

Academic development in Higher Education through innovative approaches in teaching, assessment and feedback

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The research highlighted here has been developed at the University of Aveiro (UA) and has involved close collaboration between researchers in education (Specific Didactics) and five university biology teachers over a period of some twelve years (ending in 2015). The main goal of this collaboration has been to enhance inquiry-based learning in practice and to weigh the impact on these teachers' academic development and growth. This work entailed (i) working alongside university teaching colleagues in designing and adopting novel practices to meet new demands on their time and teaching; (ii) evaluating such innovative teaching and learning strategies in action, and (iii) promoting university teachers' academic reflection on issues of teaching and learning at this level.

Outcomes show a marked interest in the design and development of innovative approaches to teaching, learning, feedback and assessment. These teachers demonstrated strong collaborative practices, insightful reflections on their teaching activities, willingness to share evaluations both within and without of university contexts, and successfully contribute thoughts and ideas to a wider audience.

One of the highlights of the research developed is that, whatever the challenges to improve the quality of the teaching and learning process in higher education, a core aspect of change is the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). SoTL focuses on university teachers' academic development by drawing on literature and research on teaching to inform practices; publishing and making presentations about teaching, and applying for funding for research on teaching. Some indications of the 'SoTL products' to emerge from the project have ranged from contributions to internal university teaching and learning events, to external international conference presentations. This research in academic development has contributed to the production of relevant knowledge in the area. The success can be attested by, for example, the number of financial projects obtained (3), PhD and master's degrees, the large number of articles published internationally and the changes of practices of the HE teachers involved.

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