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Education. Commitment Between the Past, Present and Future

*Educação. Zaangażowanie między przeszłością,
teraźniejszością i przyszłością*

Abstract: Education involves compromises, as well as balances, and involves pedagogical action by linking the world of doctrines with different realities (individuals, systems, representations). The teacher is not alone. He/she is made up of different layers that intertwine and make him/her a reflective element, fundamental for contemporary societies. When we talk about layers, we want to emphasize the importance of the multiple pedagogical, philosophical, social, historical, and cultural currents that affect teaching as well as social, reflective autonomous individuals, i.e. students. The layers that involve the professionalism of teachers come from different horizons (personal, academic, communities of practice) and have an influence on their actions. In this article there are presented some of the layers that affect the construction of the teaching profession centred on ethics, rigor, tradition and modernity. It is in this constant coming and going between the past and present, pedagogy is created in an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world.

Keywords: education; lifelong learning; change; commitment

Abstrakt: Edukacja obejmuje kompromisy oraz równowagi i wykorzystuje działania pedagogiczne, łącząc świat doktryn z różnymi realiami (jednostki, systemy, reprezentacje). Nauczyciel nie jest sam. Składa się z różnych warstw, które przeplatają się i czynią z niego element refleksyjny, fundamentalny dla współczesnych społeczeństw. Mówiąc o warstwach, należy podkreślić znaczenie wielorakich nurtów pedagogicznych, filozoficznych, społecznych, historycznych i kulturowych, które wpływają na nauczanie, a także społecznych, refleksyjnych, autonomicznych jednostek, czyli studentów. Warstwy angażujące profesjonalizm nauczycieli pochodzą z różnych horyzontów (osobistego, akademickiego, społeczności praktyków) i oddziałują na ich działania. W artykule przedstawiono niektóre z warstw, które wpływają na konstruowanie zawodu nauczyciela skoncentrowanego na etyce, rygorze, tradycji i nowoczesności. W tym nieustannym przechodzeniu między przeszłością a teraźniejszością pedagogika budowana jest w coraz bardziej niestabilnym, niepewnym, złożonym i niejednoznacznym świecie.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja; kształcenie ustawiczne; zmiana; zaangażowanie

“TIMES CHANGE, AS DO OUR WILLS”

Education issues have been immersed in our lives since the beginning of our existence. Since birth, the argumentation between tradition and modernity has been woven, giving rise to currents, philosophies and forms of educating influenced by theories based on epistemology. The aim of this article is to present a brief reflection on the dynamics that affect the life of teachers and where theories of education, the policies of the past and present, ethics, and lifelong training enable paths for teacher creativity.

For Hannah Arendt (1961), “the educator must be the mediator between the old and the new”, so that it becomes possible to innovate, through the transmitted knowledge and the creation of new paradigms. Thus, the debate about the office of *educator* (Barbosa 1998) and the use of different lenses of analysis, in a continuous movement between theory and praxis, becomes fundamental, in order to identify and understand how the crossing between disciplines affects and adjusts pedagogical work. The social construction of the teaching profession is constantly evolving, linking the history of education, political discourse, questions of philosophy and personal questioning about pedagogical practices.

The need to solve the learning problems that arise in the learning communities, the questions of families about the importance of school and the visibility of educational practices in the public sphere mark the need to rebuild the present through the lessons of the past, from a transformative and transversal perspective of current societies. “It is by critical thinking about the practice of today or yesterday that one can improve the next practice (...) The better one does this operation, the more intelligence is gained from the practice in analysis and the greater communicability is exerted around overcoming ingenuity through rigor” (Freire 1996, p. 39).

Lifelong learning (Rychen 2016) stimulated by political powers, in comparison with the need to go further in contributing to educational success OECD (2019), puts the teacher at the center of the debate by forcing a constant reformulation of his educational action.

Teacher agency. Teachers should be empowered to use their professional knowledge, skills and expertise to deliver the curriculum effectively.

Authenticity. Learners should be able to link their learning experiences to the real world and have a sense of purpose in their learning. This requires interdisciplinary and collaborative learning alongside mastery of discipline-based knowledge.

Inter-relation. Learners should be given opportunities to discover how a topic or concept can link and connect to other topics or concepts within and across disciplines, and with real life outside of school.

Flexibility. The concept of “curriculum” should be developed from “predetermined and static” to “adaptable and dynamic”. Schools and teachers should be able to update and align the curriculum to reflect evolving societal requirements as well as individual learning needs.

Engagement. Teachers, students and other relevant stakeholders should be involved early in the development of the curriculum, to ensure their ownership for implementation. (OECD 2019)

The teacher, while being unique, social and reflective, organizes the personal matrix about the educational action, constantly influenced by the interaction of the worlds to which he belongs – family, profession, community, country, religion – assuming the different roles assigned to him.

The use of the ecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner 1992) as one of the lenses of interpretation helps us to understand the importance of the paradigms that support societies and the way they affect the view of education. The weight of the interaction between the different layers will condition the interpretive frame of educational phenomena and the way we act on our action stage.

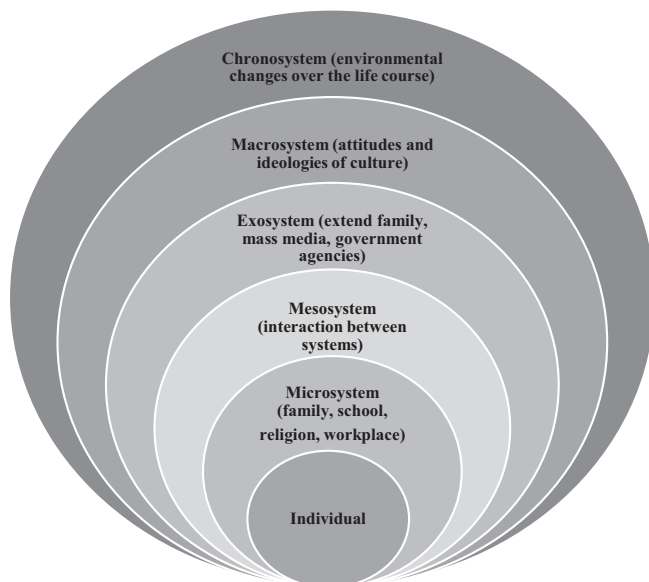


Figure 1. Layers of influence (adapted)

Source: Bronfenbrenner (1992).

For Bronfenbrenner (1992), the layers of influence (Figure 1) Macrosystem (attitudes, norms and values) and the Exosystem¹ (systems that influence the individual indirectly through Microsystem) will mark the individual in all its interactions formatting the personal and professional relationships. The management of the classroom space will, therefore, always be conditioned by the formative, philosophical, political

¹ Extended family that affects personal dynamics.

orientation of the community in which it is placed, and by the way the teacher has internalized all these guiding principles.

Luis de Camões' verses² present a metaphor that can be used in education as a support for this pendulum movement that maintains the current impact between the past, the present and the idea of the future:

Times change, as do our wills
What we are is ever changing, confidence is changed;
All the world is made of change
And forever attaining new qualities (...).
(de Camões, 1982)

The teacher and his/her professionalism should, therefore, be perceived from different points of view:

- as an individual and unique being, endowed with critical thinking,
- as a social being positioned in the space of the school/world, as a holder of the power to teach, influenced by the theories learned and co-creator of new identities.

The teacher will organize his/her pedagogical work involving what he learned in his/her initial training together with the experience of everyday life.

“ALL THE WORLD IS MADE OF CHANGE”

The theories of education are part of the DNA of the teaching profession and influence the way in which we:

- think about teaching,
- position ourselves in the classroom,
- structure the curriculum,
- allow our students to constitute themselves as co-creators of a new vision of relationships in education.

Olga Pombo (2002) speaks about the “entry of new objects to think” as vital for the modernization of educational practices. Throughout a teacher's career the learned theories must be reinterpreted in the face of the rapid change of the world. Caught unexpectedly in the middle of a pandemic, we were forced to reformulate our teaching conceptions, to update methodologies, didactics, and rebuild our knowledge, trying to maintain the quality of teaching and motivate students for learning.

For Plato,³ *the school* was the place of transmission of the cultural legacy between generations by which *man conquers eternity*. Reading the classics becomes fundamen-

² A Portuguese poet from the 19th century.

³ An ancient Greek philosopher and mathematician.

tal for the understanding of the evolution of pedagogy(ies); it becomes pressing to be able to adapt it, so that the school *has new qualities* (Camões 1982). “It is in the very nature of the human condition that each new generation grows into an old world, so that to prepare a new generation for a new world can only mean that one wishes to strike from the newcomers’ hands their own chance at the new” (Arendt 1961). This idea of a new generation that grows within an old world implies the awareness of societies about the rapid change that is happening in today’s world and that needs an update on what is intended to be transmitted to a new generation. Again, we are following the OECD (2020) statement that extends teacher’s professional development to the notion of competence that must be worked on in current systems to help students prepare for the future.

The concept of competency implies more than just the acquisition of knowledge and skills; it involves the mobilization of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to meet complex demands. Future-ready students will need both broad and specialized knowledge. Disciplinary knowledge will continue to be important, as the raw material from which new knowledge is developed, together with the capacity to think across the boundaries of disciplines and “connect the dots”. (OECD 2020)

The great challenge for teaching professionals (Schön 1983) is that the different institutions linked to education (universities, schools, governments, municipalities, etc.) must be able to think together, respecting cultures and articulating knowledge in order to transform the future into a space where everyone has their voice and can contribute to the renewal of a humanist pedagogy, sensitive to the diversity of its audiences.

According to Pombo (2002), “only the school inscribes, in the human condition, the return to the cultural legacy of the past and, thus, continues the link of creation”.

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