

СЕТЕВОЕ ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЕ В ОБРАЗОВАНИИ

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Sami Basha

PhD, Vice President for Planning and Development Affairs, Director of Special Education Center and Program, Palestine Ahliya University College, Bethlehem, West Bank (Palestine).

E-mail: basha@forzapace.net

EDUCATIVE NETWORK'S ROLE IN REINFORCING THE ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE PALESTINIAN UNIVERSITIES (REFLECTIVE MODEL TOWARD AND INNOVATION IN TEACHING AND LEARNING)

Abstract. *The need* for an educational proposal to emerge in the Palestinian educational context is necessary and needed to face the various challenges that the higher education is dealing with in Palestine. The centers for teaching and learning (CTEs) in the Palestinian universities should be seen as part of the effort to support the evolving process and the innovation needed to allow these higher education institutions be able to compete on local, regional and international level.

Methods. It is an approach to a contextualized education, with a significant role played by all who connects and interacts with the community environment and society needs, in order to build an educative community projects. This needs a real educative action with engagement and commitment by all role actors and stakeholders.

Results and scientific novelty. Based on personal experience I would like to transmit what I have learned and gained in my teaching and learning experiences and present an educative proposal that is based on the connection between the different educative higher institutions in Palestine. This proposal tackles social and educational challenges through a common process; it is about adapting a concrete model of Educative network in Palestine.

The proposal is presenting itself as an alternative model to help the higher education to be more integrated to the society needs and to obtain the coordina-

tion role for innovative actions in a comprehensive way to fulfill the educational vision of being a leading body in the evolving society in conflict.

Practical significance. The purpose of this article is to offer a very practical reflective model that becomes a guidance to sustain CTEs activities and engage more faculties to positively change the learning/teaching culture of their universities. It is about how networks can help to bring about change to education in the Palestinian Universities. I believe that university policymakers and CTEs all alike will find the reasons why educative networks are fast becoming the learning reform organizations.

Keywords: Centers for Teaching Excellence «CTEs», Educative network, contextualized education, Higher Education, educative community, innovative actions, and reflective model.

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Сами Баша

доктор наук, вице-президент по планированию и развитию, директор Центра специального образования Палестинского университета Алия, Вифлеем, Западный берег реки Иордан (Палестина).

E-mail: basha@forzapace.net

РАЗВИТИЕ ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНОГО ПРОСТРАНСТВА ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ ПАЛЕСТИНЫ (РЕФЛЕКТИВНАЯ МОДЕЛЬ: СЕТЕВАЯ ИННОВАЦИОННАЯ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТЬ В ПРЕПОДАВАНИИ И ОБУЧЕНИИ)

Аннотация. Цель статьи – показать возможности сетевой модели деятельности университетов, адаптированной к специфике образовательного пространства Палестины. Такая модель позволит, по мнению автора, преодолеть различные проблемы, с которыми сталкивается палестинская высшая школа, изыскать дополнительные ресурсы для ее развития, позитивно изменить процесс обучения и культуру преподавания в университетах.

Методы и методология. Исследование опирается на контекстуальный подход к организации высшего образования.

Результаты и научная новизна. Описана альтернативная традиционному обучению сетевая модель высшего палестинского образования. Доказывается, что для ее реализации необходимо создание центров преподавания и обучения (ЦПО) в высших учебных заведениях. Предназначение таких организаций, осуществляющих работу по сетевому принципу, состоит в поддержке инновационных процессов в высшей школе, повышении ее конкуренто-

способности на местном, региональном и международном уровнях через привлечение к решению социальных и образовательных задач как можно большего числа способных и высококвалифицированных профессионалов.

Автор, исходя из личного опыта преподавательской и организаторской работы в сетевом поле, объединяющем различные вузы Палестины, полагает, что благодаря сетевому сотрудничеству ЦПО способны стать локомотивом проведения эффективных реформ в образовательной сфере на территории государства. Подобные центры могут исполнять координационную роль в создании и претворении в реальность общественно-образовательных проектов с участием всех заинтересованных сторон и комплексным учетом потребностей общества, развивающегося в условиях конфликта.

Практическая значимость. Внедрение в практику высшего образования предлагаемой в публикации модели поможет добиться качественных перемен в деятельности палестинских университетов, сделать высшую школу более интегрированной в социальные и экономические процессы в государстве.

Ключевые слова: Центры преподавания и обучения (ЦПО), образовательное пространство, контекстуальный подход в обучении, высшее образование, образовательное сообщество, инновационные процессы, рефлексивная модель.

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Introduction

One of the most powerful spontaneous concepts was introduced to me during my visit to San Diego in California this year by a colleague during an international conference, who tried to explain to me the real meaning of being professionally involved in education; «MRI» which stands for «Most respectful interpretation». This concept stopped me to reflect on my practices and my understanding of teaching and learning in the most respectful way. My colleague was so serious about how much it is important for any faculty to be able to process and elaborate our teaching based on a collaborative approach where respect and appreciation are given to any learning activity and good interpretation is always a fruit of networking. It is the most powerful way that offers opportunities to connect with faculty and build networks that are critical to making the most of the academic experience successful for all and on all levels. The use of effective networks offer explanations for challenges that the network poses for understandings of what counts as professional development, university regulations for planning and delivering instruction, communication of research, and teacher-student roles [20]. Cristillo in his na-

tional study through the PFDP program funded by AMIDEAST, highlighted the importance of professional development of university faculty and the university benefits to strengthen interuniversity cooperation through professional networks among colleagues, both nationally and internationally [6], while Lughd sees the important experience that university campus brings together specially the plural nature of Palestinian society, helps in transforming society at large, in creating different networks that can be mobilized to achieve a higher degree of national integration [14]. It is all about making benefit of the great diversity that exist in our universities and the positive impact that could have for a better future.

I was a project director of a grant addressing special needs programs in higher education with the AMIDEAST/USAID in 2011, through which I was able to establish network of university professors from all Palestinian universities, who met to rethink how academia can better address the special needs education. A focus of my work brought to the development of the very first MA Academic program in special education published as a national document in 2012, by the Catholic University of Milan EDUCAT. I cannot forget how effective the work was and how much effort we invested not just to produce the final document but also to learn from each other and appreciate each other's input suggestions and comments. It was a learning experience for all and a rich environment that lead us to productive results at the end. It is where success is not any more considered an individual effort and achievement rather a mutual process that leads to a collective triumph. Many other individuals helped in building this program especially from the community. When I first call the people to join, they were not totally sure about this invitation and I felt that trust was not established yet. When we have started the process, all (Families, schools principles, students and non-profit organizations) were so happy to contribute and offer their in put on how better to support this program in its best shape and that can be useful to people after student's graduation.

Networks bring teachers, principals and other stakeholders together to share ideas, observe best practices, identify, analyze problems, and develop strategies for improved teaching, learning, and community life [19]. From my personal experience, these networks are becoming important methods to enhance educational renewal, student's achievement and their wellbeing. It is an innovative and indirect method for student's engagement in learning, where they see a concrete simulation of theories that we teach them in class and become more open to learn and be part of the learning process.

Wiel Veugelers is Professor of Education and founder and director of the School Network of the University of Amsterdam. He has made the theo-

retical base of his ideas of networking which makes use of many different concepts of educational change theory, such as educational change processes, empowering of teachers, professional development, communities of practice, the network society and democratic education. I believe personally that in Palestine we have already adapted various levels all of these concepts, accordingly all what we need to do is simply start evaluating their validity in our educational sets. It is about validating more the network drive and gives more space for more network creativity, so the university becomes more a laboratory of ideas and incubator of entrepreneurship.

In the first part of the article, I will feature some of the challenges we have in Palestine and how to concentrate on heading toward more productive changes and support for our higher education innovation and community good practices through the CTEs.

In the second part of the article, I will provide the lessons learned and what is necessary to keep up with this innovative concept in higher education and the contextualized education. A concrete example shown in a proposed model that is applicable for Palestinian network will be presented in this article.

The article concludes by looking at networking as a strategy for educational change. This is key reading for education students, educational consultants and teacher educators with an interest in educational leadership, educational change, and CTEs who wants to have an overall look on functional accomplishments achieved.

Academic challenges

We have to remember that our higher education institutions have a young age and they are younger than 100 years [8]. This brings us to the fact that Arab education in general is in transition due to the undergoing rapid socio political changes. Many of the Arab universities are facing many obstacles including shortage of qualified teachers, inadequacy of financial resources, the brain drain and the lack of interest in teaching careers. Added to all what was mentioned, is the absence of information networks that compounds the problem. The information networks is so important to all universities specially when it comes to how can the universities relate to community development and how to institutionalized change in settings which are so traditional oriented.

The lack of coordination and absence of major players in the educational process especially from the community, whom we consider the main potential beneficiaries of the process, has shortened the possibilities for curriculum development. Without their integral involvement, our Palestinian universities will continue to suffer from shortcomings such as a lack of realism.

The results of a study done by Institute of West Asian Studies in 2012 on the service quality of Palestine Higher education, suggest that the “service quality” in Palestine universities is slightly unsatisfactory to the students and needs further attention [1].

To explore further this issue, I have developed a survey to students spread to all Palestinian universities to look at their learning and explore more understanding of the faculty practices based on the different approaches they have been experiencing during their studies. Many questions were asked and 652 students answered. The results are still under analyzes but 2 questions from the survey can be helpful to us and relevant to this paper.

First questions: During the current school year how often have you done the following? Connected your learning to societal problems or issues

Answer		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Often	158	24.2	25.0	25.0
	Often	198	30.4	31.3	56.2
	Sometimes	207	31.7	32.7	88.9
	Never	70	10.7	11.1	100.0
	Total	633	97.1	100.0	
Missing	System	19	2.9		
Total		652	100.0		

From the table above we notice high percentage (31.7%) show that the connection with the community is very low and clearly not systematic or structured in the curriculum. The following chart also shows a high percentage (59%) of so many of our university courses have not included a community – based project (service-learning).

Answer		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Often	24	3.7	4.5	4.5
	Often	108	16.6	20.2	24.7
	Sometimes	315	48.3	59.0	83.7
	Never	87	13.3	16.3	100.0
	Total	534	81.9	100.0	
Missing	System	118	18.1		
Total		652	652	100.0	

From the above two tables, it is clear that there is a need to promote the concept of educative networks and empower student’s social skills to connect with the community and be able to build bridges to help them learn

better and connect what they learn with the real life. I hope this can be helpful to our CTEs when they plan their Activities for the coming academic year.

Heading toward more productive changes

The universities are seen as having a pivotal role in the network of power and decision making in education worldwide, influencing in peculiar ways research and policy-making in developing countries as well as influencing the international discourse in education by different means [13].

In the national study of undergraduate teaching practices in Palestine, Luis Cristillo, highlighted the absence of information related to the quality of teaching and to what is happening in the classroom and if this process helps in student's success [6]. Having said this, I believe that this and all what was mentioned in Cristillo study show that there is no space for faculty to respire and have enough time on developing their own skills and capacity to implement quality teaching learning in their teaching, and accordingly, faculty can invest very little in enhancing educative networking and promote it in their teaching. The role of CTEs is crucial in exercise pressure and tries to impact the university policy each in the proper universities; otherwise, we cannot move forward to improve the university academic level. I wish that Cristillo study will impact the policy makers to shed light on the relationship between learning quality and faculty rights to have enough time to develop innovative ideas and raise the level of faculty capacity to benefit from the community connections.

Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab brought up an examination of contemporary Arab thought during the mid-nineteenth century Arab cultural renaissance, the *Nahda*, and follows this movement to the philosophical crises that have plagued Arab thinkers since the disastrous 1967 defeat at the hands of the Israelis. She argues that the growing of political despotism has affected negatively the health of Arab cultures. She presents a hope in new Arab intelligentsia to critically reexamine and encourage self-awareness [12]. The Arab spring and in spite of all negative aspects, it did contribute to this rise of hope where young people especially in Palestine have started to pretend change of method and curriculum in the educational system that is based on memorization.

As far as I remember, the ministry of higher education and the Palestinian government gave official statements about the need to revisit our teaching in the higher education and to see how beneficial to connect with the community and listen to the market's need. I believe that all universities should be involved in the creation of negotiation forums to deal with the significant daily issues that emerge as the society evolves. This is the only way that will help the higher education institutions gain credibility within the lo-

cal community. It should hold accountable to the community for the students it produces.

Connecting with the community means also being engaged with the Palestinian schools that are struggling with the level of students and are open toward more collaboration with the universities to elevate the level of learning for students at the university. This cannot be done without being involved in an educative network that includes all those who are interested in this issue.

A study on «*Factors that impede the teaching of critical thinking in the Palestinian schools in effective way*» gave significant results that support the need for educative networks in Palestine [11]. One of the many reasons is that students are not trained to regulate their learning processes, and teachers lack of training. Both results need a reflection and serious change by creating a reflection forum to face this big problem that is impacting negatively the learning process in higher education. If a network efforts could help in finding solution to this challenge then learning in higher education will improve. It is about finding new ways to understand the reason that stands behind learning challenges in society in a more holistic perspective through educative networks.

Proposal for Palestinian Educative Network's chart «PPENC»

In the following paragraph I would like to share a chart that reflect the way I see future possible academic networking in our higher education institution, based on my past experience hoping it can be helpful and more developed in the future based on any feedback or suggestions from colleagues in the Palestinian Universities and I will be ready and available to discuss more with them.

I see it as a proposal that needs to start from a situation. The social and educational conditions in Palestine represent the major challenges that become a reason why we need a valid network that can reflect on how better to address not only the actual challenges but the future unseen ones as well. It is basically about how can the so called «Arab modern universities» put together truth, knowledge and reality, all together and practice a strong network to accelerate the process of change and making of persons benevolent members of the society [2].

A good and successful model for network of regional learning centers was the result of the feasibility study in 1980, which led to the establishment of the Al Quds Open University in response to the growing need for higher education among Palestinian in the occupied territories and the diaspora. All programs apply an interdisciplinary curriculum and emphasize practical ap-

plications as major component. This model has developed rapidly to expand and reach more than 61.000 students from all around Palestine distributed over twenty-two educational university's branches. This model has its strength and relevancy because of the nature of students who are enrolled. Most of these students are already involved in the market and has many connections. This has helped the university to be more community connected and more feasible to its needs.

As Heller [7] explains, membership in a group entitles one to participate in social networks and have access to roles and resources controlled by that group.

There should be a real drastic revision of thinking practices in the Arab world as invitation of Emanuele COCCIA, who is offering great challenge based on the Arab thinker (Averroes "Ibin Rushd – ابن رشد") who sustained that the ongoing thought's activity returns to each individual his dignity of being a human, otherwise and without "thinking", individuals are subject to rejection and remain in silence and ignorance [5]. He is inviting us to avoid failing in a system that transfer only knowledge and do not help students study and process what they study. The quality of transferring process can be possible only through a strong educative network where the community is involved in raising the quality of student's outcome.

All of that can be possible only if we start working together as a team and network to rethink our educational system. We are all came to a point where we made adaption to ourselves and to the actual educational system and ended up being victims, while we can still play a pioneer role in educative network to change this reality.

The following chart is a proposal for a real good practice in networking in educational set in Palestine where conflict and challenges is taken into consideration together with the society needs;

The work of teachers has changed significantly in recent years and now, more than ever, there is a pressing need for high-quality professional development [19]. This timely new challenge examines the actual and possible forms of professional learning, professional knowledge, professional development and professional standards that are beginning to emerge and be debated at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The **challenge** will be important for teachers, teacher educators, staff developers and policy makers to make better result of the educational system in our universities. Accordingly, the model invites us to start from the scientific, social, cultural and pedagogical **challenges** that exist in the community, and not those suggested in the curriculum.

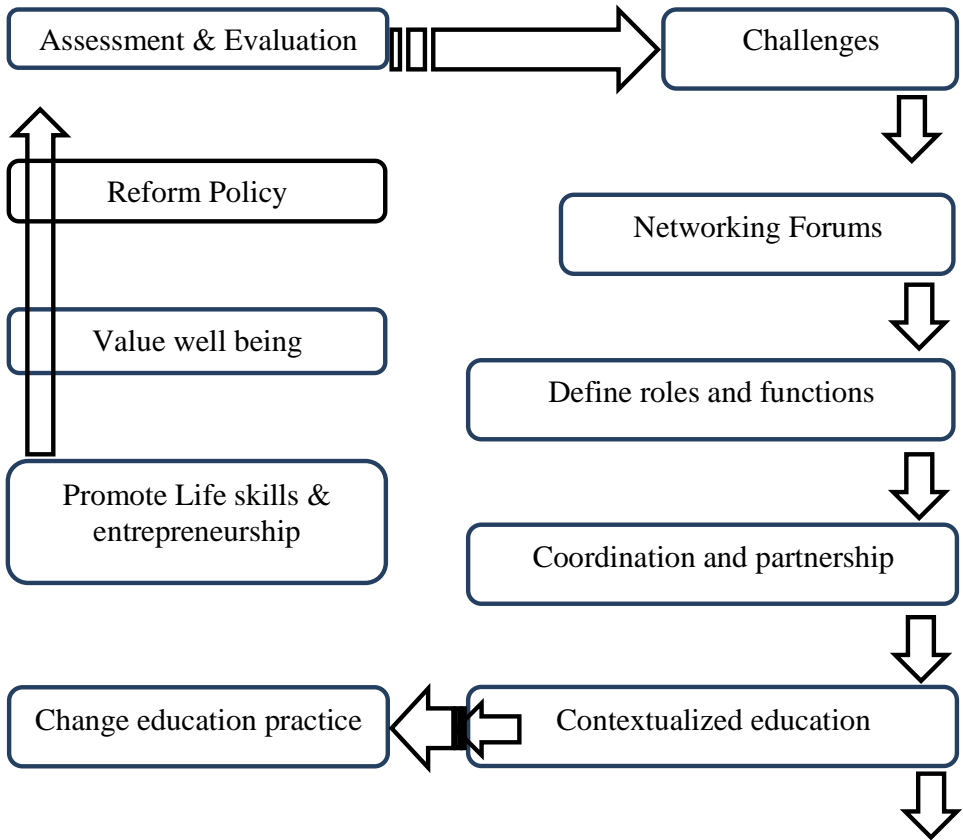


Figure – 1

A good example of a successful model of educative network **challenges** is brought to us through a research that focused on the description of the inside organization of educative networks (ENs) and the aspects that allowed their growth and success in the city of Barcelona (Spain). The ENs emerged over the last ten years in various European countries and made possible the connection between the different educative institutions in the community, to tackle social and education **challenges** in cooperation through a common project. The main aim of the ENs is to create synergies between cooperating organizations, and to coordinate community action so as to avoid the overlaps that cause parallel work. Along these years and in spite of the difficulties found, the study shows how these educative structures take advantage of the context possibilities to improve educative impact and develop a new vision of organizing and conceiving education [17].

The social, educational and political challenges are stimulus to establish around us a positive supportive people who can be of great help and can

open new orisons for our students to learn from real life. When creating a **networking forum** our work will be easier and widely holistic that can bring innovation and facilitate facing the challenges. This step of starting to **network** is a strategy to educational change, The change will bring all stakeholders together to share ideas, observe best practices, identify and analyses problems, and develop strategies for improved teaching, learning, and community life. Any **networks** that can be created in our Palestinian universities will become an important method to enhance educational renewal and student achievement. Networks forum: is the act of bringing together academics, teachers, parents, students, schools, colleges, universities, charities, companies and governments to promote progressive education.

The process of networking is ongoing process of teaching and learning. It is a mean where all learn to **define** their **roles**; being teachers and learners at the same time, where they exchange ideas and build together the new strategies to innovate education according to the need of the market.

The **networking** tradition is rooted in the classical work of George Homans [9] and is characterized as a pattern of relations among positions leading to the view that positions and **roles** determine who networks with whom and, consequently, the **networking** structure within and across the organizations. Learning in networks occurs as professionals come together as a result of their shared values, engage in social activity and produce shared resources that matters most to us rather than what we already know how to do, or can learn to do [3]. When the universities have strong innovative ideas, the network members are considered to be ambassadors for such ideas and can be instrument for change in the society and build the country democratic system where all are responsible and accountable to the common good of all citizens. And with the networks our ideas risk to remains poets written on old manuscripts.

Partnership is crucial because networks are an opportunity for our universities and the community to work together as equal partners. Usually I advise colleagues to extend a **partnership** agreement with stakeholders to assume joint responsibility for developing and sustaining the network. So, partnerships enhance ownership and learning opportunities for their members. Both recognize the benefits and challenges of developing continuous education through networks that aim to achieve the followings:

- 1) Provide and encourage personal and professional connection among all participants in the network by giving value and shape to their ideas.
- 2) Promoting action research where the university find the right topics in which invest its energy and bring inquiry into practice as a mean of improvement.

3) The networks help in building leadership to facilitate, support and engage people in network learning, to ensure collaboration at all levels among the network members.

4) Provide opportunities for the regular formal celebration of achievement through milestone's meetings of the network twice each year, and dissemination among all schools in the district.

5) Learn to coordinate and adapt our educational authority to the society needs – Coordinate between all various parties involved in this process.

When it comes to **contextualized education**, I mean here what we can integrate to the society needs: teach what is relevant and lecture what is real. Give more concrete example from the community that can be relevant to what we teach and be very concrete about connecting people with what is real.

Like many other skills, Networking has skills that need to be learned, and it all depends on the motivational components of each faculty. It is a difficult concept to discuss and many faculty are still refusing this concept and its used in their teaching practices, and might be described as a challenged concept, nevertheless we as educators should not be prevented from regarding networking as an indispensable component of education, which has educational ideas based on philosophy and gives autonomy to individuals in our complex society an promote community based learning.

Similar to the early Greeks, John Dewey believed, that education should lead the «learner» towards being a useful to the community and become active citizen and act on what he has learned. Paulo Freiré also focused on Praxis in his book Pedagogy of the Oppressed. He talks about the use of praxis in a more political sense; when the individual can reflect and take action on the world, then they can change it. This means that only through practice student can feel more connected to the world around him.

A very note Palestinian intellectual, Edward Said, has shown his intellectual commitments and their potential consequences for a newly emerging generation of critical thinking. Edward Said has considered a programmatic statements formulated in the present tense, by which Said reconsider the situation in the middle east by asking the following questions: what, then are the forms of knowledge that we can now identify as working in the ways claimed, alternatively, working otherwise. What different knowledge forms would our present day viewpoints suggest? And what may be their benefits and for whom?

Edward Said wanted to say that the knowledge that is presented is not compatible either at the level of the process of our daily life challenges. Accordingly, the educational process and the memorization cannot be compatible with our daily challenges to resist and be liberated from years of ignorance.

These above statements bring us to the point where we have to change what ought to be changed, accordingly start thinking of **changing education practices**: it is a challenge the current paradigm of education, which values academic attainment above all other goals, and start developing strengths and well-being for students, which are basically valuable and contribute to a variety of positive life outcomes. Faculty can start taking **change** seriously only when they are encouraged to reflect on their own educational practice, engage in action research and professional development, and serve as critical friends for each other. Through reflective critical study, faculty and the network members can build their skills challenge current practices, and begin to develop a shared vision of teaching and learning that impacts every aspect of the community.

Interactions on various level and with all stakeholders in the society and only when we start changing our education practices, then we reach the level of offering life skills, entrepreneurship and value wellbeing of students. The general **policy** is dead policy if it is inspired by change; accordingly, policy reform starts when we achieve the level of being real reformers in our universities and society. The policy documents can be easily then changed and be at the level of our and the society expectations. All previous acts will support collaboration with the strong impact of changing education practice to achieve the reform government policy.

These systemic problems [10] included the education system's failure as a whole to learn from the good practice it contained, its inability to draw on research carried out in academia, and the considerable interval in learning about new innovations and critically **assessing** their worth. There is also a discussion around the role, quality and purpose of instruction in higher education and **measuring, assessing and evaluating** the critical thinking as an important outcome for education. And some universities actually have already started to work on measuring this educational outcome [16]. It would be worthwhile to start using the network to find good assessment practices for Palestine to benefit from the results given so we can build better programs, policies and improve the quality of our networks. This could include processes such as enquiry methodologies, frameworks for analyzing network structures and processes such as network maps [15], theoretical models of teacher professional knowledge bases [18], and empirically grounded criteria for assessing the quality of collaborative network.

The network allows institutions to retain full independence while benefiting from co-operation with other CTEs in other universities and benefit from the support of others in the network; a kind of 'twinning' relationship allows them to correspond and organize exchanges. There are also a number of

centrally organized projects that focus on specific issues at regional or international levels. These projects give partners access to specific teaching materials and provide an additional opportunity to engage directly with other institutions. Examples of such projects include the access on international journals through some international projects like Erasmus plus and the World Bank projects, and finally the USAID various project to support higher education.

What is really needed is a well structure model of networking that can get people together to develop seriously the higher education in a way that become competitive on regional and international level otherwise we will continue to be considered a behind institutions without production living our sabbatical status.

Final consideration

We live in interesting times in terms of exploring the authority of networks and networking. Everything has moved and shifted from individual issues to the point where networks are being considered as an approach to dealing with system-wide problems.

This shift has developed and shifted emphasis on the question of the status of our current knowledge of networking. I believe that the challenge of networking is to help networks become more creative and inclusive to create sufficient internal capacity to create flexible and supportive relationships with other networks within the same country. I am arguing that there is a need to foster transforming of the ways in which faculty universities think about their work.

At the end I would like to share some important strategies that I believe are important for those who are interested to strengthen their capacity in educative networking. It is a fruit of long experience that I have spent in academia:

1. Find people who speak the same academic language, where you can go easy with them and have common ground on what you want to change and introduce teaching and learning.
2. Find time always to these people you think they are in your circle of interest and share ideas with them without any fear, hesitation maintaining high respect to their input and ideas.
3. Approach people from your academic surrounding and talk to them about the importance of networking and in what ways you have succeeded and the challenges you still to face.
4. Share with your students, community and your higher education institution your contacts and widen all possibilities for networking. At the end, networking means having more people in so you will not be alone at the end.

5. Keep in mind that your students and assistants are future candidates for your substitute, act accordingly and help them learn and practice and gain skills that you like to share and transmit for the coming generation.

6. Take an opportunity to network with international faculty. They will open and help your understanding of internationalization, which will impact positively your teaching and gain student's trust and collaboration and improve their learning.

7. When you are involved in any projects, never work on your own. Take the opportunity to involve other colleagues and students as well. Appreciate the opportunity you have and provide similar to people around you.

8. When it comes to research, today's international academic tendency is to work jointly on topic of common interest. This could be a good sign of being a good network activist.

9. Find colleagues around you who can be your peer evaluator. This is part of the collaborative and productive result of intra and extra networking.

10. Think big, and plan activities that can promote good circumstances for networking. Roundtables or discussion groups, video conferences can be a good start to enhance innovative networking.

11. Take every opportunity when possible to participate in national and international conferences and activities where you have a wide range of networking possibilities. This is where I have started my career.

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