CHANGES IN TEACHERS’ PROFILE AFFECTING THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT
Nowadays most teachers-to-be are digital natives (DUDENEY & HOCKLY, 2007, p.8). However, this change in teachers’ profile does not guarantee better use of technology in the classroom. This article presents the findings of a study which compares two groups of university students, and discusses the possible adaptation of language teacher development courses.

Key-words: Technology – Teachers’ profile – Methodology – Gen Y

RESUMO
Atualmente a maioria dos alunos de licenciatura são nativos digitais (DUDENEY & HOCKLY, 2007, p.8). No entanto, esta mudança no perfil dos futuros educadores não garante um melhor uso de tecnologias no contexto educacional. Este artigo mostra os resultados de um estudo em que são comparados dois grupos de alunos universitários, e discute a possível adaptação dos cursos de formação e capacitação de professores.

Palavras-chave: Tecnologias – Perfil de Professores – Metodologia – Geração Y

Introduction

Technology for its own sake will not generate results in learning. On the contrary, its use must be well-planned and grounded on clear, solid pedagogical purposes.

(SANTOS & SOBRINHO, 2009)

For many years when we thought about a good language teacher most of the time it had to do with their command of the language and/or the approach adopted by them or teaching strategies they applied. Learners would probably add a good rapport or the atmosphere created in class. Of course, most of us would doubt the existence of a super teacher born with all these characteristics. The role of teacher development would be to aim at this “perfect model” and try to assist the “common human being”, to achieve one or more goals related to one or another of these areas. It has been like this for ages, but in this new century (which is not so brand-new anymore). What should be the role of teacher development? To answer this question other questions have to be asked as well. The first one
would be: who is the 21st century teacher? But others are also important: What is expected from this new generation of teachers? What could be done for them to become the super teachers? Are they going to be more effective in applying modern technology to education?

This paper attempts to contribute to the understanding of this new generation of teachers’ profile. It presents some of the findings of a study which compares two groups of participants from different generations, who took the course The Use of Technology for English Teaching. First, some issues related to the research will be discussed. Then, the study will be described and finally, some consideration on the findings will be presented, which includes the adaptation of the teacher development course they were taking.

Learn from yesterday – Live for today – Look to tomorrow

But the more we are grasped by the world the more difficult it is for us to grasp it. In this time of telecommunications, computers, Internet, we are submerged by the world’s complexity and bombarded with countless bits of information about the world that drown out the possibilities of understanding (MORIN, 1999, p.31).

In a throw-away society there is a tendency of discarding the old (the past) and overvaluing the new/young (the future). However, the past and future cannot be seen in isolation, as one depends on the other. Very often we forget that time is a human creation, and that the present is just a second dividing or linking (depending on the view) the past from the future. Thus, Tradition and modernity may and should live together harmoniously. (CARDOSO, 2013).

Cacique Almir Suruí is a good example of how modernity may be used to preserve past experiences and traditions. Cacique Almir Suruí was elected one of the most creative leaders in the business world by the American magazine “Fast Company”, for he has succeeded to use modern technologies to preserve his community traditions (CARDOSO, 2012, 2013). The question is: are the past and the future living so harmoniously in the educational context?

Despite the advances in understanding the learning process, and the attempt to develop more effective teaching approaches and methodologies, the educational system is still very traditional and very much resistant to change. The fact of having a new generation of
teachers may help in the process of developing a new kind of education. However, it is not their familiarity with technology the most important aspect. They have to aware of the kind of competences the learners need to develop in this new world. Language teachers have to find ways of fostering not only learners’ linguistic competence, but also an ethical, ecological, earthling civic and anthropological conscience. In fact, this conscience should be considered the most important role of the 21st education (MORIN, 1999).

**From access to creativity**

In different language classes in the world you find different realities. In some schools all the most modern technologies are available while in others you will find just a chalkboard, and even no educational resource whatsoever. “Finally there are some classroom situations where neither teacher nor students have anything at all in terms of educational technology or other learning aids. (HARMER 2007, p 175). Hadfield & Hadfield (apud in HARMER 2007, p.175) represent this variety of realities by using an inverted pyramid (see Fig. 1).

![Image of Hadfield & Hadfield's Inverted Pyramid]

Figure 7: Hadfield & Hadfield's Inverted Pyramid

However, they add that even with minimal resources or no resources at all there is a lot to be done if teachers use the most special resource they might have: their creativity. Therefore, they suggest to turn the pyramid upside down and to add the most important
resources: the real life and the people involved in the learning process (including teachers and learners) (see Fig. 2).

![Diagram of Hadfield & Hadfield's Upside down Pyramid]

**Figure 8: Hadfield & Hadfield's Upside down Pyramid**

Access to information is not enough. We have to know how to filter the information which really matters from useless data. Then, it is necessary to know how to generate knowledge from it. However, it is still not enough. The most important is to know how to transform knowledge into creativity.

![Diagram of Access, Use, Knowledge, Creativity]

We can conclude that in any educational context there is always some resource, which in fact are the most powerful ones: the people involved in the learning process and their creativity.

**Mind the Gap**

Nowadays, there are many articles about the relationship between the so called Generation Y (ones born between the 80s and the 90s) and the other generations (Baby

However, there is little research on how education is being affected now that this generation has become the teachers, and how this change in the teachers’ profile will affect the teaching and learning process. There is even less research on the relationship between these younger teachers and their older colleagues, coordinators and principals. Therefore, I believe it is worthwhile to analyze the characteristics of this new generation and find ways of contributing to use all their potential and for them to be able to profit from past experience of the older teachers.

**Gen Y characteristics**

Generation Y are real digital natives, as they were born in era in which computers were available everywhere, they cannot imagine life without a computer. Although they are tech-savvy and very creative, they read less and less well than other generations. They are used to short objective texts and find it difficult to concentrate when reading longer ones, especially because they are multitask. That is, they are able to perform several different tasks at the same time (CARDOSO 2013, D’ELBOUX 2010, REILLY 2012).

Other characteristic that may differ them from other generations is that they redefine respect. They need feedback from others, but they will only respect the ones they believe to deserve this respect, not necessarily considering position or age. Besides, for them it is very important the balance between personal and work lives and they will not hesitate to change jobs or even careers when they find a better position, financially or which offers better work conditions (CARDOSO 2013, D’ELBOUX 2010, REILLY 2012).

Being interviewed about the demonstrations in Brazil, Pierre Levy (2013) tried to describe the new generation as well-educated and hardworking people with knowledge, using the Internet, who want to have their voices heard. Communication without frontiers, not controlled by the media. An identity in network. More collective and transparent intelligence…. 
As far as teaching is concerned, they may create a better rapport with learners. Being kinesthetic and visual, probably they will be very effective in coping with different learning styles. The same we may say about fun. Gen Y loves entertainment and games so they may create a more relaxing learning atmosphere for their learners. Besides that, as they are more concerned with earth preservation, they may develop this sense of responsibility for our environment with their students in a very natural way. They like to work with others so probably more collaborative projects and group work will be used in class. Finally, their familiarity with technology may be applied to their teaching in a very creative way.

However, these are only assumptions based on their profiles, possibilities that will only become reality if they are aware of how learning takes places. The main objective of my research is to verify this awareness.

The research

Since the course The Use of Technology for English Teaching started four years ago there has been a gradual change in its participants’ profile. This study, which started in 2009 and is still going on) compares and contrasts different groups of teachers-to-be. The Use of Technology for English Teaching is a compulsory course at UERJ (Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro). This study is based on the answers of a questionnaire filled out in the beginning of the course, and a course assessment done at the end of the course. Informal class observation was also taken into consideration. The first group (in 2010) consisted of young adults and adults (born between 1972 and 1989) while the second group (in 2012) consisted of younger learner (all born after 1988).

The First Group (Gen X and early Gen Y)

In the first group, although most of the learners were almost graduating and had already had some experience in teaching, they were still very much resistant to incorporating modern technology to their teaching. Most of them did not have access to the internet at home and had little familiarity with technology.
Only two people out of twelve had some familiarity with computers. The ones who had the computer had little or no access to the Internet. Most of them had a very negative attitude towards technology. They mentioned that they did not have much access to modern technology at schools. Only the ones who worked at two specific language centers had access to the Web at work. Those learners used to read and study much more than learners nowadays do. And as they were almost graduating and had already taken the courses on education at university or training sessions at work, most of them had much methodology awareness and wished for a less traditional education. However, they did not link this better education to the use of more modern technology, but to a teachers adoption of a more effective approach.

The Second Group (Gen Y)

Nowadays, participants of the Use of Technology for English Teaching are more familiar with technology, as typical “digital natives.” In fact, they are addicted to technology, especially social networking. They access the Internet all the time because they use the cell phone to do that. It is really difficult for them to turn off the phone. Although they “text” more, they read less and do not really worry about what other people will think about their posts. In fact, they do not even care about whether other people will read what they have written. However, this familiarity does not guarantee a better application of technology in the educational context, mainly for lack of methodology awareness. As they are taking the course earlier in the curriculum (second or third term), most of them have not had the chance of discussing about approaches and methodologies for language teaching. On the other hand, they are very creative and fun. Although they are often self-absorbed, they work very well in groups, especially in a task-based approach, through problem-solved situations and projects.

The course now and then

Due to the change in the participants’ profile, the course had to change its focus to cope with this new kind of learner. In the past, it consisted mainly of the familiarization with modern technologies and the creation of a more positive attitude towards it. Coping with the difference between the two groups the course had to be changed. In the past, the course
consisted mainly of the familiarization with modern technologies and the creation of a more positive attitude towards it. Technology was presented as a useful tool.

Nowadays the main focus of the course is on methodology, in finding ways of using learners’ knowledge of technology in a more effective way. They have to be aware that technology without methodology does not work. They are invited to rethink the use of technology and how to adapt it to language teaching. In other words, the main aim of the course is to find ways to apply their technology skills to their teaching reality.

Findings and future work

_Education of the future should be careful to not allow the idea of the unity of human species to efface the fact of its diversity or the idea of diversity to efface its unity._ (Morin, 1999, p.25)

To sum up, it is true that younger teachers have more access to technology than other teachers used to, but this new generation may have less methodology awareness. Therefore, it is necessary to offer them more training and development courses, focusing on how to apply this familiarity with technology they already have to their teaching, and at the same time to learn how to profit from their positive attitude towards change.

There may be a generation gap between teachers working in the same institution. There may also be a greater gap between coordinators and the new generation of teachers. Therefore, more study to understand this new generation as workforce is essential.

It is also necessary to investigate the brand-new Generation Z (the ones born after 2000) and how teacher from Gen Y and previous generations will cope with the differences in their profiles. I personally would like to add some other questions to my future studies, for example: Does the difference between the generations take into consideration teachers’ and learners’ styles? Is there a need to develop different learning strategies depending on the generation? What is the role of the teacher/developer in this new scenario?

As I have opened this article mentioned the importance of a change in teacher development, I would like to close the article quoting Head & Taylor’s words on this topic.

Teacher development, as we understand it, draws on the teacher’s own inner source for change. It is centred on personal awareness of the possibilities for change, and of what influences the change process. It builds on the past,
because recognizing how past experiences have or have not been developmental helps identify opportunities for change in the present and future. (HEAD & TAYLOR 1997, p. 1)

Reference


