BEYOND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY: CHALLENGES FOR TEACHERS AND TEACHER TRAINERS

Charlot Cassar
St. Margaret College Zabbar Primary School B
Zabbar, Malta
charlotcassar@ilearn.edu.mt

Summary: Digital technology creates challenges for teachers, teacher trainers and professional development. This paper looks at the current situation with digital technology in Maltese schools. Drawing on experiential evidence, it posits digital technology in schools in a broader context, arguing that the challenge is that of providing for a "good education" that goes beyond digital technology, calling for a paradigm shift with an emphasis on the learning processes involved in teaching. It then presents the Pestalozzi Programme and the European Module Series on "Respect - Responsible Attitudes and Behaviour in the Virtual Social Space" as a case study for the professional development of teachers.

Key Words: Pestalozzi Programme; Professional Development; Respect; Teacher Training; Transversal Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge (TASK);

Introduction

In Malta, the use of digital technology and in particular mobile devices has become part of our daily lives to the extent that it is often taken for granted, as is the use of social media. It is no cliché to argue that this is revolutionising the way we do things. It permeates the very fabric of our society and its influence has even become evident in the use of language – "I will Facebook you later" instead of an "I will call you later". This "new reality" is obviously not restricted to the Maltese islands and whether we condone or condemn it, it is undoubtedly here to stay. Depending on one's take on the matter, things will either get much better or much worse, but in any case this reality brings about new challenges that educators need to address while simultaneously highlighting challenges that are at the very core of education.

A Teacher Manifesto for the 21st Century

The Proposal for a Teacher Manifesto for the 21st Century, Education for Change – Change for Education (Pestalozzi Programme, 2014) identifies the "Digital Environment" as one of the challenges for educators. The digital environment is creating new opportunities for active and democratic citizenship, providing access to information, knowledge and political participation in ways that transcend the limitations of the pre-digital

environment. The digital environment is tantamount to Pandora's Box. Its power has been unleashed and it is unlikely it can ever be controlled, censored, tamed or broken in any way. Hence, the Manifesto argues that

> The focus should be on educating citizens, forming attitudes friendly to peace, respect, democracy and rule of law and thus reflecting on how the digital processes can be made friendly to human destiny. (Pestalozzi Programme, 2014, p. 10)

A National Digital Strategy

Malta recently saw the launch of the National Digital Strategy for 2014-2020. The seven-year long strategy sets forth guiding principles and policy actions for Information and Communications Technology (ICT). It recognises the application of digital technologies in all university, college and school courses, as well as non-formal learning environments, as one of the guiding principles that underpin the successful implementation of this strategy. The need to help educators embrace technology and adopt new teaching methods to support the development of students' digital skills is also identified as a key factor that will determine success (Digital Malta 2014). This perpetrates and re-enforces the notion of education as being instrumental for the desired development in terms of this strategy and corroborates the challenges identified in the Teacher Manifesto (2014).

A Widening Gap

There is the "new" connected reality that is the norm for an ever increasing number of children. While the initial "Net Children Go Mobile" report suggests that children's internet access while on the move is still limited, the report also acknowledges that it is on the rise and that children are essentially going mobile (Mascheroni & Ólafsson, 2013). The findings from the "EU kids online: final report" (Livingstone et. al., 2011) indicate that 60% of 9-16 year-old internet users in Europe go online daily, and that a further 33% go online at least weekly. 75% of children who are online use the internet for communication purposes and 38% of 9-12 year-old and 77% of 13-16 year-old children have a profile on a social networking site. While Malta was not part of either one of these studies, I do not think we are very far off the mark either way.

In this context, it is quite ironic that, in spite of the fact that schools in Malta are fairly well-equipped in terms of digital technology, the online reality that children experience outside the school context is markedly different from the one they are exposed to in schools. The use of digital resources in the classroom is often limited to playing educational games and the use of the internet as a mass medium. The Teacher Manifesto (2014) acknowledges the fact that many educational settings 'fail to integrate new technologies in their content (as a subject matter) or methods (learning while using)'. To make the matter more urgent, in their report, Livingstone et. al. (2011) dismiss the argument that digital natives do not need support in developing digital skills as a myth.

> Children generally grasp the ethical codes of courtesy, consideration and care that guide social interaction offline, but they have more to learn – or to be taught – about the importance of such codes online; becoming empowered and responsible digital citizens will be increasingly important as the internet becomes ever more embedded into daily life.

(Livingstone et. al., 2011, p. 44)

Digital natives know it all

The Challenge for Teachers

Up till now, teachers are 'digital immigrants', a term first coined by Marc Prensky in 2001. While, as the Teacher Manifesto (2014) acknowledges, it is only a matter of time before these digital immigrants are organically phased-out of the system, we are still looking at a few decades before this happens. In the meantime, the current teacher workforce is expected to cater for the needs of digital natives and support their development as digital citizens.

The recent introduction of an online platform for Maltese schools and a Memorandum of Understanding (2010) signed between the Malta Union of Teachers and the local education authorities that regulates this has somehow "forced" teachers to perform specific tasks online. However, these tasks do not go beyond mechanical inputting of specific information like children's daily attendance. Efforts are being made to move beyond this state of affairs and various opportunities for professional development are being made available for teachers. The fact that the online solution adopted is archaic and was quickly surpassed by services freely available online is not helping much and some educators are now looking elsewhere for alternative and more viable solutions. Other teachers who are not as technically savvy see the online solution as a challenge. Most are prepared to give it their best shot not realising that the solution is passé. In practice, the requirements of the Memorandum of Understanding have been assimilated into routine practices and rendered virtually ineffective.

In the meantime, the digital revolution goes on unnoticed. Interventions in school are almost always limited to online safety awareness programmes delivered by outside professionals. Most teachers make use of mobile technology to communicate and are at least on one online social networking site. However, some still struggle with the basics and in isolated cases even sending an email is considered as a major hurdle. In some such instances, this is used as an excuse to make up for the lack of a sound pedagogical approach and technology is blamed for all the ills in the classroom. In other instances the use of digital technology becomes a mask to cover up bad practices with the assumption that somehow a flashy presentation will compensate for the rest. In most instances teachers are simply missing the wood for the trees – the digital technology somehow overshadows the inherent power of the pedagogical processes involved in teaching; as Toyama (2011) argues, there are no technology shortcuts to a good education.

This poses a formidable challenge for teacher training and in-service professional development. On the one hand, digital technology simply cannot be ignored; it permeates our everyday lives, over and above the need to justify the huge financial investments in digital technology for schools. On the other hand, digital technology alone cannot provide for quality education. It does however ensure access to information and knowledge so that the teacher is no longer the champion of the said knowledge. Many teachers are prepared to concede this, at least at face value. At a deeper level however, relinquishing this power undermines the very essence of teacher-hood. It deprives the teacher of the ultimate authority and posits him or her in a state of uncertainty and vulnerability. This scenario calls for a paradigm shift in which the teacher becomes a facilitator of learning with a focus on the pedagogical processes involved:

> Teachers as facilitators of learning in an interconnected world will be encouraged to develop particular transversal competences in themselves on top of the competences specific to their academic subject. […] Such a shift for teachers in schools includes letting go of the solely subject-based curricula to open orientations, shifting to inquiry based learning, learning about cognition, thinking about thinking, learning the value of cooperation. (Teacher Manifesto, 2014, p. 17)

These facilitators of learning must be capable of stimulating learning by creating opportunities in which students actively construct their own knowledge. They need to be helped to develop their own creativity and their "learning to learn" (Leclercq, 2011). They need to develop an ever-increasing awareness of, and control over, their personal and professional growth. The Pestalozzi Programme with the Council of Europe aims to do just this.

The Pestalozzi Programme

The Pestalozzi Programme is the Council of Europe's training and capacity building programme for education at the core of which is the person through its focus on democracy, respect for human rights and dignity and the rule of law. The programme aims to put these values into the practice of education and to support member states in the move from education policy to education practice in line with these values. The programme targets education practitioners because they are the ones who make a difference in day-to-day practice in all spaces of learning, as they support the development of the necessary transversal attitudes, skills and knowledge for sustainable democratic societies (Pestalozzi Programme, 2014).

The European Module Series are an integral part of the Pestalozzi Programme. They are directed at trainers working in education and wishing to improve their knowledge and to develop their skills in the priority fields of the Council of Europe. The modules offer a unique experience in a stimulating working environment bringing together trainers from across Europe. At the end of each module participants are invited to submit educational training materials that they have designed, tested and improved throughout the course.

Each module is built round the content, a learner-centred methodology that supports collaborative work on issues of common concerns to find fit solutions for diverse contexts, and the development of competences, sensitivity, awareness, knowledge, understanding, individual and societal practice. The themes for the module series are decided by the Secretariat of the Pestalozzi Programme after consultation with the relevant units in the Education Directorate (Pestalozzi Programme, 2013).

Respect – Responsible Attitudes and Behaviour in the Virtual Social Space

One of the module themes identified for 2013/2014 was "Respect – Responsible Attitudes and Behaviour in the Virtual Social Space". The module, which started in October 2013 and which is now coming to an end, was organised by the Pestalozzi Programme in cooperation with the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe. It brought together 40 educational practitioners who worked together over an 18 month period and was made up of two face-to-face meetings and ongoing online co-operation and support.

The module focused on the premise that the media environment has changed substantially over the past decades and the ability to use, communicate and interact in a responsible and critical yet beneficial way in this new social space is part of the competences needed to maintain and further develop our democratic societies. It permeates our lives in a much more intensive way than previously imagined. It plays a central role in most aspects of our lives: from identity building and personal development, communication, construction of reality and negotiation of meaning, information retrieval, social interaction and participation to education and learning, to work and entertainment. This training course focused on the role educational practitioners can play to develop the kind of responsible attitudes and behaviour in the virtual social space, based on the values of human rights, which are an essential framework for living together in democracy and diversity. Course participants had the opportunity to learn together as well as to plan and carry out collaborative and transversal educational projects between autumn 2013 and autumn 2014, focusing on the development of respectful and responsible attitudes and behaviours in the virtual social space provided by technological means such as the internet, mobile telephony, social networks and the like.

The module series brought together trainers and participants from formal and non-formal education working in different fields and contexts. The added value of the varied experiences that team and participants brought to the module created a rich and most active learning environment. This was evident in the enthusiasm with which the group came together, the sharing of experiences, good practices and ideas. The methodology was based on co-operative learning techniques, with an emphasis on teambuilding and peer support, bearing in mind that methodology is never neutral:

> The way we train and teach needs to reflect and model the principles we train and teach for. In other words: the medium is (also) the message. Participative, democratic skills and behaviour cannot be taught in the same way that mere knowledge can be transmitted.

The training approach adopted focuses on collaborative work and knowledge construction, learning by doing, and it builds on the potential and expertise of the trainees as much as on the expertise of the trainers. It aims to mobilise the trainees' knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to further develop them through a collaborative process of challenge, experience and reflection. (Huber, 2011, p. 141)

The central theme of the module, "Respect in the online social space", was discussed and debated thoroughly in a bid to deepen participants' knowledge and understanding while the process and methodology supported the development of participants' skills and attitudes. The biggest challenge for participants was the paradigmatic shift from "teaching about" to "supporting the development of responsible attitudes and behaviours"; from "this is respectful and this is not" to "developing the pre-requisites that we need to be respectful"; from "knowing" to "being".

The Pestalozzi Programme, through its network of trainers, has developed a core list of these "pre-requisites" - specific components with a vision of supporting tomorrow's sustainable democratic societies. These components describe core transversal attitudes, skills and knowledge (TASKs) and apply to all teachers and learners, in all subject matters. This list is the result of a three-year process of collaborative work by practitioners from diverse backgrounds (teachers, teacher educators, researchers from all over Europe) and a variety of fields of expertise including citizenship, human rights, diversity and intercultural education, media literacy, history, language, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and philosophy of education (Mompoint-Gaillard & Lazar, to be published, 2015). These components transcend subject or theme specific interventions just in the same way that the development of responsible attitudes and behaviour transcends the offline or online contexts. Ultimately, the development of these components is our onus as professionals in education.

Conclusion

The task ahead is not an easy one. Working with teachers of any subject to bring about desirable change, is a complicated matter (Harris & Lazar, 2011) but it is not impossible. A paradigm shift is possible. This encompasses the ability to reflect 'on and in action' (Schon, 1983), positing professional practice in the broader context that also includes, but is not limited to, digital technology.

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NAKON DIGITALNE TEHNOLOGIJE: IZAZOVI ZA UČITELJE I TRENERE UČITELJA

Charlot Cessar

Sažetak: *Digitalne tehnologije stvaraju izazove za učitelje, trenere učitelja i njihov profesionalni razvoj. Rad promatra trenutnu situaciju koja se odnosi na digitalne tehnologije u malteškim školama. Temeljeći se na iskustvima, postavlja digitalne tehnologije u školama u širi društveni kontekst, zagovarajući činjenicu da je stvarni izazov osiguranja „dobrog obrazovanja" mnogo više od digitalne tehnologije. Rad zagovara promjene pardigme s naglaskom na proces učenja tijekom poučavanja. Nakon toga u radu je predstavljen Pestalozzi Programme i europski modul obrazovanja učitelja „Poštovanje – odgovorni stavovi i ponašanje u virtualnom društvenom prostoru" kao studija slučaja profesionalnog usavršavanja učitelja.*

Ključne riječi: *Pestalozzi programme, profesionalno usavršavanje, poštovanje, usavšavanje učitelja, transferzalni stavovi, vještine i znanja (TASK)*