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## **UNIVERSITY TEACHING WORK AS A RELATIONAL PRACTICE: SUBJECT MATTERS, KNOWLEDGE, AND INSTITUTIONS<sup>1</sup>**

**O trabalho docente universitário como prática  
relacional: assuntos, saberes e instituições**

**El trabajo docente universitario como práctica  
relacional: sujetos, saberes e instituciones**

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## Abstract

This article discusses the relational dimension of university teaching work based on the analysis of specialized literature and information collected through interviews with Argentine and Spanish university professors. Teaching is a social practice that places professors in multiple relationships with other subjects, specific knowledge, particular institutions, and society in general. Through writing, the relationships between colleagues and the forms acquired by the culture of teaching at universities are analyzed; as well as the characteristics of their connections with the students; the bond between professors, the institution, and the organization of society; and their relationship with certain knowledge that requires university teaching work. Recognition of the network of multiple relationships in which professors perform their daily work allows us to think of teaching as a heterogeneous practice crossed by multiple tensions.

**Keywords:** University, teaching, institutions, knowledge, relations.

## Resumo

Este artigo discute a dimensão relacional do trabalho docente universitário a partir da análise da bibliografia especializada e das informações coletadas por meio de entrevistas realizadas por professores universitários argentinos e espanhóis. Sugere-se que o trabalho docente constitua uma prática social que coloca os professores em um quadro de múltiplas relações com outros sujeitos, conhecimentos específicos, instituições particulares e com a sociedade em geral. Ao longo da escrita, analisam-se as relações entre colegas e as formas adquiridas pela cultura do trabalho docente na Universidade; As características que a ligação estudantil assume; O vínculo entre os professores e a instituição universitária e a organização da sociedade, bem como a relação com certos saberes que requerem o exercício do trabalho docente universitário. O reconhecimento da rede de múltiplos relacionamentos, dos quais os professores exercem seu trabalho cotidiano, permite que pensem no ensino como uma prática heterogênea atravessada por múltiplas tensões.

**Palavras-Chave:** Universidade, trabalho docente, instituições, saberes, relações.

## Resumen

El presente artículo aborda la dimensión relacional del trabajo docente universitario a partir del análisis de la bibliografía especializada y de la información recogida a través de entrevistas realizadas a profesores universitarios argentinos y españoles. Se plantea que el trabajo docente constituye una práctica social que coloca a los profesores en una trama de múltiples relaciones con otros sujetos, saberes específicos, instituciones particulares y con la sociedad en general. A lo largo del escrito, se analizan las relaciones entre colegas y las formas que adquiere la cultura del trabajo docente en la universidad; las características que asume el vínculo con estudiantes; el vínculo de los docentes con la institución universitaria y la organización de pertenencia, así como la relación con determinados saberes que exige el ejercicio del trabajo docente universitario. El reconocimiento de la red de múltiples relaciones desde la cual los/as docentes ejercen su quehacer cotidiano, habilita a pensar el trabajo docente como una práctica heterogénea atravessada por múltiples tensiones.

**Palabras clave:** Universidad, Trabajo docente, Instituciones, Saberes, Relaciones.

## 1 INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

University teaching is a complex, heterogeneous, and specific practice that is experienced and perceived differently by professors based on their particular positions in the university. In the face of diverse material and symbolic conditions, the development of teaching work in universities places professors in a network of multiple relationships. Firstly, being a university professor implies that one must relate to a specific organization that hired them to perform an institutional function. Secondly, the job entails the establishment of relationships with colleagues who, due to having different positions and not necessarily the same contractual relationship, are called to fulfill certain institutional functions. Thirdly, teaching involves relating primarily to those to whom the teaching is addressed: the students. Fourthly, working as a university professor involves establishing relationships with disciplinary, pedagogical, and experiential knowledge that are at present in daily life. Thus, the teaching work is defined as a relational practice, as it involves the establishment of various relationships based on the bonds that the institution itself establishes with society.

This article is based on the premise that the relational nature of teaching is a dimension not always visible in studies on the subject or that it sometimes is reduced to the bond between professors and students. In this text, different relationships established by professors with other distinct subjects, such as the university and particular knowledge while teaching at a university were studied.

This analysis was carried out as part of a larger research work, whose objective was to study the university teaching work and its evaluation in universities of Argentina and Spain<sup>3</sup>. It was a study of collective cases of extrinsic or instrumental character (STAKE, 2005) that allowed the approach to the specificities, complexities, and insertions of issues related to university teaching work without the intention of generalizing it.

More than a rigorous comparative study, a qualitative “comparative sensitivity” study was conducted (SIEDER, 2005). That is, we sought to recognize the specificities of each case studied, which historical reconstruction is essential for Sieder, as well as to identify those key actors and dynamics from the transnational point of view. In this comparative perspective, Rachel Sieder (2005) proposes to study those phenomena that exceed national boundaries (considering the political and global context in which they are), addressing specific situations from an interdisciplinary comparative sensitivity viewpoint.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 69 professors from two Argentine universities (Universidad Nacional del Centro de la Provincia de Buenos Aires [UNCPBA] and Universidad Nacional de Misiones [UNaM]) and one Spanish university (Universidad de Málaga [UMA]). We sought to find and explain the “points of view” (BOURDIEU, 2007) of professors of different areas, categories, and dedication in relation to the peculiarities of the professorship.

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<sup>3</sup> The research was funded by the European Union through a full scholarship of the Erasmus Mundus program “Move on Education”, Action 2, EACEA/29/09, LOT 13b.

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The criterion of disciplinary affiliation was defined a priori based on the relevance of the disciplinary dimension of the university (BECHER, 2001). As a result, professors from four areas of knowledge were interviewed: Social and Human Sciences, Health Sciences, Exact and Natural Sciences, and Art<sup>4</sup>. During the fieldwork, other selection criteria were included, such as teaching category and dedication, level of seniority, gender, and employment status. Data analysis was performed by the constant comparison method of the Grounded Theory approach from a qualitative methodological perspective.

Regarding the analysis, it should be noted that the selected universities present differences related to the history of the university system in each of their countries, the history of each institution, the peculiarities of their political, economic, and social contexts, in addition to being subject to supranational, national, regional and institutional regulations. From a theoretical, epistemological, and methodological point of view, in order to recognize such differences, the adoption of certain interpretative parameters was required. On the one hand, not naturalizing what it's familiar. Thus, it became indispensable to be permanently vigilant when regarding the writings. There should not be assumptions concerning the content and a certain distance should be kept, so that the analysis of certain situations could be objective. On the other hand, inquiries about senses, notions, and meanings were required – since no other university world was known – to understand them. In addition, a continuous historical reconstruction and contextualization of policies, practices and actors was necessary in order not to extrapolate logics and meanings from what was known to what was intended to know<sup>5</sup>.

This text is organized in six sections. This section, the first, has presented conceptual precisions about teaching in the university that allowed us to identify its relational character. The second section focuses on the discussion of relationships with colleagues and on the ways in which they acquire the culture of teaching at university level. In the third section, the characteristics of the professor-student relationship are addressed. In the fourth, the questions that emerged from the analysis of the relationship between professors and university institutions are presented. In the fifth, the relationship with certain knowledge that is established in the exercise of university teaching work is addressed. Finally, considerations regarding the systematization of the analyzes performed are presented.

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4 Since this is a synthetic version of the original text in Spanish, the transcripts of excerpts from the interviews were removed from this version. If they are of interest, consult the original text. The interviews were conducted from February 2012 to April 2013.

5 The monitoring by a Spanish director and an Argentine co-director during the investigation process was key since they belonged to the academic world of their respective countries. Their continuous observations helped with the difficulties arising from the lack of familiarization with certain spaces, practices, and denominations. At this point, Bourdieu's idea about the obstacle posed for scientific knowledge of too much proximity or too much distance should be considered.

## 2. UNIVERSITY TEACHING WORK AS RELATIONAL PRACTICE

University teaching work, conceived as a work on others (Dubet, 2006), is a paid activity that explicitly aims to transform subjects. This work aimed at facilitating the cognitive and institutional affiliation of students in university life (COULON, 1997), contributing to their preparation for their future professional lives; thus, not being reduced to the performance of teaching activities.

In the teaching work, there are specific activities (considered essential for teaching) and strategic activities (which aim at preserving the quality of the professor in the system). All activities are crossed by the tension between prescribed and actual work (DEJOURS, 2001, 2012). Several activities are involved in the teaching role of professors, which is performed by the same subjects who also do research, extension, and management tasks. That is why it can be said that professors are in a complex work situation, in a work context where the level of their daily demands is continuously increased.

A few years ago, Sancho Gil (2001) referred to “two worlds” as a way of expressing the main activities carried out at universities (teaching and research). After a while, and given the increase in management activities conducted by professors, Sancho Gil, Creus, and Padilla Petry (2010) preferred to talk about “a profession in three worlds”, referring to the three activities comprised in a professor’s work (teaching, research, and management). If we consider, especially in Argentine universities, the priority given to extension activities, a new world could be added to this tripartite division.

Addressing the relational nature of teaching means recognizing the relevance of this dimension which, in general, remains secret and poorly recognized (DUBET, 2006). The different relationships that professors establish with other people while teaching will now be addressed. The other sections of this paper include different subjects – here the focus will be on relationships with students and colleagues –, such as the relationships with the university and knowledge.

### 2.1 Relationship with colleagues

By examining the specialized literature, one can say that studies on teaching practice and its bonds generally focus on those bonds established between professors and students. In this section, the aspects of the relationship between colleagues, suggested by the interviewed professors, are addressed, as well as the particular ways in which each professor adopts the culture of university work.

Thus, one can consider the distinction made by Hargreaves (1996) between ‘content’ and ‘form’ of culture. For the author, there are two constitutive dimensions of any culture: content and form. Content consists of attitudes, values, beliefs, habits, positions, and ways a certain group does fundamental and shared things. Form refers to the relationship models and distinctive forms of association among participants in the culture in which the content is fulfilled, reproduced, and redefined. From this analysis arose the following ways to approach the culture of teaching in the university: individualism and balkanization as forms of partnership; competitiveness as work climate; and growing virtualization as a form of communication.

#### 2.1.1 Individualism and balkanization as a form of association

The professors who were interviewed suggest that the teaching work requires some coordination between professors – within public notices, areas, titles, departments, etc. –, thus, allowing simultaneous efforts for the institutional purposes pursued. In this sense, the professors say they value the means of collective work and exchanges among teaching teams. However, they recognize that forms do not predominate in institutions collaborative work for different reasons: a) lack of time; b) little recognition of this type of activities; c) lack of common work spaces; d) instability in the work of professors.

Time is crucial for analyzing the teaching work system configuration. The expressions of the professors interviewed allow us to perceive the representation of time as “a scarce good”. The conception of human time is appreciated “as a capital that is rapidly spent and with which we also wear out, (...) thus, making us plead to not misuse or waste it. Physical time flows continuously; ours runs out”<sup>6</sup> (SACRISTÁN, 2008, p. 19).

From this perception of time as finite capital and based on particular situations, professors decide to use it in different ways. In contrast, working with other professors implies the decision to invest time in this collective action. Thus, precisely because of the investment of the time and of the discussions generated, the majority of the professors opts for working individually.

Although team activity is understood as a relevant and necessary practice, it is considered “lost time” and its results are not recognized or valued. Often, the teamwork achievements are unable to compensate for personal efforts (in terms of time and energy devoted), so that individual work becomes an adopted strategy. That is, given the increasing demands, the varied activities, and the pressure for deadlines to be met by professors on a daily basis, individualism is the result of a strategic calculation of effective investment of time and energy (HARGREAVES, 1996). In the three cases studied, the lack of common workspaces was mentioned, as well as the absence of a room for the professors to facilitate meetings.

Another element that hinders collective work, which is quite recurrent in the case of the Spanish university, is the form of hiring professors. New professors are not met due to their brevity and instability in the university and because the physical conditions (lack of common spaces) make meetings difficult. Thus, a “restricted” individualism is configured. It is not a part of a strategic calculation, but it is the result of limitations in working conditions. In these cases, an institutional dynamic in which the faculty is a fiction is generated. In this context, departmental projects, scholarship programs, and the purposes pursued by a research project do not transcend formal and intentional levels. In practice, there is often a conglomeration of overlapping practices that are unknown and even contradicted by each other.

Such situations account for the solitary character of the university teaching work, which lead professors to ignore the work of colleagues with whom an institutional purpose is supposedly shared. Therefore, individualism, as a predominant form of the teaching culture in universities, may be a restricted or strategic response to the demands and contingencies of work (lack of time and space and the instability of the teaching staff), but may also fulfill each professor’s choice for solitary work. Individualism may be the preferred way of teaching and, in this sense, would be elective (HARGREAVES, 1996).

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<sup>6</sup> Quote translated freely from a Portuguese translation of the original in Spanish.

Whether by choice, strategy or restriction, individualism as a form of work generates isolation, makes it difficult to meet other people (colleagues), and limits the possibilities of collective construction of institutional projects. “Balkanized” culture, expressed in the development of work in small groups, is characterized by strong and lasting boundaries established between different parts of the organization due to personal identification with the fields that define these boundaries and differences in power among these fields. Thus, an artificial collegiate is formed (HARGREAVES, 1996) which can become an opportunity for lasting collaboration, even though it is an obstacle to the latter (MONTERO, 2011).

### **2.1.2 Competitiveness as work climate**

The work experience in the culture of the new capitalism has become a permanent situation of competition of all against all (SENNETT, 2006). In the university, the competition is not only for greater prestige within an academic community, but also for places and funding (donations, grants, etc.). Competitiveness (understood as the ability to compete for capital or for a common goal) has become an effective way of regulating systems, institutions, and subjects.

In a context of reduced state investment in public universities and commercial globalization of universities (SANTOS, 2005), competition appears as a legitimizing discourse for differentiated budget allocation policies. At the structural level, competition is generated among and within institutions for obtaining financial resources. At the subject level, competition among professors leads to flexibility and adaptability to the increasing demands of work and the emergence of individual strategies (the “every man for himself” thought) that enable survival in the workplace. However, it is necessary to analyze the incidence of changes in the temporal dimension of the teaching experience.

As stated in the previous section, the experience of time as a scarce commodity that should not be wasted threatens forms of collective labor that require a significant investment of time, in addition to generally not being a sufficiently recognized activity. Mutations of the temporal dimension in the culture of capitalism also affect the quality of bonds with others. As Sennett argues (2000), the principle of “no long-term” that currently runs through institutions “corrodes mutual trust, loyalty and commitment” (p. 22). The short-termism, prevalent in the new forms of work organization, with its fleeting forms of association, limits the possibility of maturing informal trust and building solid bonds and commitments with the group.

As Montero (2011) argues, a collaborative culture implies relationships of trust between professors, as well as mutual support, self-assessment, and shared professional learning. Yet, in order to cope with today’s realities, detachment and superficial cooperation are a better armor than commitment based on values of loyalty and service (SENNETT, 2000, p. 24). According to Sennett (2000), the temporal dimension of new capitalism is what most affects people’s emotional lives. Short-term capitalism threatens to undermine the aspects that bind subjects to each other and provide each one of them with a sense of sustainable being.

At the institutional level, individualistic and competitive dynamics highlight the difficulties of building collective projects. If, supposedly, the professors’ daily work should be inserted in an already defined collective project (institutionally or at the undergradu-

ate / departmental level), given the prevalence of isolated work, the lack of knowledge among colleagues about their respective works, and the absence of meetings to articulate content or objectives at horizontal, vertical and transverse levels, such collective project would never exist in real life.

However, conversely, if that collective project is the result of an articulated set of teaching practices and, according to Clark (1983), the institutional objectives arise from the daily contact of small groups, the non-encounter between professors and the state of balkanization in which they work daily would make it impossible to construct shared institutional criteria to guide those actions. In short, we are facing a vicious circle in which professors who work individually (due to material, strategic or elective reasons and to the fragility of ties with their peers) do not perceive “meeting points” with others or “shared meanings”. Nevertheless, in turn, the construction of these collective meanings and interests requires the possibility of meeting with other people.

### **2.1.3 Virtualization as a form of communication**

The analysis of the professors’ discourses of the three studied cases allows us to recognize the focus on virtual activities in the university teaching work. The growing trend towards virtualizing activities involves not only those activities related to teaching and to strategic work, such as filling out forms, completing online platforms, reporting, etc., virtualizing daily work disrupts relationships with colleagues.

Some professors indicated that, due to lack of space or to their needs to work with good computers, an important part of their work is done at home. The analysis carried out allows us to call attention to the fact that the teaching work nowadays, in addition to the required classroom hours, entails the permanent use of a computer. Being necessary for the professor to be present in person only in specific cases, such as classes, advising sessions, and follow-up at other institutions.

This fact, on the one hand, allows us to think about the form of virtual work in the structure of a model of hegemonic university. Although the inclusion of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the educational field can be understood as a source of democratization (of information, of the access to higher education, etc.), the conditions of inequality cannot be ignored in current systems of government, universities, colleges, and subjects, as well as the link with the “commercial globalization of universities” (SANTOS, 2005).

On the other hand, and considering the context of the discussion on the ways ICTs work, which facilitate exchanges and formation of academic networks (disciplinary and interdisciplinary) beyond the limits of the institutions, gradually replacing face-to-face meetings at universities, technologies can contribute to the atomization of professors; thus, hindering forms of collective organization.

In everyday teaching, virtualization as a form of peer communication is a common practice. In university teaching work, activities mediated by virtuality are increasingly frequent; for this reason, it is necessary to investigate their peculiarities and effects at the level of the subjects and the teaching team. What is lost, altered or gained nowadays with current forms of “teleworking”? A clue to think about this can be found in the characteristics of the written communication that prevalent in virtual communication (emails, virtual

platforms)<sup>7</sup>.

The written communication generally requires more time and greater attention to formulate an idea than the oral communication, which can use other resources, such as gestures, postures, etc. Due to the greater effort required to produce a written text and to the increasing demands that are the object of a professor's attention, writing or replying to an email has become a tiring task. Precisely, what happens in everyday life and in the direct relationships between subjects, such as the unexpected, which is more perceived than seen, factors that are from the intentional field, operated as a source of inner mobilization or interpellation cannot be processed when writing or reading an email. All this is left off the screen, from virtuality. These are not minor issues since they take under consideration professors as individuals and workers and, when excluded from the new forms of communication, those issues make them become invisible and naturalized.

These statements, far from trying to attribute an evil character to the technologies themselves, intend to make us think about the incidence of the virtualization of a professor's work in the context of a relational plot that involves the logic of the field, institutional dynamics, ways of regulating the teaching work, the practices and the perceptions of the subjects. Thus, "we need to understand the development of new technologies fundamentally as an intensification of the economic-industrial logic of capitalism" (MARRERO ACOSTA, 2004, p. 20). As a result, in a scenario marked by the decapitalization of public universities, in which professors are led to compete for economic funding, scholarships, subsidies, etc., and where new forms of work organization generate task intensification, flexibility, and employment instability and institutional programs have been weakened (DUBET, 2006), it is possible to question the extent to which the virtualization of teaching promotes individualistic work practices and logics that threaten the collective organization of professors<sup>8</sup>.

### 3. RELATIONSHIP WITH STUDENTS

The professors from their particular position in the university and the daily routine of their interactions relate directly to the students; thus, building a pedagogical relationship (GRAMSCI, 1976)<sup>9</sup>. Within the framework of these interactions, practices and perceptions that configure unique modes of relationship are seen. Each professor and student find "the other of the relationship" from a set of thoughts, action, and perception schemes (BOURDIEU, 2002) that allow them to interpret the situations in which they participate while teaching and learning.

In the case of the professors who were interviewed, their recurrent references to students were in terms of disabilities. With some exceptions, the professors mentioned the students' actions based on certain parameters of how they should be and manifest

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<sup>7</sup> In addition to these, professors use other resources, such as videos (which are worth more than an image or a word) usually, peer communication is done via email.

<sup>8</sup> It is not unknown that, in times of crisis, technologies have been the communication platform of professors from different universities (this can be seen in the Spanish academic forums that were created in recent years due to the political and economic crisis in the country). In Spain, on the internet, professors share their experiences and their claims. A specific investigation should be carried out for the analysis of the potential of these devices as a means of collective organization of professors.

<sup>9</sup> The concept of pedagogical relationship used here to explain professor-student relationships is not specifically limited to 'school' relationships. Gramsci understands this concept as an active link of reciprocal relationships that occur in the society as a whole and in each individual in relation to others.

themselves in terms of deficiencies, such as lack of prior knowledge, few study strategies, and little interest and political commitment, which shows that part of what they expected from their students comes from an idealized and implicit picture of what a college student should be<sup>10</sup>.

Although these representations remain as signs of identity for sectors of the student population, there is a hybridity due to different phenomena (transnationalization of economies, crisis of ideologies, cultural transformations, etc.) that lead to a student experience crossed by heterogeneity and fragmentation (CARLI, 2012). As a result, the current representations of college students fluctuate between their current experiences and figures built at particular historical times.

New students who live in the university and divide their time between work and study, who are not necessarily young (in the traditional sense of belonging to a particular age group), who establish relationships with knowledge and reading practices that are different from those of their professors, and whose intellectual and political interests are not limited to the university environment threaten the representations of the ideal and the real students. According to Corea and Lewkowicz (2004), this is the dissociation between the supposed student and the real student who actually inhabits the university. Yet, it implies a tension between the professors' expectations regarding university education and the representations of students in their work experiences in the field of education (CARLI, 2012).

In the interaction between what is expected of students and how they are perceived, professors end up engaging in activities that are not part of their specific activities but are substantial for students' learning, for instance, teaching basic prerequisites needed to address other specific content of the subject taught. The same was observed in relation to study strategies, the professors say they spend time and energy to guide students through bibliographic research, to demand readings and text interpretations, and to teach the students how to use different techniques to identify relevant information. The professors also mention the development of argumentation, which requires a lot of follow-up on their part because the students' writing is very weak; thus, being the content not always the focus of teaching practices. Moreover, from a more general point of view, professors' interactions with students are not restricted to classrooms, class schedules, and the prescribed curriculum contents. In general, professors also accompany and advise their students in relation to organizational and administrative aspects of the university.

Therefore, the relationships between professors and students are not only mediated by content and disciplinary issues. Identity recognition goes beyond institutional roles, as they are adults and young adults who relate to each other through models of desired subjects. Desires, feelings, sensations, and expectations pass through these relationships and configure them.

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<sup>10</sup> Regarding the historical construction of such representations, in the European context, the "average student", the "normal student" or the "true young student" are defined in early-century texts by Spanish philosophers, such as Ortega y Gasset and Miguel de Unamuno. In France, in the sociological tradition of the 1960s, the figure of the student as "heir", representative of a privileged position in the social structure and, as a product of university education, depository of various mechanisms of social inequality invisible under the ideologies of the present and of merit. In Latin America, historiographical and essay production "has also constructed a set of representations of the university student who passes through Ariel de Rodó's aristocratism, the tradition of Latin American reformism, and the politicization of the 1970s" (CARLI, 2006, p. 3).

The transit of students through the university can generate encounters or not with a specific subject field, but also with a professional who requires learning their languages, knowledge, and customs.

During the student experience, more than the linear expression of conscious rationality, the student faces the product of doubts, fears, errors, and passions (MALINOWSKI, 2008); thus, dealing with a double learning. According to Bourdieu (2007), in this arduous process of construction as a student, the affiliation phase plays an important role for the students to know the rules of the university world and also for them to recognize themselves as part of this new universe. They have to incorporate their practices and ethics and forge a “student habitus” that will become the guiding principle of their actions. In this sense, the “habitus”, understood as a willingness to act, perceive, think, and feel in a certain way (BOURDIEU, 2008), will be gradually built in the interactions that the student establishes within the institution in general and a specific field of knowledge.

A relevant issue that should be taken under consideration in the analysis of the professor-student relationships has to do with the simultaneity of the student affiliation process and that undertaken by new professors in their access to a particular position. That is, entering university means starting to move through a specific cultural environment and starting a socialization process in which future members of an academic community (students or professors) progressively develop their senses of belonging, identity, and personal commitment to it. It happens because, despite having known the university as students, the new position occupied as professors places them in a different place in relation to the knowledge (which must now be taught), to the students (who are former classmates), to the professors (who are now colleagues), and to the institution (with which there is a contractual relationship and duties to fulfill)<sup>11</sup>.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the configuration of the relationship between students and professors that, in recent years, has taken the form of “work on demand”. Professors are increasingly being consulted by students in spaces and times outside the classroom or by email. In this situation, the centrality granted to students in the teaching and learning processes cannot be ignored. This seems to validate, within the commercial logic that crosses the university, the idea of a student as a client. In view of the capitalist spirit which considers the “client as the king” (BOLTANSKI; CHIAPELLO, 2002), the virtualization of teaching opens channels of communication for professors who provide greater accompaniment for students. However, this tendency defines a mode of relationship that lacks the essential, “the human factor”. As noted, in peer relations, ICTs play an important role in shaping the relational dimension of teaching work.

#### **4. Relationship with the institution**

To be a professor means to establish certain relations with the university and the way of belonging to it. One of these is related to the employment conditions. Based on the cases studied, these situations are more evident in the Spanish university. The cur-

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<sup>11</sup> Coulon (1997) points out three stages at the entrance of the university: 1) a time of estrangement, which implies the insertion in an unknown area and the rupture with norms and customs typical of the world from where the student that has just left; 2) a time of learning, which implies a process of adaptation to new institutional guidelines and discoveries of ambiguities between old and new rules; and 3) a time of affiliation, in which the student can master the new rules of the game and interpret institutional meanings.

rent type of hiring leads university professors, especially those who have just started their careers, to experience a permanent situation of job instability. This has repercussions not only on their personal lives, but also on the type of bonds established with students, colleagues, and the institution as well. In Argentina, the periodicity of public notices for new professors undermines the permanence in a position and the possibilities of promotion in the teaching career are threatened by the lack of funding, which is being used for financing the public notices<sup>12</sup>.

In a context where professors often need to have greater commitment to the institution, it is worth asking: “how would one commit to an institution that does not commit to oneself?” (SENNETT, 2006, p. 167). In the current work scenario, which is marked by work instability and flexibility, not committing to it can be understood as a form of rules of the game (BOURDIEU, 2007), as a strategic response to meet, at least minimally, the intermittent commitment required by the institution in order to remain there for as long as possible. This is not efficient, in terms of investment of time and energy, or beneficial for the professor’s mental health, who has to commit and build ties in an uncertain space that leaves people adrift (Sennett, 2000, 2006). “What is special nowadays about uncertainty is the threat of a historic disaster; changes are integrated with the daily practices of vigorous capitalism” (SENNETT, 2000, p. 30). Instability at work weakens ties and commitment to the university and others, making it especially difficult for those who have just begun their affiliation with the university (COULON, 1997).

Another type of relationship established with the university has to do with the provisions of regulatory mechanisms. In the case of the Spanish university, with more than a decade of experience in implementing the guidelines from the Bologna Process, most professors have been undergoing a set of changes that affect their daily teaching work: increased in formal evaluations of their work; greater demands on specific lesson planning; requirements for the development of certain methodologies and practices considered innovative, etc.

Given the growing demand for activities (especially bureaucratic) that take time and energy away from what is considered substantial to teaching, what arises is the superficiality of work as a strategy that allows the fulfillment of obligations without major commitments. In this sense, prescriptions and accountability give a specific configuration to the relationship between professors and university in the exercise of teaching.

Finally, regarding the forms acquired by the relationship between professors and institution, it is noteworthy to stress the relevance of an institutional project that allows professors to give meaning and direction to their daily work. The professors of the three universities studied pointed out the need for institutionalized projects that integrate efforts and direct them towards the achievement of certain objectives. On both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, professors say they see the lack of political-academic-pedagogical proposals that guide them as to “where to go” and “integrate and articulate efforts and enable long-term planning”; thus, responding to the society’s appeals. In this context, there were several professors who said they felt confused due to not knowing very well

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<sup>12</sup> The recently approved Collective Bargaining Agreement (CCT) changes the working conditions of university professors, especially those related to job stability. The agreement states that each university will design its own institutional mechanism of periodic individual assessment which will determine the permanence of the professor in the present position.

what is expected of them. These expressions convey an image of something “adrift”, as Sennett (2000) stated, of uncertainty and weakening of institutional projects as obstacles to giving meaning to teaching. This lack of meaning, the option of not committing, and the feeling of exhaustion in the face of a work that is not a source of satisfaction can be understood as the weakening of the university institutional program.

Enders and Kaulisch (2006) mention the transformation process that universities have been undergoing since the 1980s which brings them closer to a business model. In this context, they argue that the tendencies towards mercantilization, management, and internationalization generate a combination of old and new resources from which academic careers “intertwine” and at the same time “separate” from the institution.

On the one hand, the growth of intersectoral activity, the international mobility of professors, and the increase of auxiliary and part-time staff lead to the erosion of traditional concepts, such as a professor’s “chair”, and are conditions for the disengagement of professors from the organizational field. On the other hand, the introduction of new forms of university management tend to align faculty activities according to organizational needs and interests; thus, creating internal labor markets by linking professors to the institution. Therefore, there is a twofold movement between the trends that contribute to the creation of nomadic and borderless careers organized by the subjects themselves and the university policies and practices that institute regulations that bind academics to the institution.

## 5. RELATIONSHIP WITH KNOWLEDGE

As previously mentioned, the university world is not a homogeneous space. For constructing its heterogeneity, the dimension of disciplinary action plays an important role. Clark states that “the issue of knowledge, even more of the advanced type, is the core of purposes and the essence of any higher education system” (Clark, 1983, p. 35). Knowledge is the raw material around which institutional dynamics and academic practices are structured. And it is precisely the academic team that manipulates it in various ways in order to discover, maintain, purify, transmit or apply it. In this regard, the author states that a professor moves around with a set of knowledge, either general or specific, looking for ways to increase it or teach it to others. From this substance, increasingly specialized and autonomous, certain aspects of form, certain aspects of form are grouped together with tasks and workers according to various types of knowledge.

Becher (2001, p. 13) was interested in “drawing a map of the multicolored territory of academic knowledge and exploring the diverse characteristics of those who inhabit and cultivate it”. The author states that, in the university, tribes linked to certain territories (cognitive territories) coexist with a certain cognitive tradition (categories of thought) and codes of behavior (CLARK, 1983). Each of these tribes has their own traditions, customs, practices, knowledge, beliefs, moral principles, linguistic and symbolic forms of communication, and meanings that unify those who are part of it and that must be learnt by those who want to belong to the tribe (ARAUJO, 2008).

Teaching practices acquire particular configurations according to the disciplinary fields and the methodological tools available to make them evolve. In addition to disciplinary knowledge, certain didactic and pedagogical knowledge is required (in relation to the organization of classroom activities, use of teaching resources, motivation of

students, encouragement of participation, etc.), which not all university professors have.

Professors show that the system enables them to perform a function – the teaching function – for which not everyone has been prepared. Thus, it can be stated that, in relation to the pedagogical formation, professors have unequal training. In many areas, professors are basically in control of their subject knowledge; however, in relation to their students and the peculiarities of learning processes, as well as the limitations and possibilities of certain teaching strategies, professors have only “some intuitions”. In other disciplinary areas, however, it is considered essential to have this knowledge in order to be able to teach. These are fundamentally areas in which the subjects of the learning or teaching processes are part of their own object of study. Thus, it turns out that these professors must carry out a task to which they were not previously trained for, since they were prepared to act as biologists, engineers, doctors, accountants, etc.

These tensions in relations with knowledge (disciplinary and pedagogical) established in teaching are related to the issue of the identity of university professors (ZABALZA, 2009; LUCARELLI, 2004) and the marks of their original professions that make teaching a “residual category” (CHIROLEU, 2002; EDELSTEIN, 2012). Another issue to be observed about the relationship with knowledge that implies teaching arises from the articulation of the need for permanent training and from the market logic that prevails in the university field. Therefore, although academic qualification is a prerequisite for university entry, in recent years, a profitable postgraduate, congress, course, seminar, etc. market has emerged, which, according to Collins (1989), in his analysis of the credentialist society, does not guarantee new knowledge and skills. Finally, belonging to a disciplinary field and understanding the discipline as a socio-historical construction places the professors in different spaces inside the university; thus, generating conditions of inequality in terms of recognition and prestige. In this sense, the relationship with knowledge in teaching is crossed by the hegemonic dynamics of legitimation of occupational stratification and social reproduction.

## 6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The multiple relationships in which university professors develop their daily work prevent us from talking about teaching as something homogeneous. Their multidimensionality and specificity, the various conditions under which they are developed, in addition to their relational character make teaching at universities something heterogeneous (SCOTT, 2008), a complex practice (MORÍN, 1994) of diffuse boundaries (SANCHOGIL, 2001). The relations established with the institution, colleagues, students, and knowledge are permeated by the type of relationship that the university maintains with society.

The analysis carried out allowed us to see that the relational nature of the work gives rise to a series of tensions. Firstly, it can be said that teaching is considered by the subjects a collective social practice, which requires joint work and shared criteria. Nevertheless, the conditions and regulations that make daily work foster practices and dynamics that threaten the formation of bonds of trust, solidarity, and commitment to each other. It is in this sense that the teaching in the university can be said to be crossed by the tension between the individual and the collective.

Secondly, trends that put the professors around the university as an organization while forces fragment identities around specific disciplinary fields can be seen. The analysis based on the organizational perspective and on the recovery of the disciplinary dimension allows us to understand teaching in the field of contradictory forces. These are general and particular characteristics of a symbolic organizational universe that recognizes all members as members of the university but can also be a symbolic disciplinary universe that fragments the construction of identities around disciplinary matrices and professional fields with idiosyncratic practices (ARAUJO, 2008). At this point, teaching at the university is crossed by the tension between disciplinary and organization affiliations.

Thirdly, there is a twofold tendency towards professors' academic careers. On the one hand, professors are anchored in universities through university management forms that seek to guide professors' activities based on their interests. On the other hand, internationalization, mobility, and increased part-time as a form of hiring divert professors as institutions encourage nomadic careers. In this sense, teaching is crossed by the tension between forces that anchor it to organizations and forces that separate it from them, fostering careers without borders. As a result, – from the synchronic point of view – there is a tension between the disciplinary forces that tend to fragment university teaching and the organizational forces that tend to integrate it; while – from a diachronic point of view – there is a tension between forces that disconnect the trajectories of the professors from the institution itself and those that intend to link them, guiding the professors according to their purposes and interests.

Finally, it should be noted that the analysis of the relational nature of teaching on a daily basis allowed us to approach multiple dimensions that configure this practice and to recognize the tensions that cross it. These issues make the complexity, heterogeneity, and specificity of university teaching work, which is not always recognized. This is because “work was and still is a subject little analyzed and reflected upon in university life” (MARTÍNEZ, 2013, p. 48). Thus, the approach proposed here of teaching as a relational practice sought to make visible the interwoven bonds which have configured teaching and put university professors in a network of multiple relationships with other subjects, knowledge, and institutions.

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para descubrirlo, conservarlo, depurarlo, transmitirlo o aplicarlo. En este sentido, el autor afirma que lo que hace un profesor universitario es circular con un paquete de conocimiento, general o específico, en busca de la manera de aumentarlo o enseñarlo a los demás. De esta sustancia crecientemente especializada y autónoma se derivan ciertos aspectos de forma, agrupándose las tareas y los trabajadores de acuerdo con diversos paquetes de conocimiento.

Becher (2001, p. 13) se interesó en “trazar un mapa del multicolor territorio del conocimiento académico y por explorar las diversas características de quienes lo habitan y lo cultivan”. El autor afirma que en el campo universitario coexisten tribus ligadas a determinados territorios (territorios cognitivos) que operan con una determinada tradición cognitiva (categorías de pensamiento) y códigos de comportamiento (Clark, 1983). Cada una de esas tribus posee sus propias tradiciones, costumbres y prácticas; conocimientos, creencias y principios morales; formas lingüísticas y simbólicas de comunicación y significados que unifican a quienes forman parte de ella y que deben ser adquiridas por quienes pretenden pertenecer a la tribu (Araujo, 2008). Ingresar a la universidad en carácter de estudiante o de docente supone socializarse en una cultura institucional peculiar y en una determinada cultura académica. Aunque se hayan transitado varios años como alumno en una determinada carrera universitaria que brinda las herramientas necesarias para la apropiación de los saberes de la cultura disciplinar de pertenencia, el pasaje a la categoría de docente implica nuevos aprendizajes en relación a la lógica de la disciplina. Ser profesor de determinada área disciplinar no constituye una extensión de las prácticas ejercidas y de las identidades construidas durante la experiencia estudiantil. Los procesos de aprendizaje y afiliación, tanto cognitiva como institucional (Coulon, 1997), que sirvieron para la incorporación de los estudiantes a ese nuevo mundo que es la universidad necesitan ser puestos en marcha nuevamente para habitar el mundo universitario desde otra posición: la de profesor o profesora. Ser docente universitario implica nuevas y diferentes relaciones con la institución, con los estudiantes, con aquellos que de maestros pasan a ser colegas y con un conocimiento que ahora debe ser enseñado.

Las prácticas de enseñanza adquieren particulares configuraciones según los campos disciplinares y las herramientas metodológicas de que se dispone para llevarlas adelante. Además de los conocimientos disciplinares, requiere ciertos saberes didácticos y pedagógicos (en lo relativo a la organización de las actividades en clases, el uso de recursos didácticos, la motivación de los estudiantes, el fomento de la participación, etc.) que no todos los docentes universitarios han construido. Al respecto, un profesor del área de Ciencias Exactas y Naturales plantea: “*un docente tiene que saber explicar, tiene que saber algo de pedagogía o saber manejar una clase, pero ¿Cómo le exigís eso a una persona que no tiene formación en ese sentido?*” (UNCPBA, Profesor novel CExN, Entrevista 15, Pág. 2). Un colega del área artística afirma que “*hay muchas carreras que no le da la formación necesaria al docente para poder llevar adelante bien sus clases*” (UNCPBA, Profesor ART, Entrevista 22, Pág. 2). Por su parte, una profesora de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades critica la ausencia de formación pedagógica en su formación de grado y considera un absurdo que no se exija en el nivel universitario la capacitación docente que sí se requiere en otros niveles (UNCPBA, Ayudante de docencia CSH, Entrevista 3, Pág. 3). Los docentes ponen en evidencia que el sistema los habilita para desempeñar una función — la función docente— para lo cual no todos fueron preparados.

De modo que puede afirmarse que, en relación a la formación pedagógica, los/as docentes universitarios se encuentran en desigualdad de condiciones. En muchas áreas, los profesores cuentan fundamentalmente con la solvencia en el conocimiento de su disciplina. Son más bien intuiciones las que tienen acerca de las características de sus estudiantes y las peculiaridades de los procesos de aprendizaje, así como de las limitaciones y potencialidades de determinadas estrategias de enseñanza. En otras áreas disciplinares, sin embargo, se considera indispensable poseer esos conocimientos para poder llevar adelante la práctica de enseñanza. Éstas son fundamentalmente áreas en las que el sujeto de aprendizaje o la práctica de enseñanza forman parte de su objeto de estudio. De esta manera, ocurre que profesores universitarios en el ejercicio de su función docente deben llevar adelante una tarea cuya formación no se encuentra previamente garantizada ya que en su mayoría fueron preparados para desempeñarse como biólogos, ingenieros, médicos, contadores, etc. Estas tensiones en las relaciones con el conocimiento (disciplinar y pedagógico) que se establece en el ejercicio del trabajo docente, remite a la cuestión de la identidad de los profesores y profesoras universitarios (Zabalza, 2009; Lucarelli, 2004) y a las marcas de la profesión de origen que hacen de la docencia una 'categoría residual' (Chiroleu, 2002). Y es que la profesión académica nuclea a graduados que, una vez obtenidas sus titulaciones, no ejercen la profesión para la que fueron formados más allá del espacio universitario, sino que desarrollan su trayectoria profesional y laboral en cargos docentes en las propias universidades (Edelstein, 2012). Otra cuestión a señalar respecto de la relación con el conocimiento que supone el ejercicio del trabajo docente, emerge de la vinculación de la necesidad de formación permanente y la lógica de mercado que impera en el capo universitario. Sostiene un profesor: "*Vos hiciste un grado, pero después hiciste un máster, después hiciste un doctorado, después vendrá un pos doc y estás corriendo siempre*" (UNCPBA, Profesora CSH, Entrevista 7, Pág. 7). Los docentes se refirieron a la tendencia a "*correr detrás de los títulos*", "*ir detrás de la zanahoria*". Así, si bien la titulación académica constituye un requisito para el ingreso a un cargo docente, en los últimos años se ha configurado un mercado universitario de posgrados, congresos, cursos, seminarios, etc. que, al igual que plantea Collins (1989) en su análisis de la sociedad credencialista, no garantizan per se conocimientos y habilidades. Como manifestaron los profesores y profesoras entrevistados, muchas veces la decisión de realizar un posgrado, asistir a un congreso o cursar un seminario obedece más a una estrategia por la obtención de esa moneda de cambio que es la credencial, que a una necesidad o interés formativos. Por último, cabe señalar que la pertenencia a un campo disciplinar, entendiendo la disciplina como una construcción socio-histórica- ubica diferencialmente a sus integrantes en el espacio universitario, generando condiciones de desigualdad en términos de reconocimiento y prestigio. Socialmente, no es lo mismo ejercer el trabajo docente siendo médico que pedagogo. No goza del mismo prestigio un profesor del área de Ciencias Exactas y Naturales o Medicina que otro de Ciencias Sociales, Humanidades o Arte. En este sentido, la relación con el conocimiento en el ejercicio del trabajo docente está atravesada por dinámicas de legitimación de la estratificación ocupacional y la reproducción social. Los mecanismos de cierre social de determinadas comunidades profesionales y su auto-legitimación mediante la ideología técnico-funcionalista que argumenta la necesidad de una larga y selectiva formación especializada se erigen como estrategias de protección del gremio (Collins, 1989) que generan representaciones sociales sobre tales comunidades.

#### 4. REFLEXIONES FINALES

La trama de múltiples relaciones en que los profesores universitarios desarrollan su quehacer diario, impide hablar del trabajo docente como una categoría homogénea. Su multidimensionalidad y especificidad, las condiciones diversas en las que se desarrolla, así como su carácter relacional, hacen del trabajo docente universitario un dominio diverso (Scott, 2008), una práctica compleja (Morín, 1994) de límites difusos (Sancho Gil, 2001). Las relaciones que en el ejercicio de trabajo docente se establece con la institución, colegas, estudiantes, conocimientos y saberes están permeadas por el tipo de relación que la universidad mantiene con la sociedad.

El análisis realizado permite advertir que el carácter relacional del trabajo da lugar a la configuración de una serie de tensiones. En primer lugar, puede decirse que el trabajo docente es considerado por los sujetos como una práctica social de carácter colectivo, que requiere del trabajo conjunto y de criterios compartidos. Sin embargo, se reconoce que las condiciones y regulaciones que configuran el trabajo cotidiano, propician prácticas y dinámicas que atentan contra la conformación de vínculos de confianza, solidaridad y compromiso con otros. Es en este sentido, que se puede afirmar que el trabajo docente en la universidad está atravesado por la tensión entre lo individual y lo colectivo.

En segundo lugar, se reconocen tendencias que tienden a centralizar a los docentes en torno a la universidad como organización y fuerzas que fragmentan las identidades en torno a campos disciplinares específicos. El análisis desde la perspectiva organizacional y la recuperación de la dimensión disciplinaria permite comprender el trabajo docente en el marco del interjuego entre lo general y lo particular propio de ese universo simbólico organizacional que reconoce a todos los integrantes como miembros de la universidad, y aquel universo simbólico disciplinar que fragmenta la construcción de identidades alrededor de matrices disciplinarias y campos profesionales con prácticas idiosincrásicas (Araujo, 2008). En este punto, el trabajo docente en la universidad está atravesado por la tensión entre la pertenencia disciplinar y la pertenencia a una organización.

En tercer lugar, se reconoce una doble tendencia en relación a las carreras académicas de los docentes. Por un lado, se ancla a los docentes a las universidades a través de formas de gestión de las universidades que buscan orientar las actividades de los profesores en función de sus intereses. Por el otro, la internacionalización, la movilidad y el aumento del tiempo parcial como forma de contratación los desvinculan de las instituciones fomentando las carreras nómadas. En este sentido, el trabajo docente está atravesado por la tensión entre fuerzas que lo anclan a una organización y fuerzas que los desvinculan de ellas propiciando carreras sin fronteras. De modo que a la tensión —desde un punto de vista sincrónico— entre las fuerzas disciplinares que tienden a la fragmentación del trabajo docente universitario y las fuerzas organizacionales que tienden a su integración, se le puede agregar —desde un punto de vista diacrónico— la tensión entre fuerzas que desvinculan las trayectorias de los docentes de la propia institución y las que las pretenden ligarlas orientándolas en función de sus finalidades e intereses.

Por último, cabe señalar que el análisis del carácter relacional de la docencia universitaria desde la categoría de trabajo permitió abordar múltiples dimensiones que configuran dicha práctica y reconocer tensiones que la atraviesan. Cuestiones éstas que

hacen a la complejidad, heterogeneidad y especificidad del trabajo docente en la universidad y que no siempre son reconocidas. Y esto porque “el trabajo como tal ha sido y aún es, escaso tema de análisis y reflexión en la vida universitaria” (Martínez, 2013, p. 48). En este sentido, el abordaje que aquí se propuso del trabajo docente como práctica relacional buscó visibilizar el entramado de vínculos que lo van configurando y que coloca a los profesores y profesoras universitarios en una red de múltiples relaciones con otros sujetos, saberes e instituciones.

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