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TUTORING IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN PORTUGAL AND SPAIN: LESSONS LEARNED FROM SIX INITIATIVES IN PLACE

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ABSTRACT

Tutoring has been one of the issues which have received growing interest within the context of restructuring process in higher education under the so-called Bologna process in Europe. In this paper six tutoring initiatives currently being implemented in Portuguese and Spanish universities are examined in the light of the framework within which tutoring operates in higher education contexts. The various kinds of tutoring — mentoring, curricular tutoring, academic tutoring and training-related tutoring — are implemented in higher educational institutions in an attempt to meet the needs of the students. Data are drawn from the analysis of the reports on six tutoring programs underway in various higher education institutions in Portugal and Spain. In general, they have been put into practice as part of a number of experiences in each of the institutions involved, according to the characteristics of the students and the context. Findings point to the importance and the need of Faculty to be trained in tutoring as well as the need to better clarify the role of the tutor. The paper ends with a number of reflections and recommendations for an improved model of tutoring and guidance as a planned action within higher education. It encompasses a cumulative and consistent process based on a developmental and integral intervention, in order to encourage the active involvement of students and the participation of different agents interacting in the tutoring process.

Keywords: Higher education, European Higher Education Area (EHEA), tutoring, guidance.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education has been facing new challenges in the light of commitments undertaken as part of the Bologna Declaration of 1999. Increasing importance has been given to new teaching-learning methods and to education centred on self-regulated learning (Veiga Simão and Flores, 2006). In a changing context, higher education institutions need to be capable of analyzing, monitoring and anticipating major social and economic trends, foreseeing problems, contributing to solutions and influencing policy — and of nurturing “citizens who see themselves as knowledgeable, critically-minded and free, capable of living and working in a society which values critical reflection and freedom” (Simão, Santos, and Costa, 2005, p. 27). It is no longer possible to accept the role of higher education as a mere cumulative process to acquire theoretical and scientific knowledge. Learning is seen as a process which is active, cognitive, constructive, meaningful, mediated and self-regulated (Beltrán, 1996). This entails the need to rethink curricular organization models of the programs and courses and also the teaching methodologies (Simão, Santos, and Costa, 2002). It is within this context that tutoring is of crucial importance, given the academic model which is to be implemented at a European scale. The main goal of this paper is to reflect on various initiatives in tutoring currently underway in Portuguese and Spanish universities, and to contribute to the construction of a conceptual framework for improving tutoring within the context of higher education.

TEACHING AT HIGHER EDUCATION

Understanding teaching as a complex and challenging process implies the development of pedagogical, social and institutional competencies in which all tasks inherent to teaching in higher education interact in a balanced way (Cruz Tomé, 2003). This has implications for training and professional development of Faculty (Flores, et al., 2007).

The construction of the professional identity of Faculty is a complex and ambivalent process dealing with teaching, research and management roles (Zabalza, 2002) which require time and effort leading to, in many cases, conflict in handling them on a day to day basis (Mayor, 1996). The major rewards attached to research lead Faculty to focus more on it in detriment to other roles (Escudero, 2003).

Fernández (2003) highlights a number of characteristics of Faculty including: being critical, reflective and open to change; working in a cooperative and collaborative environment and contributing to the projects and mission of the University, taking into account the ethical dimension and the sense of commitment and responsibility. Thus, it is important to think about their training (Zabalza, 2002, 2007) linked to the ideas of professionalism (as complex practice that requires a specific training); of lifelong learning (seeing personal and professional development as a process that entails ongoing updating in order to respond adequately to social changes) and of quality of the service carried out. Faculty have to be knowledgeable of their subject matter and being an expert and open to a permanent search for knowledge and research, but also a specialist in designing, developing, analyzing and evaluating their own practice.

PEDAGOGICAL RENEWAL IN HIGHER EDUCATION: NEW METHODS OF TEACHING

Aware of the importance of the key role of higher education in the construction of the society, the European Union has developed and implemented the so-called Bologna process, which was initiated with the Sorbonne Declaration, signed in 1998 and reinforced by the Bologna Declaration, signed in 1999. This process entails the construction, within the period of 10 years, the European Higher Education Area which is to be competitive, attractive, harmonious and cohesive. According to Simão, Santos, and Costa (2005):

The European dimension of Higher Education has gained, with the Bologna Declaration, a new perspective and a great impetus, leading to a dynamic process of reflection, debate and action, which has been playing the role of a catalyst for both national reforms, which were already in place in 1999, for example in Germany, France and Italy, and reforms initiated afterwards by the vast majority of the countries that have signed the Declaration. (Simão, Santos, and Costa, 2005, pp.39-40).

The Bologna process goes beyond changes in the restructuring of degrees and curricular transformations to include a pedagogical renewal in order to “stimulate not only the cognitive level but also the development of transversal competencies such as communication skills, leadership, innovation and creativity necessary for the individuals to be integrated, to participate and to use the potential of the knowledge society” (Flores, et al., 2007, p.9). It also entails a key indicator to discuss the issue of student autonomy – the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). This system, by including a new paradigm in terms of the organization of teaching to be student-centered and based upon learning outcomes, implies a new concept of curriculum organization to be understood not as a mere juxtaposition of knowledge organized in subject matters but as curriculum areas designed in accordance with the training goals to be met in a given program. The ECTS system has implications for the learning methods which have to be active, cooperative and participatory, able to facilitate the focus on problem solving and on the creation of a learning environment that facilitates the development of specific competencies in a given professional domain, but also transversal competencies. The role and practice from the part of Faculty are, within this context, necessarily different from traditional teaching. They call for the need of Faculty to be prepared and trained in order to meet effective and efficient levels of pedagogical coordination (Simão, Santos, and Costa, 2002). Thus, besides the consideration of new models of learning, curriculum structures and new ways of learning, the discussion under the Bologna process includes what needs to be taught and learned, how assessment is to be conducted and how to develop competencies within a lifelong learning perspective (Flores et al., 2007).

TUTORING AT THE UNIVERSITY

Higher education has always, in one way or another, paid attention to the training and development of students within a wider perspective, over recent years, mainly when factors such as diversity of knowledge, technological developments, social and economic pressure

and demands, amongst others, have contributed to enhance the integrated and formative nature of higher education. In a way, the configuration of the European Higher Education Area has implied a process of redefinition of university as far as teaching and tutoring are concerned. They are seen as interdependent roles leading to student learning. This new way of understanding university education implies that quality teaching entails a redefinition of Faculty work, their training and professional development. It means a significant change in their traditional role of knowledge transmitter, to include designing and managing complex learning scenarios, engaging students in the search and construction of knowledge through adequate strategies and activities. At the same time, tutoring, in its diverse forms, is seen as a way to help and guide students both at the academic and professional level (Moreno Ortiz and Sola Martinez, 2005). In other words, it is assumed that students benefit from quality teaching based upon learning processes in order for them to develop their competencies. In order to achieve that, both teaching and tutoring are crucial. And for this institutional support as well as adequate resources to stimulate both dimensions is crucial.

Given its scope, the tutoring process embodies a wide range of features and characteristics. Boronat, Castaño, and Ruiz (2007a) identify several dimensions, amongst which are: a) the legal or administrative dimension provided under current legislation; b) the teaching or curricular dimension, which sees tutoring in terms of the curriculum, in regard to content and the program within the curricular units; c) the academic or educational dimension, which addresses the assistance given to students in their endeavours to pursue their academic activities with success, while promoting their autonomy; d) the personalized dimension, which addresses personal interaction (the tutor provides special help in cases of particular difficulties and offers guidance to students on their educational development) and career advice (the tutor advises on which curricular options to select and on the possible career prospects associated with the options); e) the practical dimension, which, in certain courses (teaching, medicine, nursing etc.), has a long tradition in which university teachers and tutors are involved; f) the distance tutoring dimension, in teaching environments in which teacher and student are physically remote; g) the awareness of diversity dimension, since universities now accommodate students with different problems stemming from their personal characteristics and from the social, economic and cultural characteristics of the modern age; h) the peer tutoring dimension, which exists in many universities and in which mentors simultaneously play an intermediate role and act as tutors for the groups of students (or individual student) in their charge. (The literature, especially in the English-speaking academic world, makes frequent use of the expression “peer mentoring” rather than “peer tutoring” [see, for example, Terrion and Leonard, 2007]. A common definition of the term “mentoring” is one of the difficulties in this field, since it is a term which often overlaps with others such as “tutoring”, “advisory services”, “guidance/supervision” [Barnett, 2008; Colvin, 2007; Dennisson, 2000; Pereira, 2005; Rose and Rukstalis, 2008], counseling and “coaching” [Healy, 1997]. What distinguishes “mentoring” from other kinds of teaching and/or assistance relationships is that it is designed for use in a transitional context — helping the recipient make the transition from one state to another [Wallace and Gravells, 2007]. For the purpose of this chapter the terms “tutoring” and “mentoring” are used interchangeably.) PLEASE: This sentence in red should be included as a footnote or endnote. Is it possible?

All these kinds of tutoring may respond to the perceived need to create and cultivate, among the teachers and students at university, a culture of guidance and tutoring. But a mere declaration of intentions is not enough. The university teacher-tutor becomes the teacher of

reference of the group of students which s/he is in charge of. Lázaro (2002) sees the university teacher-tutor as the guardian of the human and scientific development of the student as an individual, not as an abstraction, who is also responsible for keeping an eye on the student's entire learning process and who seeks to identify the student's strengths and weaknesses. This makes it possible to establish a series of objectives for tutoring action: guiding students in their knowledge of the university to promote their integration in the new university context, informing students on academic and/or career issues, encouraging participation in the different aspects of university life, reflecting on the academic and personal development of students, and evaluating the need for tutoring assistance as an instrument of knowledge and reflection in the university education process. The emphasis given to each of these dimensions generates different tutoring models. Carrasco-Embuena and Lapeña Pérez (2005) identify different perspectives, but they highlight a set of common characteristics of university tutoring: a) tutoring is a form of guidance which is intended to promote and facilitate the whole development of students, in the intellectual, emotional, personal and social aspects; b) tutoring is a teaching task which personalizes university education through supervision at an individual level, which enables students to build their knowledge and attitudes and bring them to maturity, helping them plan and develop their academic progress; c) tutoring is an action which enables active integration and preparation of students in the university institution, channelling and connecting with the different university services (administrative, teaching, organizational, etc.), ensuring the adequate and cost-effective use of the different resources which the institution makes available.

METHODS

Higher education institutions have put into practice initiatives to provide students with guidance and personalized assistance throughout their career at university in order to facilitate the completion of their training and their professional entry into the labor market. There is a variety of initiatives and actions developed at universities which relate to their interest in this kind of issues. Nowadays, learning is seen as an active, cognitive, constructive, significant, mediated and self-regulated process, which implies rethinking curriculum organization and teaching methodologies.

For the purpose of this paper, data were drawn from the analysis of the reports on studies (see Carrasco-Embuena, et al., 2009; Veiga Simão and Flores, 2007, 2008; Veiga Simão, Flores, Fernandes, and Figueira, 2008) of six tutoring programs and practices implemented in higher education institutions, namely:

1. The tutoring initiative at the Lisbon's Instituto Superior Técnico, the SISTESE program, Portugal (see <https://fenix.ist.utl.pt/tutorado/inicio>).

This is an academic or formative tutoring initiative at an institutional level developed at the Instituto Superior Técnico (IST). The Instituto Superior Técnico is one of the Portuguese institutions who started this kind of tutoring program. It created the tutoring program in 2003/2004 for some students and it has been disseminating it more and more to courses and students over the recent years. The program of monitoring and tutoring works for all the

students in Years 1 and 2 of the undergraduate courses aiming at provide them with personalized, continuous and formal support in order to enhance teaching and learning quality and academic success. The program is coordinated by the Pedagogical Council which defines the strategic orientation visible at the document regulating the program and monitors its functioning and implementation. The supervision is done by the Coordinators of the undergraduate Courses and Integrated Master courses and their role is to validate and adapt the tutorial program to the specific characteristics of the courses in order to enhance the available recourses and the goals of the program. The tutors are lecturers in the program and they monitor and support a group of around 15 students who meet on a regular basis throughout Year 1 and 2 in the Course. The tutor is given 1 hour per week in his/her timetable to perform this role. Technical support is provided by the Taskforce within the program charged with the monitoring and evaluation of the whole program.

2. The tutorial system at the Institute of Higher Education (Escola Superior de Educação - ESE) at Setúbal, Portugal.

This system aims at the courses restructured under the so-called Bologna process. In this case, tutoring is directly linked to a subject matter (curricular unit) called “Carteira de competências” (Competencies development) which is compulsory and common to every course and it implies the monitoring and supporting of each student throughout the course. This curricular unit aims at recognizing formally learning and competencies acquired or developed in a variety of contexts and situations – scientific, academic, professional and social. They need to be recognized as significant and relevant for the formal competencies aimed within the courses that each of the students is attending at. This curricular unit stimulates the student, through the support from his/her tutor, to define and identify a learning path throughout the course, the result of which will be 5 credits. It may include activities beyond the formal ones existing in the students’ timetable.

3. The Project-Led Education (PLE) at the Integrated Master of Engineering and Industrial Management (MIEGI) at the University of Minho, Portugal.

Since 2004/2005, first year students in Industrial Management and Engineering program (IME) at the University of Minho have been participating in Project-Led Education (PLE), during the first semester of their course. The main reason for adopting PLE experiences in this context is associated with the importance of fostering interdisciplinary approaches in engineering curricula and student motivation. Interdisciplinarity is a key feature of PLE, in so far as students need to relate different content areas and apply them to a project. In Project-Led Education, students work together in teams to solve large-scale open-ended projects related to their (future) professional context. It aims at fostering student centeredness, teamwork, interdisciplinary work, linking theory to practice, development of critical thinking and competencies related to interpersonal communication and project management (Powell and Weenk, 2003). PLE is coordinated by a team made up of the course coordinator, lecturers, tutors and researchers. The kind of project selected for each semester includes a challenging theme, which requires the development of students’ learning outcomes of the Project Support Courses (PSC). The main characteristics of the PLE include the emphasis on learning and the active role of the students in their learning process, and the development of

so-called “soft” cross-disciplinary skills which extend beyond the immediate technicalities of the subject. The teams are composed of six to eight students and they have a tutor that supports them and monitors the development of the project. The tutor’s role is to facilitate student progress and monitor the learning process. Findings from research carried out in this context have shown that results of PLE are, in general, positive, for both students and lecturers. By and large, the project has shown an effective contribution to the active involvement of students in their own learning processes and to the development of transversal competencies, enhancing their motivation and helping them improve their performance in the first year of their studies – the year which is generally considered as critical to the success of their course. For more details on how the PLE project operates in MIEGI and the findings of the evaluation process, see Lima, Carvalho, Flores, and van Hattum-Janssen (2005, 2007); Carvalho and Lima (2006); Alves, Moreira, and Sousa (2007); Fernandes, Flores, and Lima (2007a, 2007b, 2009); Lima, Cardoso, Pereira, Fernandes, and Flores (2007). This sentence in red should be another footnote or endnote. Is it possible?

4. The tutorial action at the university of Alicante, Spain (see <http://www.ua.es/ice/tutorial>; Carrasco-Embuena, 2009).

The Tutorial Action in place at the University of Alicante aims at providing students with support and guidance from a member of the Faculty in order for them to develop both academically and personally in the process of adaptation to the curricular and social higher education context. In general, students benefit from a tutor and supporter, whether a member of the staff or a student, who facilitate personal, academic and professional guidance. Tutors get specific training for the role and resources are available to them to undertake their tutorial tasks. Both individual and group activities are planned and developed in terms of training and supervision through a global, flexible and open plan which constitutes the framework of the tutorial program in each of the Faculties of the University of Alicante. By and large, there are three main intervention dimensions: i) general coordination of the program at the university; ii) coordination at Faculty level; and iii) tutor coordination in each of the Faculties. The activities include meetings with the coordinators and tutors in order to provide them with information and training; individual and group activities with students to work on specific themes within the program or proposed by them; construction of materials to collect data on organizational issues and ways of functioning of academic life, guidance in solving the academic and learning difficulties, and also related to curriculum trajectory at the university and to professional opportunities. Currently, 11 Faculties participate in the tutorial program, 120 staff and 2,257 students distributed in groups of 20 students. The most recurrent is the individualized tutorial in which one member of the Faculty guides a small group of students, simulating the communication not only between the teacher and the student but also amongst the students within each group. The broad coordination team works directly with the tutors and coordinators in each of the Faculties through general meetings and seminars in order to find the best solutions to overcome the difficulties and constraints identified. Tutors may also get personalized support from the coordination team through interviews and email.

5. The ORIENTA program at the University of Valladolid, Spain (see <http://www.eduonline.ua.es/jornadas2007/comunicaciones/2G3.pdf>; Boronat Mundina, 2009).

The ORIENTA program aims at enhancing teaching quality and the academic achievement of students at the University of Valladolid. Its purpose deals with broadening the tutorial role of the teacher to encompass other aspects in order to foster the integrated development of the students while at university. Thus, tutoring is understood as a process aimed at informing, analyzing and guiding students' problems and difficulties or discussing themes of interest for the students which are considered to be important to their academic and personal development. The goals of the program are:

- to facilitate the adaptation of the student new at the university into the higher education context and to help him/her to make decisions about the curricular units to be undertaken throughout the course;
- to enhance the quality of the programs at the university, both in its content and form;
- to optimize the learning context of the student;
- to stimulate student participation at the University;
- to identify problems and constraints at the higher education system and solutions to overcome them;
- to improve the public image and external visibility of the University.

The program includes different organizational levels, namely:

- i. the technical office which is responsible for the dissemination of the program, to support its development, to provide the necessary resources for the implementation of the program and to disseminate the outcomes;
 - ii. the coordinators of the different Courses who are in charge of disseminating, implementing and evaluating the tutorial program; selecting the tutors willing to participate in the program; organizing the tutorial groups and other activities to enhance the potential of the tutorial program; reporting on the activities and tutorials undertaken by sending the evaluating questionnaires to the Technical Office;
 - iii. the tutors whose role is, amongst others, to support and inform students about the different services and activities in place at the university, in general, and within the Course they are undertaken, in particular; to facilitate the development of learning abilities and strategies; to monitor academic development of the students; to fill in the evaluating questionnaire of the tutorial action; etc.
6. The university tutorial action program (PATU) at the Polytechnic University of Valencia, Spain.

This program aims at enhancing academic excellence, integral education and support of the students, facilitating their adaptation into the university context in all its dimensions. Its goals are: to support and guide students in their global development; to facilitate the integration of the first year students into the new university context; to avoid feelings of isolation; to identify difficulties in their academic life and to help solving them; to stimulate the academic tutorials; to guide students in the decision-making process in regard to the choice of the academic curriculum; to stimulate their participation at the university; to

develop the reflective abilities, dialogue, autonomy and critical thinking; to identify critical issues and problems in the organization of the modules.

In order to facilitate the communication and functioning of the program, an organizational structure was created with different levels including the Coordination/Administration of the Faculty; the coordinators of the program; a full-time person responsible to provide assistance in the development and evaluation of the program, and the tutors. As for the planning of the tutorial program, it entails the following phases: i) needs analysis; ii) identification of goals to meet the needs; iii) selection of content in order to meet the goals, and iv) evaluation. At the end of the program an evaluation is undertaken in order to identify the difficulties and needs and also improvement strategies in order to adapt the program to the characteristics of each of the Faculties. The evaluation process includes questionnaires, reports on the tutorial meetings, meetings with the coordinators of the program, etc.

For the purpose of this paper, we drew upon the final reports on each of the tutoring initiatives carried out at the six contexts identified above. From the content analysis of the reports, several emerging categories were identified: Faculty perspectives on tutoring; assumptions and principles underlying tutoring; competencies and role of the tutor; organization/model of the tutoring program; resources available to support tutoring; training and monitoring of tutors and evaluation of the tutorial experiences.

MAIN FINDINGS

Providing guidance and support to university students is nowadays seen as an important feature by higher educational institutions, which seek to organize ways of responding to this need. Personalized and academic tutoring, mentoring and curricular tutoring are some of the examples from the five institutions briefly described in the above section in their attempt to respond to the support and guidance needs of the students.

Table 1. Key Aspects of the Tutoring Programs Analyzed

Category	Indicators
Dimensions / modes	Administrative, curricular, academic, personalized, etc.
Objectives	Promoting the acquisition of skills; consolidating learning across different disciplines; promoting and facilitating the wide and global development of students; reflecting on the academic and personal development of students, etc.
Content	Learning strategies, social skills, communication skills, etc.
Target groups	Course groups, class groups, individual, ERASMUS students, etc.
Types	Face-to-face, at a distance (online); compulsory, optional.
Timetables	Included / not included in the academic timetable, etc.
Nature	Formal encounters — classes, meetings; informal encounters, etc.
Characteristics	Smaller classes, additional number of tutoring hours, etc.
Tutor	Teacher/Faculty related to each curricular unit, course teacher/Faculty, final year student, etc.

The various tutoring programs and practices have been shaped in the specific context of the institutions in which they were developed, in accordance with the characteristics of the students and of the educational environment. The analysis of these tutoring initiatives reveals significant diversity in the ways in which these practices and programs were implemented (see Table 1).

FACULTY PERSPECTIVES ON TUTORING

Faculty perspectives on tutoring are very much related to their visions on teaching and learning which they draw upon their own experiences in the classroom. When discussing the concept of tutoring at higher education, one might ask: is there a unique definition? Are there any differences in people's understanding of tutoring taking into account the diversity of factors amongst which are a given perspective on what is to be taught and learned at higher education and the status and roles to be undertaken? From the analysis of the programs described above, four main ways of seeing the tutorial action at university may be identified even if some of these dimensions overlap.

Tutoring as a Process to Fight Against Student Academic Failure and Early Drop-Out

Some Faculty see tutorial action as a solution for avoiding student drop-out in the first year and, thus, reducing some of its causes in order to support students to carry on their studies at university. As such, tutoring is an action that facilitates student adaptation into the university context as it helps them with opportunities to acquire and develop study techniques (in many cases those already used by their tutors during their study times at university). In this case, the role of the tutor is to "prescribe or recommend methods of working for given topics, advice on when and how to better study, emphasizing the need to acquire and develop techniques to better deal and select the information...". Behind this kind of understanding of the tutorial action is the belief that it facilitates the transition from secondary to higher education and that it helps identifying at an early stage situations related to academic failure and drop-out. One of the limitations of this perspective may be related to the fact that Faculty do not see the need to change their teaching methodologies nor do they integrate tutoring in their teaching perspective. They only give guidance and advice from time to time in order to avoid academic failure and drop-out.

Tutoring as a Process to Help and Guide Students

Other Faculty highlight the academic or formative tutoring which entails a process of helping students to develop in the academic life successfully. For them, their role, through this guiding dimension, aims at stimulating and facilitating the integrated development of the students in a variety of aspects: intellectual, affective, personal and social: "Being a tutor means to be a guide, to provide a framework for students that come from a schooling context

which they know to a new world that is quite different: the academic world”; “the role of the tutor is to sort out the study problems of the students and mainly guiding their options and decisions... it is giving advice and assistance...”. For other teachers, the tutor intervention context is broad as his/her role is “not to sort out the study problems of the students (for that they have the teachers), but to guide their options in a broad sense” and “a tutor who helps in the adaptation process of the students which is different from a tutor who helps in their academic work”. One of the difficulties stressed by the Faculty is associated with the ways in which students see the role of the tutor. For instance, one of them states that “due to cultural issues, the teacher is seen sometimes as the enemy (...) a person that one needs to work with in order to do a given module in the most successful way and doing the less possible. There is a kind of barrier between the teacher and the student”. Similarly to the example regarding tutoring as a way of fighting against failure and drop-out, the reasons behind this academic and formative perspective are linked to the fact that it facilitates the transition from secondary to higher education and it helps to identify problems at an early stage. Similarly, Faculty advocating this kind of tutoring do not see the need to change their teaching methodology nor do they integrate tutoring in their teaching activity.

Tutoring as a Process of Personalized Support

Another way of seeing tutoring in its personalized dimension related to the personal and academic context. The tutor provides the students with specialized support and advice in the case of given difficulties. It aims at promoting the formative and academic development of the students, helping them in their curricular itinerary and guiding them in terms of professional opportunities. To illustrate this, one Faculty member said “many times students do not have the competencies or the necessary resources to develop their role in their new context with the demands and challenges that it entails”. In these circumstances, students may benefit from different ways of support in order for them to deal with the demands of the context and to redefine their role as students. Some Faculty argue that institutionalizing the tutor role “is crucial to overcome the bridge between secondary education and higher education, promoting a more personalized environment, and stimulating the active participation of the student in its own learning”. On the top of that the tutor “promotes the development of competencies, attitudes and values that help students to handle the challenges of their academic life and, later on, their professional life”. From the accounts, it seems that for some staff tutoring is only needed for some students and, thus, there is no need to integrate it into the teaching activity.

Tutoring as a Process Occurring at a Curricular Level

From the accounts, the curricular and teaching-related dimension of tutoring does emerge. It is associated with the teacher’s work in the curriculum context, namely with the content and syllabi of the modules or curricular units, but without neglecting the broader formative dimension of tutoring, in other words, the global development of the students: intellectual, affective, personal and social. Indeed, within the implementation context of the Bologna process, it has been argued for the need to change the model of pedagogical

organization which is to be based upon the acquisition and development of competencies. This implies moving beyond the mere reproduction of knowledge transmitted in the classroom. It implies a more pro-active and autonomous attitude from the part of the students in their learning process. This conceptual change increases the kinds of challenges to be faced at higher education in so far as changing the methods of studying and ways of working are key factors that justify the need for an academic guidance. This has also implications for the teacher whose role needs to move beyond the mere transmitter of knowledge. Some Faculty also discussed student autonomy: “being autonomous implies being able to make decisions based upon the tutors’ guidance, being able to interpret and work through the meanings and procedures learned and developed at university”. Tutoring is understood as a process that facilitates the transversal dimension of learning, which is influenced by the ways in which students structure the components of their study, by the guidance provided, by the promotion and assistance so that the students construct their own knowledge. The accounts of these Faculty members point to the need to change teaching methodologies and to integrate tutoring into their teaching activity.

Underlying Assumptions and Principles of Tutoring

Despite diversity in the content and form of the six tutoring initiatives, it is possible to identify a number of common aspects. Amongst them are the following: to facilitate the transition from secondary to higher education, to guide the academic trajectory of the students, to identify at an early stage situations leading to academic failure and drop-out, and to develop broad and transversal competencies. Improving the quality of teaching and learning at higher education, especially in a context of student diversity, calls for universities to develop programs such as tutoring as described above.

Competencies and Role of the Tutor

Another issue of relevance in Faculty accounts relates to the kinds of competencies that they consider to be essential to undertake the role of the tutor. Three kinds of competencies were identified: i) knowing – the tutor has to be knowledgeable of the tutoring process and having specific training about it and his/her possible roles (goals, objectives, tasks, dimensions, supervision, ...). This is seen as an important aspect in order to enhance the potential of the tutoring, in so far as some of the tutors stressed the existence of constraints and limitations in the tutorial programs which they relate to the lack of pedagogical preparation they get to undertake their role: “there are new roles to be undertaken in pedagogical terms that were not accompanied by adequate training...”; ii) being – in which the tutor is seen as a guide. For that it is essential that he/she is motivated for the tutoring process in terms of availability and willingness to establish personal relationships: “the communication between the tutor and the student is crucial” and “if there is no communication between the tutor and the student there is no tutoring at all”; iii) doing – in which competencies such as listening, identifying the needs of the students and finding the best solutions, being able to negotiate keeping a coherent attitude and sorting out conflicts are key issues which imply an ongoing developmental process from the part of the tutor.

Also of importance is the attitude from the part of the student (and what it implies for the tutor) in terms of, amongst others, being able to ask for help, being able to communicate and being able “to be in the tutor’s shoes”. This aspect is reiterated by Wallace and Gravells (2007), in so far as the student may have a broad understanding of the self, being able to see beyond traditional and more conservative attitudes. The more traditional approaches may represent an obstacle to the acquisition and development of competencies of the professional-to-be. Amongst others, it is noteworthy, cognitive and metacognitive aspects, motivational aspects as well as being able to ask for help, being open to criticism, managing stress and prioritizing.

Although there are differences in the tutoring programs described above in their goals, content, organization and ways of operating, the tutor’s role is essential to promote the development of the students and of the program itself. Overall, the main tasks of the tutor are identified: to facilitate the institutional relationships and a sense of belonging; to provide feedback in regard to academic work processes; to provide personal and individualized support; to help in the integration of the newcomer at the university; to encourage, motivate and guide in dealing with doubts and problems; to identify potential and difficulties in students’ development; to monitor their development throughout the course, to help and give advice in their professional decisions, etc. (In the case of students in higher education, various researchers [Cooke et al., 2006; Dias, 2006; Jones and Frydenberg, 1999; Soares et al., 2006] have concluded that for most students their 1st year at university is a critical phase in the process of adaptation to higher education — and the 1st term of the 1st year is the time for preventive action [Jones and Frydenberg, 1999]). The sentence in red should be a footnote or endnote. However, it is noteworthy that the tutor is not responsible for solving the students’ problems. There are other services to which the students should be guided such as counseling, etc. The tutor’s role is to guide the students within the goals of the tutoring program whether it is academic, curricular, personal, and so on. The contribution lies in the support and guidance that can make a difference in students’ lives, and the kind of feedback to be provided depends on the structure of the tutoring program.

Organization/Model of the Tutoring Program

One of the key aspects of the six tutoring programs relates to the relative small number of students benefiting from the support of each tutor if it is to be successful. Also, despite the existence of a tutor guide, in some cases, it is up to the tutor to develop the tutorials as he/she wants. However, it is suggested that a method of registering the work of the tutor needs to be implemented in order to facilitate the monitoring of the tutoring process. A written document may help in this regard and may avoid a “waste of time” from the part of both the tutor and the students. The intervention plan (e.g. selection of content for the tutorials, activities, duration, timing, etc...) is a shared responsibility of both the tutor and the students.

Resources Available to Support Tutoring

One key aspect in all the six initiatives was the need to clarify the role of the tutor, his/her duties and responsibilities and those of the students. Also, the need to construct monitoring

and evaluating tools was also highlighted in the reports analyzed. In some cases, a guide for both the tutor and the student was constructed in order to develop a sense of shared framework for the tutors involved in the program. Suggestions for the tutorials, clarification of the tutor's role and tools for monitoring and evaluating the tutorials (e.g. questionnaire to be filled in by both the tutor and the students) are included in the "Guide of the tutors".

Training and Monitoring of Tutors

The reality of higher education, as suggested by Bireaud (1995), reflects a new and more heterogeneous public which calls for a different (and more individualized) teaching for which most lecturers are not well prepared. Their training is not adequate to these new demands, especially at a time of restructuring in the courses, programs and curricula. This may lead, at least in some cases, to academic failure and early drop-out rates. As stressed by Marques (2006), one should reflect upon the need to develop a training and professional development program for lecturers, especially those whose practice is more traditional, in order for them to work within the new paradigm. In this regard, concerns about the training and monitoring of the tutors' work are highlighted in all the reports analyzed. In some cases, a specific program for the tutors was developed as it is the case of Coaching at the IST and the meetings at the SISTESE program and the identification of a training plan for tutors. The analysis of the six initiatives corroborates the need to develop professional development opportunities for Faculty in various domains such as scientific knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of the teaching practice and knowledge of the self (Veiga Simão and Flores, 2007).

Evaluation of the Tutorial Experiences

As stated previously, the need to evaluate and monitor the tutoring system was also a recurring theme in the reports analyzed. Identifying the potential and the limitations of the tutoring programs and ways of improving them are of crucial importance. From the reports, the following elements emerged: the problem related to the students missing the tutorials; the lack of asking for support from the part of students; the resistance to write down the key aspects of the tutorial meetings; ethical issues; conflict management; and the role of the tutor in the assessment process. In general, the need to create a coordination structure was felt in all of the initiatives analyzed. This structure is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the whole program, but also, in some cases, for developing of a culture of cooperation amongst the tutors and between these and the students and for organizing and providing resources (bibliography, webpage, support material, training sessions for tutors, etc.).

CONCLUSIONS

The key aspect of the programs analyzed relates to the attention and focus on the student in so far as he/she meets on a regular basis, individually or in a group, with a Faculty member or tutor whose main role is to support and guide him/her. The contribution of the tutor is,

therefore, linked to the need to meet the challenges of a more heterogeneous population at higher education and to reduce academic failure and drop-out rates. On the other hand, the creation of a system that may foster the global development of the students, the development of a more flexible model of teaching, in which the student plays a more active role in learning, and the need to better respond to the students' needs and difficulties, the revalorization of the teachers' role, through the acquisition of "new pedagogical tools", the emphasis on a more formative dimension are some of the benefits of the tutoring systems analyzed. The various tutoring initiatives described in this paper were built within the practice and context of each institution according to the characteristics of the students, to the settings in which the tutorials were to be implemented, and to the programs in which they were developed. The monitoring and evaluation of the process and the outcomes led to adjustments and to the identification of solutions to needs that are located in a given context.

Overall, these initiatives point to the need to highlight the key dimension of tutoring within the competencies of the teacher at higher education. However, there are a number of key issues that need to be adequately addressed from the evaluation of the tutoring programs analyzed if this dimension is to be successful and effective: the training of tutors and opportunities for their professional development (including clarification of their role, development of methods and tools for tutorials, etc), the institutional recognition (and valorization) of tutoring, and the attention to the particularities and needs of the contexts in which they are developed.

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