



## Tutoring Social Sciences learning

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### Abstract

This paper seeks to vindicate the role of mentoring in teaching, having proven to be a tremendous tool for effective communication and personal relationship with individual students. Exhibited an innovative educational experience conducted with students of degree in Early Childhood Education from the Universitat Jaume I, trying to promote the continuous character of the orientation process from the first years of training to adult life and employment, including the importance of enhancing the relation between the different educational levels.

We also wanted to expose that much more than the task of transmitting information and knowledge, mentoring is essential in all educational models that are based on self-learning new trends, including the Bologna process. Therefore, we believe that mentoring is the crux of a new learning model based on personal and professional autonomy. This approach to work is based on a philosophy of autonomous learning that aims to meet the need for cognitive maturation of university students and improve their educational guidance.

With this experience teaching innovation we have sought to improve our academic methodology, giving a strong weight to the tutoring, both onsite and virtual. We also have tried to encourage teamwork in groups and independent learning. Thanks to these improvements, we have continuously evaluated the students, while students self evaluate their learning process. In summary, the proposal of educational innovation that we have carried out has shown the need to promote a system of mentoring to advise, guide and support students in their learning process.

### Keywords

Tutoring, mentoring, self-learning, teaching task, innovation in education, students' affairs.



## **Introduction**

One of the problems that face our students, especially in the early years of the degree, is disorientation, typical of those who enter a new educational level, with different teaching methods than what they have known until that time. Therefore, the main objective of the experience presented here is to improve the educational guidance of teacher students. That objective has been achieved through mentoring, a teaching strategy that we consider underused by students and lecturers.

The choice of this problem is justified mainly for two reasons. On the one hand, many professors consider mentoring as a supplement to their activity, that it isn't valued and well paid. The current situation caused by the economic crisis and budget cuts affecting the Spanish University is causing in a major sector of lecturers a strong reluctance to carry out tutoring, considering it as an unpaid function. In addition, this perception deepens in existing models of accreditation and promotion of university professors, taking into account the teaching and research tasks, but not efforts devoted to mentoring. As for the students, one of the issues that they appreciate of their lecturers, as is clear from several surveys, is the role of motivation and guidance, both personal and professional or academic. They value that lecturers worry to promote high expectations among students and that they be able to empathize with them to treat their problems in an appropriate way.

With these premises, we started our experience to demonstrate that mentoring should be within the teaching, the most powerful tool of communication and personal relationship between individual students and lecturers. This is to promote the continuous character of the orientation process, from the first year of University until adult and working life, and enhancing the importance of traffic between the different educational levels.

We also would like to expose that mentoring serves for reporting and transmitting knowledge, but also promotes self-teaching, in which new trends of teaching innovation are based, including the Bologna process. At last, we try to contribute that lecturer understands this new professional status of their teaching role, who has become a guide that accompanies the student, who is the true protagonist of the teaching-learning process (Álvarez y González: 2005, p. 2).

## 1. Mentoring: an essential tool in the teaching-learning process

In the literature on teaching methods and strategies, we can find numerous definitions of mentoring which are determined by the concept of education and guidance that each author has (Arbizu, Lobato y Castillo: 2005, p. 5 et seq.). In our case, we believe that guidance is a formative intervention and a teaching task in the student's learning process.

Some of the issues that promotes the new European Higher Education Area are self-learning and personal sufficiency, independent problem solving and team-working in University students. Through mentoring, both individually and in groups, these goals can be achieved successfully. In addition, you can set aside the transfer of knowledge from the lecturer, rote learning and the control of it with exams because the mentoring develops the basic skill of learning to learn.

We understand that mentoring is a university student right and a duty of the professor, but beyond this we consider the condition of mentoring as a space where dialogue can resolve students and lecturer's doubts in the learning process. So, it should serve to optimize student learning and lecturer teaching. We believe it should be an opportunity for the academic and scientific dialogue on the subject that links students and lecturer, on their learning objectives, contents, assessment criteria and references, among other issues.

Tutoring may be in person or online, which enables a closer relationship between both sides, although it supposes a greater impersonality because they are not together physically. Virtual tutoring solves problems of students that, due to their shyness, would have never asked and solves specific issues that arise during the learning task. Also, this type of tutoring saves waiting time because the lecturer can attend student's doubts at all times (García Valcárcel: 2008, p. 9).

In either of the two varieties, we believe that mentoring should be a space of recommendations not only academicals but also personals and professionals. In the same way, we believe that to carry out this advising task, lecturers should be trained in terms of orientation, because they have to supervise the student, to accompany him and guide him beyond the classroom in order to combat school failure. (García Nieto: 2008, p. 193).



Therefore, one of the key aspects of the work of teaching that is too often neglected is communication with their students to advise and guide them through the tutorials. We understand that today the main job of the teacher is to guide students in the teaching-learning process in which students are the protagonists. Thus, the lecturer helps students to plan their academic development, professional and social, in the early years of the degree, when students are disoriented because of changes of this new educational level, and in last years of the degree, when the immediate laboral future generates uncertainties of all kinds.

That is why the lecturer must be a motivator professional, plus a good counsellor, concerned about the learning of their students. Similarly, the lecturer must be a professional reference for students, with that purpose he will need to have extensive knowledge of the degree to help the student to choose for electives, in order to assist him in career opportunities that exist in the profession for which students are being trained. The lecturer also has to be experienced in the use of management and advisory services offered by the University.

By contrast, for the lecturer this closer relationship with students is an enormous gratification, because he can learn more about the characteristics of their students. At the same time, through this close relationship that promotes mentoring, lecturers help to develop the work of the university institution, committed to the society in which it is inserted.

However, the need for advice of the student is different in every moment of the educational process, so the lecturer must make dissimilar recommendations for each level. As for the new students, our experience as high school teacher shows that lots of students are enrolled to many college degrees by chance and not by vocation. Each time fewer students, at the end of the last year before the University, have clear ideas about which university degrees choose. The marks obtained in the entrance examinations to the University, the proximity or distance of the centre where a certain degree is offered from their home and employment expectations are often decisive in their choice.

Therefore, when they reach the University, the number of students disoriented with respect to higher education is huge. This situation sometimes causes the abandonment of the

studies program and a high degree of dissatisfaction. In addition, that causes a lack of clarity about what are they learning, that in many cases, lasts throughout the degree. In the same way, high school students are used to having a tutor assigned by the school with whom he has one hour per week for advice. In this session, students receive guidance from the tutor or from the psychologist on study skills, college tours, choices they have when they finish their educational stage, administrative procedures to claim notes or to enrol at the University and other topics. The tutor is who solves any questions that students may have since their entry into the education system.

By accessing to University, this figure disappears for the first time in student's life, they do not have this reference person that advises, accompanies and guides. By the time they start higher education, when they start a new grade where choices are greater than at any previous stage of education, students are alone and confused. Therefore, we understand the importance of the tutor's role in the transition between high school and higher education. In this case, tutoring may also be conducted by students of final year of the degree, who could introduce tutored students in the degree and in the university system.

Moreover, our experience as a tutor of internships in the last year of the degree of Master has made us understand that the needs of support in recent years aren't in a lower grade. At that time, students face, often for the first time, with the workplace and with typical difficulties and obstacles of a professional without experience. In this case, the problem is not a lack of motivation, but the shortcomings that they have related to their future employment. That is the reason because they also appreciate the advice of the lecturer, who facilitates the transition from university to working life.

As students work outside the University in recent years of career, it should be noted that in this case the advice is shared with a tutor in the workplace, a professional who helps and guides the student from the workplace in which he aspires to be inserted. That supervisor is coordinated with the academic tutor of the University, which controls the process and acts as a bridge between the supervisor and the supervised.

In the same way, the professor who supervises the Degree Final Project is an excellent figure to carry out this task to guide and help the student to decide if he continues with a

more specialized training or if he already goes to laboral world. But to fulfil this function is not sufficient with the willingness of the lecturer, but the tutor has to be formed to select the suitable methods and strategies to advise adequately the student. Only by forming the lecturer, he will understand that tutoring is another tool to improve learning, which has contents and a planning of activities that will contribute to the development of the required skills. So, how we have tried to expose, we believe that mentoring is essential to educate university students, in order to be well trained and aware of what is their tasks at the University.

## **2. Development of the experience**

For the reasons set out before, we decided to carry out an innovative educational project during the 2013-2014 academic year with our students in the second year of the Early Childhood Teacher degree. During the first week of classes, we introduced our students the tutorial plan, consisting of a series of meetings that had to keep students and lecturer. Then, we spent a poll our students with three objectives: knowing about them, creating a climate of confidence in the classroom and make them share the learning process of the teaching profession.

Among other things, we asked for personal data, including the birthplace, residence, associative activities or sports performed regularly in order to better understand our students. Similarly, with the same goal, they were asked what they would like to learn in the subject that at that time began. At the same questionnaire, they were asked about the opinion of the Universitat Jaume I and about the teaching they were receiving in their degree.

Regarding previous ideas about Social Sciences, in the questionnaire students were asked to draw a map of the world, noting Ecuador and Parallel 0°. Also, we asked students to quote five geographic names and five countries or cities. As historical contents, we demanded to write the name of the three most admired persons of the past in chronological

order and some information about them. Then, we asked to do the same with three historical facts.

When we had finished to analyse the data from the surveys, we began with the tutorial calendar, understood as a personalized meeting scheduled in the syllabus. The interview allowed us to cater, facilitate and guide each student in his or her learning process. From each meeting, the lecturer filled a monitoring form where was reflected if the student arrived in the expected date and time and each topic talked about. The high percentage of attendance indicates the interest of students in tutoring. Also, the students prepared a diary where they reflected their daily process of learning and other topics of the subject matters addressed in individual tutoring. This paper was delivered by the students at the end of the year and thanks to the comments reflected in it, we could value the utility that tutoring had in their learning process.

Simultaneously, we asked the students to be grouped into sets of approximately ten students. Once clusters were done, we asked them to choose a representative, who should meet with the lecturer once a month. These students were chosen from volunteers by their peers, this is the reason because were learners committed to their function, assumed as an own decision. These representatives helped the lecturer in the transmission of the information needed to pass the subject and helped her to coordinate the different working groups of the class.

Then, we exposed the purpose of mentoring meetings with the representatives of groups and we established the calendar of meetings. In addition to the specific issues to the field of study, we were going to talk about various topics such as public speaking strategies, issues that promote college success, self-esteem and optimism when facing academic tasks or exams, etc. These mentoring meeting set out the need to develop skills to learn through observation, investigation, analysis, deduction, discovery, classification and finally reflection. At the meetings, the lecturer tried to flee from an expository teaching and to promote an open space for dialogue between students and lecturers. (Rodríguez Espinar: 2004).

Also, thanks to these meetings, the lecturer was able to carry out a careful control over the distribution of tasks between the members of each group, of problems that each group had to confront, and of the development of activities that they had to make for learning. In the same way, we resolved doubts and directed the work of the students. From each meeting, a student wrote a page to compile the discussed proposals in order to solve unexpected or negative results that were taking place throughout the year.

After each session, the students attending the group tutorials carried out meetings with their work group. Peer tutoring has developed and implemented successfully in the English-speaking world in order to mitigate the fact that the information the lecturer wants to convey to their students doesn't reach all students by the enormous amount of learners who attend the subject. Through these peer mentoring, we seek to achieve autonomy and independent study and to take decisions according to their personal and professional interests. Also, we attempted to foster teamwork and personal involvement of each of the students in their own teaching and learning process.

At the same time, after each tutorial group, the lecturer thought about how students were doing their tasks, looked for alternatives to activities that weren't successful and attractive to students, analysed what were the problems for students and the causes thereof. That is, took out a self-evaluation process of teaching. At the same time, the lecturer also offered tutorials through traditional or virtual personal encounter, usually after the request of students, when they had any question on the subject of study. These tutorials also allowed dialogue and mutual understanding between lecturer and student.

### 3. Project's results

The impact analysis aims to determine the effects of the implementation of the action plan tutorial among our students. For this purpose, we have examined both positive and negative consequences it has had on the beneficiaries and students' opinions about the usefulness of the scheduled tutorials. To verify the results, we have compared the academic marks of the students who participated in this tutorial plan with those in the previous year who had not

done it and who had only received private tutoring when they asked for it to the lecturer. In addition, participating students were surveyed about their satisfaction with the mentoring program, if it had aroused the interest, the relationship with the lecturer, and finally the utility of the same.

As mentioned above, to carry out our objectives, we have raised the combination of individual and group tutorials. The individual tutorials have given excellent results, as they offer the possibility of a teaching-learning process more adapted to the needs of each individual student. Regarding the group tutorials, they have also had notable results, as they have supported the commitment of the students with their learning, decision-making and awareness of themselves regarding each stage of the educational process.

Most students were satisfied with peer tutoring because they thought that this kind of tool was very complete to solve their needs. However, they recognized the work of the lecturer in terms of advice on individual tutorials. In general, according to their statements, both kind of tutoring satisfied them, because they felt more guided in the teaching and learning process than they felt in other subjects in which they received only an individual tutoring by the lecturer. Therefore, we conclude that the peer tutoring system combined with personal interviews has more benefits than traditional mentoring between lecturer and student.

Regarding the student-tutors, who participated as these voluntarily, they showed at the end of the experience the convenience of an academic gratification for the work done. It should be noted in this regard, that our students want to become teachers and, therefore, it was not difficult to find students willing to supervise others, because of the vocational component for their studies. Perhaps, if this experience would have been conducted with students from another degree, would have been more difficult to find students who will show interest in participating.

About the participant lecturer, it should be noted that this educational innovative experience has been extremely rewarding for her, to see first hand what students think of her teaching style, what their expectations are and where are the difficulties of the subject taught.

To improve this proposal, we will consider in the future the coordination with other professors of the area of Social Sciences Teaching, so that they can work with this method. The analysis of references, reflections joint study about academic performance of our students and the training that we carry out will affect the quality of our teaching, our preparation as lecturers and, ultimately, achieve the best academic results in our students.

In this regard, it would be desirable in order to carry out a comprehensive mentoring of students regarding academic, personal and professional matters, a maximum of ten students tutored for each lecturer. If this premise would be possible, the tutor would be able to advise the student comprehensively in academic skills, identify potential learning difficulties and help the student to plan his or her studies and electives. It should be noted that among the main difficulties encountered is the excess of students we had to attend, the lack of time to do it and the mentality prevailing in the university culture that leads to consider mentoring as a voluntary activity in the process of teaching and student learning in higher education.

So, with this teaching innovation experience, we have sought to improve our academic methodology, giving a strong weight to the tutoring, both onsite and virtual. We also have tried to encourage teamwork in groups and independent learning. Thanks to these improvements, we have continuously evaluated the students, while students self evaluate their learning process. To conclude, I must say that the proposal of educational innovation that we have carried out has addressed the need to promote a system of tutorials to assist students in their learning process. This approach is based on the work of independent learning, which aims is to meet the need for cognitive maturation of the college student.

#### 4. References

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