

The challenges to form teachers in the lifelong learning era

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Abstract

Lifelong learning and learning beyond the school require that students are educated for critical thinking, to develop their own abilities to learn and to be creative. For this, it is necessary that teachers have such capacities also, which is not a reality in most places and countries. The training and re-qualification of teachers is necessary, even more in a world in which access to ICTs is growing and quickly becomes a reality also in education, whether for formal, non-formal or self directed. For this, the recognition of teachers by society is indispensable, which includes remunerations equated to other well evaluated professions.

Keywords: lifelong learning, teacher formation, Information and Communication Technology.

I believe, indeed, that overemphasis on the purely intellectual attitude, often directed solely to the practical and factual, in our education, has led directly to the impairment of ethical values. I am not thinking so much of the dangers with which technical progress has directly confronted mankind, as of the stifling of mutual human considerations by a 'matter-of-fact' habit of thought which has come to lie like a killing frost upon human relations. Without 'ethical culture' there is no salvation for humanity. (Einstein, 1953)

“One child, one teacher, one pen and one book can change the World.” It was among the last words in Malala Yousafzai’s speech at the Youth Takeover of the United Nations, in July 2013 (Theirworld 2013). A believe she expressed again when received the Peace Nobel Prize in 2014, calling education “one of the blessings of life” (Nobel Media 2014). Both ceremonies took place in the present decade, the second decade of XXI century, our present time. For this reason, it was quite natural that we expected to listen much more about the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) for education than the words said by Malala. Her words have the role of reminding us about the inequality the world faces throughout its many regions, ones that have the facilities of high technologies to use as tools in education and others that hope to, at least, have the old goods.

However, and despite the many difficulties economically poor populations present in conflicted zones face, there is at least one common variable between the troubled zones and the ICT well provided ones: teachers are indispensable. And the kind of

teachers is the same. That is, those capable of preparing children for the future, in a world where knowledge is and will be the key for every situation in everyday life.

Children are creative by nature, and curiosity is a natural driver for engaging in learning experiences through experimentation and search for knowledge. However, today's world is shifting in the types of experiences children have, as we move to an ever-increasing technologically dominated society. It is therefore important to move beyond traditional teacher formation curriculum, and update teacher development strategies to reflect and address the issues these professionals face.

Teaching and learning in the era of lifelong learning are processes not yet mastered, but developing and improving, as it has been deemed essential by many, including UNESCO (UNESCO 1996) and the OECD (OECD 1996), for example. The reason for this being that, in *the twenty-first century, learning throughout life will be essential for adapting to the evolving requirements of the labour market and for better mastery of the changing time-frames and rhythms of individual existence* (UNESCO 1996). Education as a process may hold a different meaning within the realms of lifelong learning, as it brings awareness to the fact that education and training are continuing processes, both for students and teachers alike – in fact for all members of current and future societies. Among the societal changes calling for transformation in educational paradigms is the globalisation of the economy, with its many effects on the movement of capital, labour and knowledge.

Science and technology's continuous developments expand our current knowledge on a fast pace. With it, it brings significant change to the character of work and occupational patterns visible within a generation cycle, emphasizing the need to keep learning as well as re-train for current occupations, not to mention for opening

opportunities in career development. Skills and keywords such as adaptability, flexibility, teamwork, innovation and initiative are ubiquitous throughout the job market. However, the educational system was not set as a malleable institution, and fitting the education system to serve the needs of society, specially when that society is undergoing profound and accelerating change, can be challenging.

Also, it is important to highlight that in the lifelong learning framework, formal education structures – primary, secondary, higher, vocational, and so on – are less important than learning and meeting learners' needs (The World Bank 2003). Increased or unlimited learner mobility should be encourage and facilitated, so that they are able to enter and leave the system at chosen, and therefore beneficial, points. Inclusion of a variety of societal actors and players, such as, but not limited to, learners, teachers, families, business, industry, and the state, should be encouraged for better governance.

As most programs are developed by those closest to the source of funding – mostly governments and their bureaucratic employees – the fundamental decision on which subjects should be encompassed and how they should be addressed is often far removed from the main actors: teachers and students. Important programs that have included teachers have found that most concerns are not currently being addressed. Increasingly, teachers face challenges acquiring or improving ICT teaching skills (OECD 2009). The constant rate of innovation, children's plasticity enabling them to absorb such knowledge with extreme velocity, and recurrently overly booked schedules mean that teachers have little time and, in most cases, little to no assistance in understanding and adapting technologies to the classroom. If educators had more time planned in their schedules for these activities, much more could be

done to help young people thrive and learn in classrooms (formal education), out-of-school activities (non-formal education) and in self-directed – and in some cases digital – contexts (informal education) (Council of Europe 2015).

Among one such project was the alternative pedagogic proposal of Faculdade de Educação/UFPel (Pelotas, Brazil) for the formation of teachers at work (KIELING 2000). The project had a double goal: to qualify teachers in the view of teaching/research combination and to investigate the experience of the Faculty in teacher's education. It started from the voiced need of the community to have better prepared teachers. Representatives of five municipalities held seminars to discuss the needs and shortcomings faced by the communities. A diverse group of representatives was gathered, and included professors, students, parents, school employees, educational authorities, politicians, mayors, deputies, business people (from commerce, agriculture, and other areas), firemen, police officers, health sector administrators and workers, non governmental agencies, as well as people employed in different sectors of economy and unemployed members of the community. As the number one issue unanimously agreed by the peoples was the need to have better prepared teachers.

To overcome those deficiencies a two-year re-training program was launched, which lasted for over 10 years and reached over 2,000 teachers, offering tools to work through subjects in an interdisciplinary method, having the teaching practice of the student/teacher emphasized as a "space" of knowledge and learning, and finally to experience the production of knowledge, giving the student a more qualified observation of reality, the elaboration of interpretative knowledge about this reality, the questioning of dogmatisms and the permanent inquiry about what is in place,

the search for paradigms and consistent and pertinent paths to the historical relations that are proposed to know and to explain. The project, based on the diagnosis of regional demands and consideration about the public university, became the main reference point in the search for new alternatives to respond to the educational demands and detected social requirements.

It is also imperative to highlight the need to improve the faculty's image in society (teachers and headmasters, for example). Several programs understand this and add this particular point as a goal to achieve better learning environments, as for example, the Estonian The Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 (Republic of Estonia, Ministry of Education and Research 2014) and the European Network of Education Councils (ENEC 2008). As part of their programs they state wages must be more competitive and work organization must be such that working as a teacher or a headmaster would be highly valued in society, as an attractive career choice. These measures not only envision attracting new talents, but also impact teacher retention, and both are part of priorities set by UNESCO, which further include training, recruitment and working conditions (UNESCO 2013). It is important to highlight that improving the status of teaching is associated with teachers' better motivation and job satisfaction, which increases their retention and performance, as well as student learning. Including access to ICT tools offers the opportunity to enrich the pedagogic toolkit of teacher educators and teachers in ways that have been so far unforeseeable. Information and communication tools are becoming increasingly portable, flexible and powerful, and studies point to the potential of these new technologies as learning tools (Soloway et al. 2005). ICT skills are a basic prerequisite for most qualifications in our current reality, has become an essential

part of our learning and development in education, and will be more intrinsic and vital to qualifications that currently do not require much ICT know-how or skill. This is not to say that ICTs are undoubtedly the best educational mean or ideal tool for all peoples and societies (Higgins 2003), but the technology's global pervasiveness cannot be overlooked or denied. Therefore, those children who are not prepared to use and take advantage of the tools and technologies available and developed during their lifetime might encounter significant difficulties; stagnate in their careers and/or professional development, and feel an overall sentiment of being left behind. Giving the almost ubiquitous presence of technology in our lives, there is little to no doubt of the need to use ICT in education, the question now relying on which and how these ICTs can be effectively implemented in education (Moon 2004). The identification and use of best practice in the ICT-teacher-training is above all a transfer process, concerning both the curricula of the student and the training of the teacher (Auerswald & Magambo 2006).

In a study aiming at valuing the effectiveness of the training received in a year-long training course experience on ICT for in-service teachers using a quantitative research approach, teachers' general satisfaction towards the training was regarded high (4.42 in a scale from 0 to 5) (Sánchez-García et al. 2013). The teachers engaged declared that the training courses optimize the application of ICT in their day-to-day teaching and, as a consequence of that, many of them voluntarily participated in innovation school projects related to the use of ICT at their schools. High levels of satisfaction towards the ICT courses seem to have been reached because the training contributed to the development of one's own teaching skills, as the training allowed teachers to use many basic functions of ICT in class. The study also highlights

the importance of focusing on knowledge that is transferable to the classroom, as to avoid information overload, which can lead to lower levels of satisfaction with the courses, reduced attraction of teachers for training courses, and lower rates of return for further training.

Teachers engaged in lifelong learning will possibly feel more confident and secure in their tasks, experience improved student motivation and satisfaction, as well as feeling encouraged to contribute to the school's overall learning climate (Southall 2003). When teachers develop as lifelong learners, they not only strengthen and enrich their own knowledge and skills as educators, but also instil upon their students the importance and value of learning across the lifespan (Helterbran 2005).

There are fundamental social and economic changes which are re-shaping contemporary society. It emphasises that society's requirement of a highly educated, well trained, committed and effective teaching force was never more urgent.

If society's concern is to improve quality in education and to foster creative, enterprising, innovative, self-reliant young people, with the capacity and motivation to go on as lifelong learners, then this will not happen unless the corps of teachers are themselves challenging, innovative and lifelong learners. The future well being of the teaching profession in the context of a lifelong learning policy framework is of pivotal importance. It is necessary to view the career of teaching nowadays in a systemic way which locates it within the role required of it by a fast changing society and school environment (Coolahan, 1991).

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