

INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION AT THE ESEF: THE CHALLENGE OF COLLECTIVE CONSTRUCTION

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Abstract: This paper aims to present some reflections on the journey that the Center for Assessment of the School of Physical Education of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (NAU/ESEF/UFRGS) has been going through in the area of institutional assessment. After a brief historical overview of the assessment of Higher Education in universities in Brazil and, more specifically, at UFRGS, we shall discuss about the methodology employed by the NAU of the ESEF in the assessment process developed within the Unit. From this experience of collective building, we bring up some questions about the issue, aiming to contribute to discussions that may occur in different areas.

Keywords: Institutional assessment. Higher education. Universities. Focus groups.

1 INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we aim to present some reflections on the work we are developing in the area of institutional assessment, which has enabled us to not only envision but also tread new paths in this field. We describe a brief historical overview of the assessment of higher education in universities in Brazil and, more specifically, at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). Next, we will focus on the creation of Centers of Unit Assessment (NAU) at UFRGS, their functions and how these are being developed by NAU of the School of Physical Education (ESEF) UFRGS since 2009. In this direction, we present the methodology used by the NAU of the ESEF in institutional assessment, analyzing strengths and weaknesses observed throughout this process. We end with some questions in an attempt to contribute to discussions that may occur in different areas.

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Thus, we believe that it is productive to begin with a brief discussion about the concept of assessment that, given its complexity, leads us to a continual rescue of the proposed objectives and construction of meanings of what we do.

We may note that **to assess is to look from certain criteria** (PACHECO, 2002), since it is not possible to know whether something is good or bad, satisfactory or unsatisfactory, near or far from what we want, without identifying what we consider as a benchmark . Such parameters may present more or less flexibility, and may even vary over the course of the assessment, but, either way, they exist and constitute what we might call the 'model' and are always arbitrary, as any other choice.

In this sense, it could be said that **to assess is to exclude** (SILVA 2009), because, as we set it to be good, satisfactory or even acceptable, the object of assessment should be in a certain way and not another, and we are excluding other possibilities. It is noteworthy that excluding, in this case, does not necessarily mean to label, dismiss, criticize or punish, as in traditional school assessment practices. Excluding what is not 'useful' implies being sure of where you want to go. The features excluded from the established pattern are the ones that need to be improved or modified based on the assessment, according to the degree of detachment of the established parameters.

It is also important to consider that **to assess is to measure** (HOFFMAN, 1991), even if that can be done in different ways. Quantification, often employed in the assessment, combined with other strategies of qualitative nature, can provide important information for the referrals that may be triggered during the process.

We also believe that **to assess is to assume decision-making** (LUCKESI apud GAMA, 1997) in that the sense of knowing what one wants to reach, identifying what is not appropriate to quantify satisfactions, dissatisfactions, and expectations comprise providing information for positive change. There is no change without decision-making and decisions are choices taken. The results indicate the deficiencies and refer to decision-making for each case.

We also affirm that **to assess is to follow, mediate, challenge, and see oneself through the eyes of others** (HOFFMANN, 2005), accepting the differences and identifying individual needs in order to meet them.

Based on this brief initial reflection, one can assume the degree to which it is necessary to conjecture, consider, rebuild on the subject of assessment, during an intense, inexhaustible path, but with many productive ways. We believe that, mainly, **to assess is to think about it** (SCALLON apud HADJI, 2001) and that, simply, upon providing space for it and somehow settling this practice, the assessment will have already accomplished, in large measure, its purpose.

2 A BRIEF HISTORICAL COLLECTION

During the 90s, the assessment process within universities in Brazil was effectively implemented through the Program of Institutional Assessment of Brazilian Universities (PAIUB), where the focus of discussion and referrals aimed at searching for a better quality of courses and graduate school. In UFRGS, it was no different: designed in line with the PAIUB, the Institutional Assessment Program of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (PAIUFRGS) aimed at the internal assessment as a process which referred to institutional self-knowledge (UFRGS, 2006-2008).

It was in the presence of PAIUFRGS that Centers of Unit Assessment (NAUs), responsible for the conduct of the assessment process in their communities, were built in our university. Thus, at that time 29 NAUs were created, corresponding to 27 academic units of Higher Education, the School of Application, and the Vocational School of UFRGS.

At the ESEF, the first NAU was formed in 1994, consisting of three teachers, three students and one administrative technician, with the aim of performing the internal assessment of the Licentiate Degree Course of Physical Education, only then offered by the Unit. This assessment was focused on the objectives proposed by the course, physical resources, personnel, curriculum structure, management and offerings in the area of research and extension, whereas this Center did not present conclusive results in that period. Thus, in 1997, a new NAU was created, which remained active until 1999, completing the job with the delivery of the final report. In the period between 2000 and 2004, there was a gap in the assessment process of the Unit, making the NAU of the ESEF temporarily inactive.

In the early 2000s, Brazilian universities started to establish an assessment system set by law, under the responsibility of the MEC. Decree 3860 of 07/09/2001, instituted the National System of Higher Education Assessment (SINAES), which extended the assessment process in addition to undergraduate courses. Thus, universities started a redirection of this process, characterized by self-assessment so as to also meet that new demand. The UFRGS, on its own initiative, resumed, in 2003, the internal assessment process, through the Project of Permanent Institutional Assessment of the UFRGS (PAIUFRGS), also understood as the second Evaluation Cycle. In 2004, the PAIUFRGS gave rise to the Permanent Project for Institutional Assessment, UFRGS (PAIPUFRGS) based on the SINAES, then understood as the third Evaluation Cycle, completed in October 2005 (BRAGA, MILK, MOUSSE, 2007).

At the ESEF, in order to meet the demands of this new moment, the NAU was restored in 2004, being then composed of three teachers, three students and four administrative technicians, who completed their work by delivering an interim report in August 2005.

Decentralization of the assessment process, carried out in each academic unit by the action of the NAUs, coordinated by the Secretariat of Institutional Assessment (SAI) and the Self-Assessment Commission (CPA) – whose creation was made compulsory by the SINAES – pointed to the creation of a culture of institutional assessment focused on the participation of the subjects. However, we believe that this ‘culture’ is something that does not happen immediately, but rather emerges through a dynamic, permanent assessment process, enabling and encouraging dialogue in the different institutional sectors. Likewise, it is built by different paths, at varying paces, given the peculiarities of each unit included in the process.

Accordingly, after the delivery of a partial assessment report in 2005, the NAU of the ESEF was revived only in 2009, implementing the proposed deployment of an internal assessment system, submitted by the Unit Board, elected in December 2008.

3 THE CENTER OF ASSESSMENT OF THE ESEF TODAY

The current NAU of the ESEF, created in March 2009, consisted of a committee of nine members: three teachers, three coaches and three students. Some members have

been part of the NAU since its creation, others joined it during the assessment process, replacing the members of the same segment that could not, for some reason, stay. In the policy adopted by this committee, there is an ongoing effort by the group to be complete, with equal representation of all segments of the Unit, which until now has not been possible for many different reasons. The first members – two teachers and one technician – were invited by the Unit Board for the initiation of work, including setting the criteria for formation of the commission and assessment strategies that would be employed. The other members were invited by nominations from the segments which they represent.

In addition to the commission, the NAU of the ESEF was organized in March 2009 as well as a sector, offering its own physical space, equipment and material resources to carry out the work. In this sector, they hired an Education Technicians (Commission member) and two scholarship students funded by the SAI. The NAU of the ESEF has a coordinator and a coordinator replacement, chosen by the committee. This structure aims at enabling institutional assessment as ongoing and continuous, focused on different aspects of the practices to the everyday life of the unit.

The NAU's work consists of weekly meetings of the committee, in which strategies are discussed, decisions are made and actions to be effected by each member and by the sector during the period between meetings are deliberated. This assessment process has been developed at different stages set in advance by the commission. At the end of each job step, the results are discussed with the various segments of the community of the ESEF through meetings and assemblies. Thereafter, reports are prepared and delivered to the Board and widely disseminated within the Unit. Reports are also prepared to meet the requirements of external assessment and are submitted to the SAI/UFRGS upon request, in view of the established criteria and deadlines.

The operation of the NAU of the ESEF is based on the systematic dialogue between the subjects – committee/industry/community/leadership – about setting goals and actions planned in order to achieve the internal and external goals, within the proposed institutional assessment.

4 PREPARATION FOR THE METHODOLOGY PROCESS

Aiming to build a characterization of the ESEF, the NAU has mapped its different sections, courses, physical resources, human resources and interfaces established internally and externally. This mapping was necessary, since knowing the reality of organizational institution is essential for assessing positive and negative aspects and, above all, to envision possibilities for improvement.

The Commission scheduled visits with all the coordinators of the sectors in which two members of the NAU presented their proposal and requested a characterization that portrayed what the sector is, how it is composed, its functions and purposes, who it serves, and all the additional data deemed necessary. The sectors thus offered indications about its availability for the assessment process and what they considered reference quality.

We list the following sectors for the survey data: Assessment of Projects, Library, Center for Olympic Studies, Center of Sports Memory, Olympic Center, Extension Committee, Committee of Undergraduate Dance, Commission on Undergraduate Physics Education, Commission on Undergraduate of Physical Therapy, Research Committee, Department of Physical Education, Board, Academic Board, Specialization, Photocopies, Computer Laboratory, Exercise Research Laboratory, Cleaning, Maintenance, Center of Unit Assessment, Entrance, Tutorial Education Program, Graduate Studies Program – MA, PhD, University Restaurant, Movimento Magazine, Administrative Secretariat, and Security.

After analyzing the data from this first stage of work, the Center of Assessment considered it appropriate to enrich the look on the internal operating procedures. The second step aimed to give voice to people who work in the Unit, in different segments at different positions, analyzing the processes of organizing work routines, the conditions for the performance of professional activities, as well as policies and interpersonal relationships that are established within the institutional framework.

Within the perspective of qualitative research, which excels in anchored interpreting in the context and aims at the observation, description, understanding and meaning (SILVA, OLIVEIRA, PEREIRA, LIMA, 2010), we opted to use the technique of focus groups in the second stage of data collection. This choice was based on studies conducted by the NAU on this technique in numerous meetings about the adequacy of the same previously established objectives.

The ‘focus group’ technique, defined by Barbosa and Gomes (1999, p.1) as “[...] an informal discussion group reduced in size, with the purpose of obtaining qualitative information in depth” has gained a privileged *locus* in various areas of study since the 80s, but it is as of the 90s that it began to be employed with a higher incidence by university researchers.

There is a consensus that the choice of members that will be part of a focus group is a relevant task, as they should have at least one common trait so that their ideas and views can contribute to the study. From this perspective, the technique can be used with a group of people who already knew each other previously or not, but it is important to highlight the thoughts of Aschidamini and Saupe (2004) and Cruz Neto, Moreira and Cena (2002) that the decision to participate in this kind of group should be individual and free of any coercion, and that participants are properly informed about the topic(s) addressed and objectives of the study.

Considering that a focus group should be small enough so that everyone has the opportunity to explain their views, and large enough to enable participants to properly expose the diversity of ideas, Gondim (2002) points out that the constitution of the group is four to ten people, depending on the level of involvement of each participant with the subject, if it arouses the interest of a particular group, or if the subject is controversial.

The meeting is attended by a moderator, who intervenes whenever he or she deems necessary, trying to focus and deepen the discussion, and an observer, who complements the action of the moderator as he or she observes behaviors, expressions, and reactions that are not expressed in speech .

The moderator plays a key role in the technique, being responsible for the initiation, motivation, development, and conclusion of debates (CRUZ NETO; MOREIRA; Sucena, 2002). He or she must lead the discussion by proposing topics, keeping the group focused on the topic being discussed, and ensuring that each participant is heard.

The main job of the observer is to assist the facilitator in conducting the group; he or she identifies the participants on their arrival, organizes the recorder and arranges the signing of consent by the participants and, most importantly, note the language body,

the ‘silence’ and other actions of the respondents and the moderator during the interview. Cruz Neto, Moreira and Cena (2002) underscore the importance of the observer, since his or her notes should reflect on the constant improvement of work quality and overcome the problems and difficulties faced.

The recorded interviews are transcribed for later analysis. In terms of information analysis, Gondim (2002) suggests that transcribed interviews should be read and entries that appear in each one should be coded, and this can be done based on categories previously developed or, inductively, from all the answers produced in the group. Thus, trends and potential patterns can be observed as well as opinions frequently and substantially expressed by participants in relation to the subject, which is the focus the discussion.

5 IMPLEMENTATION OF FOCUS GROUPS

Considering all the aspects mentioned here about the technique, the implementation of focus groups at the ESEF began. Using as a reference document of the ‘Ten dimensions of assessment of higher education’, prepared by the MEC (BRAZIL, 2001) and issues raised in the first stage, the committee determined that four issues would be addressed as axes of the discussions: planning, structure, recovery, and professional communication. Moreover, it was considered important to open a space to also discuss the very process of institutional assessment and to be posted positive aspects and areas for improvement in each sector. For such issues, there was no pre-conceived assumption, and the discussion is subject to taking different directions, as the contribution of each group.

The formation of groups was based on the goal of listening to all sectors of the ESEF in its different segments. Thus, participating in focus groups, there were: managers and coordinators, UFRGS employees, outsourced workers, secretaries, scholarship students, scholars, and professor and student representatives. The groups gathered people in the same segment, from different sectors. This strategy was used to allow people to feel comfortable to bring their contributions, being with their peers and even identifying themselves, often with similar situations occurring in other sectors. We also adopted the criterion to not repeat the same people in different groups, although we

found that many accumulate functions, aiming at gathering a larger number of participants in the overall scope.

For the teachers, we had considerable difficulty to propose schedules that reconcile their holdings due to the nature of the activities that develop and the lack of a common time of encounter between them. This difficulty also occurred with some officials. Thus, the formation of some groups outside the criterion planned meeting with the couple was required to ensure participation of all.

At this stage, 15 groups were heard, totaling 64 people, including 27 section coordinators, 4 professor representatives, 7 student representatives, 4 secretaries, 5 UFRGS employees, 5 contractors, and 12 scholarship students, in interviews lasting about two hours.

Because the Assessment Committee is also formed by different segments – students, teachers and technicians – we believe that everyone should be involved as mediators and observers. From this premise, people were arranged to work in pairs, always bringing two different segments (student/teacher, student/technician, teacher/technician) for the purpose of the interviews in focus groups. From the assessment of the first applications, we chose to keep as a mediator, where possible, someone from the same segment of respondents, making them more comfortable for effective participation.

At the beginning of each focus group, participants were informed about the methodology that would be employed and the subsequent use of the material collected by signing an informed consent. It was explained that the interviews would be transcribed and the names of the participants would be hidden, expressing only the position of the respondent. After the transcription, data were organized into summary tables, according to the subject discussed. Thus it was possible to view the contributions of different segments and sectors on each of the topics. From the reading of the tables, there were recurrences, disagreements and individual positions, allowing the construction of analytical texts, expressed in the form of a report by the Commission of the NAU.

The analysis presented was restricted to pointing the questions raised by participants of the groups linked to the overall context of the interviews. These issues

were later exposed in a general assembly to the entire ESEF community and discussed by different segments together in order to build referrals suggestions. Today we can say that one important result was achieved in this process, which consists of the satisfaction of the participants with the opportunity to be able to express their opinions and have them sent to the deliberative bodies.

With regard to new stages of assessment, the NAU is working today in the assessment of the courses offered by the Unit, involving physical, human resources and especially the curriculum. Based on surveys, focus groups with samples of students (of the four courses offered) and focus groups with the total (Physiotherapy and Dance courses) number or samples (in Physical Education courses) of teachers, it aims to obtain data to allow the portraying of the look of those directly involved in educational processes regarding the courses.

Although we have often faced the impetus to develop suggestions or see ways, we understand that the function of the NAU is essentially to assess processes, giving voice to individuals and subsidizing reflections on the institutional routine that can result in improved processes.

6 TEMPORARY CONSIDERATIONS

We present here the result of our choices, as evaluators, and our look, as unbiased as possible, but also full of expectations about what we describe for now. This was a collective, participatory and engaged constructions with the seriousness required to the difficult task of evaluating.

As stated by Larrosa Bondia (2002, p. 1-2),

[...] the words with which we name what we are, what we do, what we think, what we perceive, or what we feel are more than just words. [...] thinking is not only “reasoning” or “estimating” or “discussing” as we have been taught a few times, but more importantly, it consists of making sense of who we are and what happens to us. And this, the sense or nonsense, is something that has to do with words.

In this way, ‘to think is to give sense’ – a sense we plan to translate through our words. The choice is difficult and the sense often eludes us. We lose track of how many

times we replace words by others, trying to be faithful to what we think. But we know that words are not neutral and that the text is outdated and incomplete as soon as we finish it.

Thus, our intention in this article was to report only a few steps of a long walk on the task of assessing. These were not the first steps – for many have had this task – nor were they the last ones, because so many others will continue it. However, we hope we have contributed in some way and have given meaning to what we have presented here.

Avaliação institucional na ESEF: o desafio de uma construção coletiva

Resumo: Este artigo tem por objetivo apresentar algumas reflexões sobre a caminhada que o Núcleo de Avaliação da Escola de Educação Física da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (NAU/ESEF/UFRGS) vem trilhando na área da avaliação institucional. Após uma breve contextualização histórica da avaliação do Ensino Superior nas Universidades brasileiras e, mais especificamente, na UFRGS, discorreremos a respeito da metodologia empregada pelo NAU da ESEF no processo avaliativo desenvolvido dentro da Unidade. A partir desta experiência de construção coletiva, trazemos alguns questionamentos acerca do tema, na tentativa de contribuir para discussões que possam vir a ocorrer em diversos âmbitos.

Palavras-chave: Avaliação institucional. Educação superior. Universidades. Grupo focal.

Evaluación institucional en ESEF: el desafío de la construcción colectiva

Resumen: Este artículo tiene como objetivo presentar algunas reflexiones sobre el camino que el Núcleo de Evaluación de la Escuela de Educación Física de la Universidad Federal del Río Grande del Sur (NAU/ESEF/UFRGS) viene atravesando en el ámbito de la evaluación institucional. Después de una breve reseña histórica de la evaluación de la educación superior en universidades de Brasil y, más concretamente, de la UFRGS, se discurre acerca de la metodología utilizada por el Núcleo de la ESEF en el proceso de evaluación dentro de la Unidad. A partir de esta experiencia de construcción colectiva, se presentan algunas reflexiones acerca de la cuestión en un intento de contribuir a los debates que pueden ocurrir en diferentes áreas.

Palabras clave: Evaluación institucional. Educación superior. Universidades. Grupo focal.

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