global approach to the development of teaching.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

Unlike the two training programs with ADs reviewed above, with this study we provide a mediate follow-up view of the permanence and transfer of the change in conceptions that were the product of an inquiry-training process. Although there are no follow-up former studies on this subject, our results regarding the effectiveness of the training are similar to those reported by Mårtensson and Roxå (2021) and Skead (2017).

We conclude that this type of process meets the training conditions to facilitate the change of conceptions of ADs towards academic and global conceptions, and that, in addition, they are effective in maintaining their validity and being transferred, in part, to performance contexts. Furthermore, we consider that the goal of achieving a university oriented towards student learning requires stable institutional conditions, so that training processes such as the one we carry out are institutionally covered, so that they find a viable transfer environment and facilitate the processes of institutional change in this area to get materialized.

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