



What Futures for Education? An Answer to the Challenge Launched by UNESCO

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Abstract

Thinking about education is something that has been happening over time at different perspectives. However, thinking together and giving voice to the different actors in an educational community is something that does not happen very often. The initiative launched by UNESCO to rethink the future of education, made a group of students and teachers from the Pedagogical Council (PC) of a Higher Education Institution in Portugal, come together to reflect about this topic.

Throughout the 20th century till now, the concept of education has been consolidated as a right. Not only fundamental right but also an universal one [1]. As Menendez reminds us, “*Society understands that the right to education must also extend to all (...). The challenge of inclusion is still far from being resolved, but at least it is already on the public policy agenda in many countries of the world*” [1].

Based on the focus group methodology proposed by UNESCO, a session guide was created and a virtual focus group of 8 persons was carried out, during an hour and a half, according to 3 starting questions/topics: 1) How do you/we view the future? 2) What should be the collective purposes of education in 2050? and 3) How should what we learn, how we learn and where we learn change in the future?

More than the result of the discussion itself, this work shows the importance that the Pedagogical Council (PC) has in a future path to think about education. Once PC is acting as proactive partner instead of a reactive one, and just to answer to requests of others, its goal becomes giving voice to teachers and to students.

Keywords: *Citizenhip; Collaborative thinking; Society; Pedagogic Council.*

1. Introduction

The initiative proposed by UNESCO – “Futures of Education - Learning to Become” [2], it's an important challenge which aims “to reimagine how knowledge and learning can shape the future of humanity and the planet” [2]. It tries to mobilize people all over the world, in order to reflect and generate dialogues on how education should be rethought to engage the challenges that society faces. To fulfill this initiative a group of students and teachers from the Pedagogical Council of a Higher Education Institution in Portugal, came together to reflect about this topic, thinking about education as a process whose access has to be generalized [1,3] and, if collaborative processes are themselves learning processes [3].

Full citizenship can be understood in a triple concept: legal citizenship, political citizenship and social citizenship [4]. Working on this issue in schools, at all levels of education (basic, secondary and higher education), is a way to train citizens with more integrity, fairness and with greater sensitivity and attention to social issues; people capable of striving for equal rights and opportunities and non-discrimination, capable of claiming the “right to have rights” [5]. The path to citizenship is a deep, gradual work, involving students, teachers and the surrounding community, in the construction of a participatory and inclusive project. Preparing present and future generations, to act appropriately and ethically, and to be protagonists and disseminators of full citizenship, must be our goal. To achieve it, one needs to look at the local reality / community, identifying exclusions and social problems as well as enabling each individual to promote the horizontality of relationships, to provide situations of equality and to contribute to territorial, social and cultural cohesion [6]. So, citizenship is not an acquired fact: it is learned, but it is also a social and political achievement and a challenge. Education and school appear as the main means for this achievement [7]. The balance between the eminently technical contents that are taught and the integral



formation of citizens, impose that we think about the citizenship processes developed by the different social institutions and, consequently, of the citizens who are being formed. Doing this collaboratively presents numerous advantages described by several authors over time [2, 8, 9].

2. Methodology

Starting from a script for the session created as part of a collaborative process already described in Dias et al. [10], the group, to which the authors of this work belong, was formed with three moderators and five participants, including a student. The moderators collected the set of participant's contributions, remaining in the background, guiding and redirecting the conversation, in a non-invasive way, as recommended by UNESCO.

The online session lasted 90 minutes and allowed participants to express them about: what they consider education to be in 2050; what goals it should set and what specific actions should be taken. The discussion topics are presented in table 1.

The results of the session were systematized in a two-page report sent to UNESCO.

Topic 1 - Our changing world: How do you view the future?	Think about 2050 ... What are the most hopeful and worry aspects?
Topic 2 - Broad Purposes of Education	What should be the collective purposes of education in 2050?
Topic 3 - Implications for Learning	How should what we learn, how we learn and where we learn change in the future?

Table 1: Topics for discussion in the focus group

3. Results of the focus group discussion

Concerning the view of the future, all participants expressed to feel some **hope**. Here are the reasons mentioned:

1. In general, it is noted that young people are more attentive to aspects such as environment, quality of life, and protection of more fragile groups, for example; and their participation in discussion and intervention groups in society is more effective; for these reasons, networks that support social entrepreneurship are emerging;
2. In the context of today's society, early childhood education will be able to form better citizens; therefore, educational aspects must also be aligned with the evolution of society (values and technology).

As **worries**, participants pointed out the follow:

1. Individualism; we are falling into self-centeredness; utilitarianism; relations between people are hampered; it is necessary to rethink education. Technological changes must be taken in consideration both in education and assessment. Sometimes we feel students appear to be lost; education must make information available but also allow people to think for themselves as well as the debate of ideas; and pacific coexistence of different groups or disruptive ideas should not be limited by formal education;
2. The defense of environmental causes and social values will not grow as quickly as necessary until 2050.



Taking into account the visions described before, participants were invited to think about the collective purposes of education in 2050. The main ideas shared were as follows:

1. Since education is an universal right, we must defend persons and give them the ability to promote their own occupational justice - to promote the necessary resources for their participation; sharing knowledge and information on all aspects of human life, thus having a more active, participatory, just, inclusive and sustainable society without allowing extremes to prevail. This has been and still it is a slow and painful process.
2. It is very important to contribute to keep our history alive and to promote peace through education.

Thinking about the last aspect of our dialogue: In what way how we learn; what we learn; where we learn, will be changed in the future? Participants shared the following aspects:

1. Changes must happen in a bottom up way (maybe the most important idea), although it is also important the top down actions; sometimes, the expression of organized groups is very scary. The less information and knowledge we have, the more we lack the legitimacy to understand other human beings. How to overcome the phenomena of extremist violence? Through the parallel paths top-down and bottom-up; so, acting daily and with great patience, acceptance, tolerance, respect and valuing the space of education every day, is essential.
2. When Bologna process assumed the acquisition of cognitive, motor and relational skills, it was understood that students were central, instead of curriculum. However, students are still being taught towards memorization, so when they reach higher education, they find themselves locked in another's ideas. Currently, students are not valued for their creativity (that they progressively lose) but the change of such situation is imperative. Teachers have to value paths, where students can achieve good learning results and success, without feeling insecure. We must work on multiple aspects of the human being; the fears and insecurities are much more felt by adults (teachers) than by students. It can be an advantage and allow to change the present paradigm; Teachers often scare students and put them in the role of subservience;
3. Learning doesn't just happen in the classroom; the way of learning at the classroom must be changed. At school and in the classroom we cannot be only attentive to the contents of the disciplinary fields but also bring the social and citizenship values; lifelong learning must be improved and stimulated.

4. Final considerations

The importance of dialogue and discussion of common interest issues was considered by the UNESCO initiative as very high and a good opportunity for the widening of spaces for debate among school communities. The case presented in this paper, takes advantage of the opportunity for dialogue created by UNESCO, so the elements of the pedagogical council bring the idea of a council that is more than just advisory. It was a consensual idea that initiatives like this and proactivity are fundamental to institutionalize the path of citizenship and collaborative work.

Although there are still many reasons for concern, there is also a lot of hope in education as a way to contribute to a more dignified future; all participants noted that many young people are much concerned with social and environmental issues and desire to protect people and nature.

Education has the great ability to keep our history alive. This aspect was also highlighted as a goal to keep present and constant. Aspects such as knowledge, understanding and respect for humanity's past, can help society to transform itself, by moving towards a more and more harmonious development.

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