

Didactics–promoting collaborative work and personal learning environment. Critical, creative and autonomous roles in a competitive society

**Estela Lamas
Anabela Maria
Margarida Gomes**

The XXIst Century – Globalization, European Educational policies and Portuguese School challenges

Society has changed in the last 60 years, forcing the educational experts to reflect on the role of the School, in the XXIst Century. Changing attitudes among teachers and learners seem to be ‘the rule’ for an effective and successful school. Education is no longer something that people have in a specific time of their lives, but a permanent feature throughout.

Instead of being imposed by learners and external to people in their daily lives, learners should feel a desire for education, which is something intrinsic to individuals, and particularly felt by adult learners who have to update their skills and competences, thus empowering themselves and consequently contributing to a modern Europe with equal opportunities.

School has evolved from a place where knowledge is provided to a place where learners are helped to develop their professional and social skills. Consequently, education must evolve through big challenges in order to face the changes of society in the XXIst century.

Lifelong Learning is becoming a priority in European policies because of the learners need for continuous updating of their knowledge, fuelled by their important of self-improvement in both working and social skills and improving their values, enabling better citizens in a global world. “There is a need to promote active citizenship and respect for human rights and democracy and to step up the fight against exclusion in all its forms, including racism and xenophobia” (Official Journal of the European Union, 2007: 46).

Education must also be seen as a universal right and something that should be permanent. Faure defends the idea that, in a growing Economy, Education must be a concern, since instructed individuals are better citizens and understand better democratic life needs (Report *Learning to Be*, 1972).

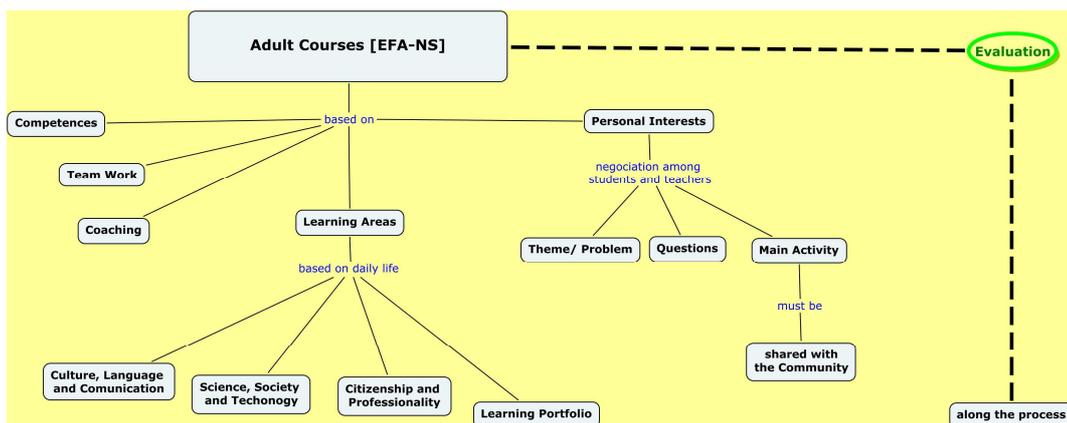
There is no doubt that European education systems have been facing a new challenge. The Continental/ Napoleon education model ‘study a lot in a short time to work all along your life’ was then replaced by the Nordic / Anglo-saxonic model ‘study all along your life to work all along your life’.

Due to an extremely powerful influence in post modern Society, changes in working and ICT development have challenged all institutions in order to improve their performance. School as a social environment cannot be apart from this new reality.

Lifelong Learning is relevant to everyone because they need to understand the global consequences of their individual attitudes. They must assume solidarity in human destiny, the quality of life and the search of human balance. Education is now seen in a Humanistic and Universal perspective. Delors (1996) picks up this issue that education is essential to the construction of peace, liberty, social justice and to live with the others, not only in the ‘global village’ but also in local communities. He reminds us of the meaning of a holistic dimension of education, presenting the four fundamental basis of Education, i.e., ‘learning to know’, ‘learning to do’, ‘learning to live together’ and ‘learning to be’.

After the Lisbon European Council (2000), Education is considered an essential issue to transform the European Economy into one of the most competitive in the world. So, Lifelong Learning is, then, moved into first place, as we can read in SEC (2000) 1832 (p.3): “(...) Lifelong learning is no longer just one aspect of education and training; it must become the guiding principal for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts (...)”.

Since 2006, the Portuguese policy for Adult Education has been evolving into a new perspective in Grammar Schools as it may be outlined in the following schema:



This new perspective of the learning process is focused on competences. Essential aspects from students’ lives are considered, as their experiences, knowledge acquired in familiar, professional and social life. Everything that students have learnt in a formal, informal or non-formal environment now has to be considered. Meaningful learning is now a concern to establish the curriculum that fits better students’ desires, needs and interests.

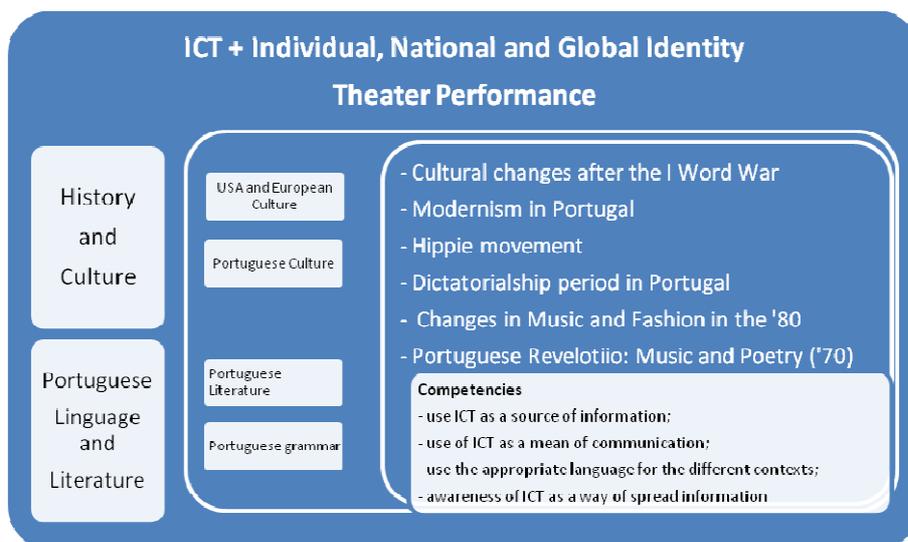
With this perspective there is no curriculum. Students learn what they want and need and teachers have to adapt their performance to students’ needs. All strategies, methods, contents, lessons and the curriculum itself are negotiated between students and teachers. The result is that the learning process is significant for learners and students are fundamentally involved in the process they consider ‘their learning process’.

In this model knowledge comes naturally. In the short term it is not the main issue. The model for the ‘Knowledge Society’ provides the conditions for students’ development and their competences, or helping them to improve those they already have. The teachers’ role in this model is transformed to coaching and helping students to think about their needs and being aware of their potentialities and limitations, and looking towards a life with more fulfilment. As a result of this, teachers must

develop a problem-based work structure and be aware of the fact that students must learn by doing – and must develop a tutoring and coaching system to promote interdisciplinary studies.

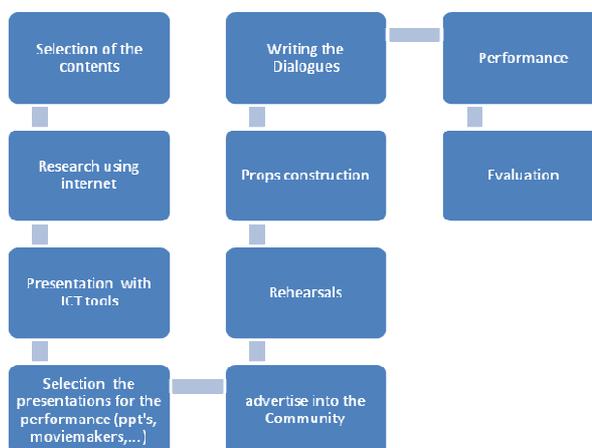
Teacher’s practices and challenges from a didactic point of view

The teacher’s role is consequently undergoing big changes. The demands for adaptation, originated from several different sources, not just from the younger generation, are great. In order to create successful courses they need to learn more about how different types of students function in a learning situation. They must become aware of learning style theories and, based on them, attempted to identify practical applications. The teacher’s strategy must be grounded on new didactic resources and methods of student research, stimulating autonomy and respecting different learning profiles and rhythms – creating open learning guides to promote students participation on the plan construction, as can be seen in the following example.



This was the plan teachers and students made in order to have a final activity that was a theatre performance about the XX century.

All process was developed by students, according to the following structure, respecting their rhythms, the themes they’ve chosen and their interests about it.



These learning situations are more complex and require a new working method – a didactic reorganizing process that implies working the subjects in an inter/pluri/trans methodology. Teachers should encourage teamwork and collaborative study. Teachers become work leaders as well as facilitators. Problem solving, inquiries, practical job projects, case studies, research are some of the methodologies that may be used in the teamwork, involving students. This gives them the opportunity to bring to the group their job problems, real situations of daily-life, leading the teacher's activity beyond the classroom walls, breaking the border between school and society, between formal and informal education.

This change of teaching methodology brings some challenges to the teachers: having no established curriculum is the main one. Teachers have to realize that the curriculum has to be in constant development and reevaluation. What really matters are not only the contents to be taught, but the way student develop their competences in a real context.

The adult learning process is evaluated during the process and in a reflexive and systematic attitude, using feedback and feedforward, thus helping students to improve their performance. Therefore the portfolio is one of the most important and strategic tools. Students have the opportunity to show their strengths and additionally become aware of their failures. The portfolio is a good resource to make them realize what they need to improve – improving concepts as meta-cognition and critical thinking. It also gives them the opportunity to get a clear vision of the evolution of the process, shifting from the teaching paradigm to the learning paradigm. With this perspective the portfolio is not only a way of evaluating, but primarily a learning tool. This implies a change in pedagogical methods, involving several learning dimensions – empowering learners' autonomy and auto-confidence.

A new look on teaching activity – tutoring and coaching; questioning the didactic process that sustains learning in an educational and social environment

We believe this method of education can only happen if students feel autonomous in their studying program, if they feel they are becoming empowered and feel they get personal and professional benefits from it. To provide this encouraging climate the teacher must build a pedagogical organization to ensure a successful process.

Emphasising what has been said before 'big changes' are taking place in the education world in terms of a paradigm shift from a teacher-centred 'instruction paradigm' to a student-centred 'learning paradigm' never leaving outside 'the teacher's role'. In concluding this short reflection we believe this new paradigm involves creating learning situations, motivating environments and real experiences which might allow the discovery and the construction of knowledge. The criteria for success have changed too and will continue to change as institutions shift from one paradigm to the other.

According to Requejo Osorio and Longwoth (2005), Lifelong Learning is a process neither regarding only adult learners nor relating only to professional issues. It represents a continuous process of learning that should be taken into account since early childhood. It implies a continuous (re)construction of the self, inside the community, with self own values, having in mind the inclusion in a multicultural world.

Particularly when talking about adult education, we believe that some principles should be taken into consideration. In fact,

- adult learning programs should capitalize on the experience of participants;
- adult learning programs should adapt to the aging limitations of the participants;
- adults should have as much choice as possible in the availability and organization of learning programs;
- adults should be challenged to move to increasingly advanced stages of personal development.

In order to achieve these teach challenges we believe that without a strong team work among teachers (collaborative work), this model will not be successful. The pedagogical team has ‘to keep the gear’ (Zabalza, 2008). Each subject, each ‘curricular area’ is just a part of the whole and each part has to complement the others. In order to make this work, all members of the pedagogical team have to work together, preparing the themes, strategies and methods. Zabalza (2007: 135) declares: “(...) el mismo contenido se trabaja desde distintos puntos de vista o bien desde distintos planos de an lisis (...)”.

We also emphasize the co-teaching system as an important strategy. Teachers’ performance is thus engaged in order to ensure a successful learning process. In our investigation area – the Social Science – we are developing a co-teaching program History/Literature. From the experience we have developed, we reinforce the idea that working together benefits the students and leads us, as teachers, to new ideas of what to teach, how to teach and how to solve problems that occur in the process.

We reinforce the Morin’s idea (1999) that subjects cannot be separated they have to be connected among the several learning areas. The world is more and more globalized therefore the contents in education have also to be connected.

The reflexive work, and specifically the reflexive evaluation as part of the process, means that students and teachers are always in touch – by email, i.e – changing opinions, feelings and doubts about the work. This moment is very important, and teacher should be aware of it, guiding and coaching the process but at the same time encouraging and empowering the progresses and making them face the educational process in a positive point of view. We present two examples of teachers’ answers to the students’ work.

F, F, V: Realizaram um bom trabalho, pensamos que aprenderam e que tamb m se divertiram com a sua elabora o. O trabalho escrito e o PowerPoint complementam-se e apresentam os aspectos mais relevantes da moda e da mentalidade dos Anos Vinte. Sugerimos que verifiquem a ortografia, particularmente na utiliza o do Portugu s do Brasil. Esqueceram-se de indicar a bibliografia?

You have done a good work. You had fun while you were working and learning. The written work and the ppt presentation complement each other and focus the most important issues about The ’20. You should pay more attention to your spelling, specially the differences between the Portuguese from Portugal and from Brazil. Do not forget the References.

P e E: Pensamos que utilizar o ‘Movie Maker’ para apresentar este trabalho constituiu um desafio, mas parece-nos que foi um desafio conseguido. Pensamos que se divertiram a fazer a pesquisa e a construir a apresenta o. Escolheram bandas marcantes dos anos ’80, algumas intemporais. No entanto, podem melhorar   a linguagem, precisamos de verificar os textos e eventualmente a resolu o de algumas imagens.

P. e E.: Using the moviemaker to present your work was a challenge for you, but it worked pretty well. Your research was good and your efforts to learn how to use the moviemaker had a good outcome. However, you should pay more attention to your spelling and text construction.

Another important contribution for students' encouragement and empowerment is the external perspective, the opinion of the community at the end of the activity. After the theatre performance, the audience was invited to express their feelings about the students' work as we show bellow.

Obrigado pela vossa criatividade, intelig ncia e coragem. Djs PARABENS!
F. do Ligeir, 20 de Junho 2009

Obrigado por me fazerem lembrar no tempo. Que maravilha!
Adorei!
Foi lindo!
Este iniciativa   um papel para aqui.
Que tal fazerem um grupo de teatro?!...
Parabens a todos, Professores e ALUNOS

H  tantas palavras para descrever o que aconteceu neste espet culo pelas 21.30h.
Foi fabuloso a forma como representaram, cantaram, dançaram.
Neste dia saem todas vitoriosas.
Foi um dia fant stico.
Continuem assim.
Parabens.

Thanks for your work, creativity, intelligence and courage. Congratulations

Thanks for making me remember old times! I've loved it. It was great! You should continue.

There are so many words to talk about what happened tonight! It was great the way you performed. You are winners tonight. Keep doing it.

At the end of the activity, the reflexion about the entire process was required in order to realize if the objectives previously established were achieved or not. Through the examples we present, we think we did it.

Final work reflexion

"Quando se falou nas aulas em fazer uma pea de teatro, eu pensei logo que n o ia fazer parte do grupo. Para mim, era impens vel participar (...). Mas, com o passar do tempo,   medida que as aulas se iam aproximando do fim do ano, vi que realmente a pea ia mesmo em frente. E, ent o, pensei... - se fazia parte do tema, seria de participar na pea. N o era justo eu ficar de fora e os meus colegas a trabalhar (...). Foi muito agrad vel o conv nio entre colegas e professores, embora tamb m bastante cansativo (...). NO entanto, valeu a pena o esforo."

"When we talked about a performance, I've disagreed. It seemed unbelivable that I could do something similar. But, I've realized that if it was a group activity I should participate. It would be unfair if my mates work and I did not. Now I think it was great and I've done something that I thought I couldn't."

"No in cio, fiquei um pouco "de p  atr s", n o estava a gostar muito da ideia, mas, com a continuao e com os ensaios, comecei a gostar. (...) Tamb m existiram algumas pessoas de fora da comunidade escolar que foram convidadas a participar na pea, por exemplo, o padre D e o Sr. J. V. (...) Na minha opini o o resultado foi muito bom."

At first I didn't agree with the activity, but during the rehearsals, I've realized how good it could be. It was great that external people, as other teachers, Mr. D. and Mr. V. could also participate. It was a very good experience.

Conclusions

The Knowledge Society emphasis the need of a shift of educational paradigms: shifting from teaching methodologies to learning methodologies. Thus, education institutions must be prepared to offer a seamless canvass for individuals to start their learning anywhere and anytime on the canvass and exit at any point and any moment.

Coaching techniques are much more appropriate to this conception of school, than the traditional role of the teacher, in order to help learners to learn by doing.

Education should not be a sum of subjects that learners have to acquire. In our opinion, school has to provide a variety of strategies that will help learners to develop competences that allow them to live and be updated in the Knowledge Society. To contextualize, we review the actual conditions defined by the European Community regarding long life and wide long education as required by the Knowledge Society.

We believe the idea that Education should be seen as an integral and permanent process, combining knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context. It's also necessary for personal fulfilment and development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment.

Students access to knowledge through different skills, different intelligences, different acquired knowledge and different wanted knowledge, different experiences. In other words, they are as much contributors to the learning as they are receivers of knowledge. In the Knowledge Society, everyone will participate in education or training (formal or informal) throughout life.

Coming to a conclusion, learning must be an important challenge. Training must come along with information. This will no doubt stimulate the habit of study and so facilitate lifelong learning. The requirements are:

- a constant interconnection – learning subjects / daily working life;
- a meaningful learning – contents which may make sense;
- a pragmatic knowledge – contents which may be of use;
- a development of critical thought – mind prepared to accept/reject the large quantity of information displayed;
- a promotion of autonomy – preparing people to be learners all along their lives;
- a development of skills - relevant to the future, in a professional or cultural and social level.

Teachers as a team will learn from one another and the courses will be the result of a synthesis of technical solutions, education experience and theories.

More than theoretical knowledge, teachers should develop:

- leadership competences;
- facilitating competences;
- communicating competences;
- listening competences;
- observation competences.

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