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Plurality of Voices and Cultural Diversity in the Modern Educational Setting

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Abstract: Teachers' voice on educational-related issues seems to be the most prevalent. However, this voice is not only related to curriculum, decision-making, testing, or school management, but it comprises a complex psychological dimension with multiple reverberations on the beneficiaries of learning. In order to have a clear view on the concept of *plurality of voices*, it is necessary to approach it from various perspectives: pedagogical, cultural, social and psychological. Each voice provides a different communication style. The voice of the teacher is one of authority, guidance, source of inspiration, whereas the voice of the student reflects curiosity, engagement or willingness to learn. The present work aims at highlighting the impact of both teachers and students' voice within the modern educational setting.

Keywords: plurality of voices, engagement, educational setting.

1. Introduction – Defining *plurality of voices*

As the concept itself reveals, *plurality of voices* refers to the recognition and integration of various perspectives, experiences and voices within the learning process. According to Wink (2000, p.70), "voice is the use of language to paint a picture of one's reality, one's experience, one's world." McLaren (2002, p. 245) defines voice as "the cultural grammar and background knowledge that individuals use to interpret and articulate experience." As we can notice, most definitions comprise the word *experience*, since learning and teaching are mainly about experiences that require personalization, social interactions and emotional connections. *Plurality of voices* highlights the importance of representing cultural and social approaches with a view to creating a more inclusive educational dimension.

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As a powerful instrument of communication, the teacher's voice can be translated in terms of engagement, behaviour, and rapport with students. Beyond the flatness of the voice, there are other significant elements which contribute to the smooth development of the learning process.

Voice as tonality or assembly of pitches helps to create a conducive learning environment, to stimulate students and to foster cooperation between the learning participants. Apart from the teacher who guides and monitors education, an equally important role is played by the students' voice, through the experiences they gain in the classroom and their sharing outside the school setting.

The student is not only a receiver of information applicable to one context or another, but an active, participatory, and autonomous entity, capable of developing extra cognitive abilities such as: giftedness, creative behaviour, talent or excellence.

In order to have a clear view on this broad concept of *plurality of voices*, it is necessary to approach it from a pedagogical, psychological and cultural perspective. The teacher and the student's voice, the design of the curriculum that includes a wide range of cultural, historical or literary aspects, the acceptance and promotion of multilingualism, the approach of global perspectives that help students to have a broad perception of the world, the commitment of the academic community and the development of specific behaviours and attitudes are just a few key elements that can shape teaching and learning practices.

2. The voice of the teacher and its psychological dimension

The educational framework in general and the modern one in particular start from the teacher's voice as the main promoter of education. This voice is so penetrating and assertive that it extends beyond literal speech. It is a complex term that encompasses tone, interaction with students, attitude, engagement, communication style, adaptability, empathy etc.

Conspicuously, teaching means more than a restrictive environment of information dissemination. The teacher's voice is even more striking since it creates an almost perfect balance between commanding attention and maintaining a positive learning setting. Moreover, the teacher's voice includes psychological elements that in combination with specific skills and abilities build an ideal space for professional training and personal development.

The importance of the tone is crucial, especially since it influences the effectiveness of communication. An appropriate tone can enhance trust, mitigate conflicts or facilitate transition between activities. Conversely, a harsh tone may generate disengagement, communication barriers or even panic among students.

Most frequently, the tone and volume are more meaningful than the delivery of knowledge itself. Teaching authenticity is generally regarded as a blending of constructive attitude, compassion, warmth, and genuine interest in the topic approached. Any deviation of tonality from its natural course triggers an unfriendly learning environment. In this framework, students are no longer able to become

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critical thinkers, on the contrary, they develop communication blockages and hostility to learning.

Attitude, engagement, adaptability and empathy all make up the psychological dimension of education without which, learning would be vain and ineffective. These characteristics are bidirectional since they are manifested both by the teacher and students. However, their nuances are slightly different, depending on each participant's interest in learning. The teacher's attitude is more related to 1. a positive outlook towards teaching, 2. enthusiasm to enhance students' interest and engagement, 3. respect for open communication and cultural diversity, 4. flexibility in teaching methods and approaching diverse learning styles, 5. fairness in addressing any disparities, 6. patience especially when students face challenges, 7. professionalism to help students develop valuable skills etc.

On the other side, students' attitude includes 1. motivation to actively participate in activities, irrespective of the level of difficulty or the obstacles encountered, 2. work ethic and perseverance to achieve academic success, 3. responsibility in completing tasks or meeting deadlines, 4. resilience as opportunity for growth rather than insurmountable obstacles, 5. cultural competency as engagement with a globalized world, 6. attendance and punctuality as key elements in appraising education etc.

Teachers' engagement acquires an indisputable value based on permanent adaptation to educational trends and innovative teaching methods, fostering a sense of connection and trust, sharing ideas, practices and resources, and providing the most suitable educational policies. As regards adaptability to change, educators play an essential role from the following perspectives: establishing an easy transition between lectures and group discussions, responding to students' diversity by meeting individual needs, incorporating technology into teaching and keeping updated with technological trends, navigating changes in curricula to achieve the highest educational standards, managing crises and conflicts etc.

Empathy as an instrument of understanding and sharing feelings and perspectives of others could not be absent from the learning environment since it contributes to the promotion of mental health and well-being. An empathetic approach gives rise to clarity, compassion and maintains open lines of communication. It also encourages inclusivity and fosters positive interpersonal relationships.

On the other side, lack of empathy triggers poor communication and diminishes students' enthusiasm for learning. In addition, it causes behavioural issues and may exhibit disruptive attitudes like frustration, noncompliance, defiance of authority, bullying, inappropriate language etc.

All these psychological aspects that echo the teacher's voice should be properly understood and embedded in the learning process. Any extreme manifestation can only create a dysfunctional and ineffective educational framework characterized by lack of relevance, disengagement or insecurity. The choice of the best practices must be left to teachers so that they shouldn't be "the end point of

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educational reform; the last to hear, the last to know, the last to speak." (Hargreaves, A., Shirley, D., 2011).

It is also worth mentioning the constant public pressure on the teacher during the 21st century, and the obsessive idea of reforming curriculum in a permanently dynamic academic setting. Excessive control or limitations of what must be taught cannot define an adequate learning framework and hence failure, misbehaviour and lack of cooperation. Teacher voice should be non-negotiable in establishing the 'what' and 'how' of teacher professional learning." (Tomlinson, 2018, p. 88).

As Knight, 2011, p. 35 stated "to silence the voices of teachers by asking for compliance (just follow the script) rather than ideas and feedback is dehumanizing – treating teachers like objects rather than thinking creative professionals."

3. The voice of the teacher outside the academic community

The teacher's voice is authentic and valuable not only within the academic community but also outside it. A teacher's engagement involves taking initiatives that connect school with the broader community. Playing other roles that extend beyond the school responsibilities is essential and widely accepted in a dynamic world where the school-society cohesion contributes to the advocacy of values and the creation of community identity. Learning is connected with social, political, economic and historical spheres, constructing new dialogues and approaches. As Haworth (1999, p. 101) suggests "we reconstruct, we can resist, reshape and re-accent a speech genre that becomes half-ours and half-someone else's thus making new meanings possible."

Starting from the idea that "the true direction of the development of thinking is…from the social to the individual" (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 20), we can highlight the major importance of social interactions on individual cognitive development. Only through dialogue, collaboration, cultural influences, and shared experiences, can we internalize knowledge, acquire language and shape cognitive structures.

Social constructivism in its essence does not negate each individual's innate abilities or personality differences, on the contrary, it emphasizes the intertwined nature of social and individual factors in the learning process. The teaching-learning domain mostly refers to what takes place in lessons, considering the teacher, teaching assistants and learners as the main actors (Calcagni E., 2018) but generally extends to the external community which consolidates the learning practices and values the individual's experiences. Today's teachers do not confine their roles to design the best teaching practices, to tailor syllabuses or facilitating creative thinking. They take other responsibilities in an attempt to create a so-called commercial attitude in the community they belong to. The geographical environment in which the teacher activates influences his perception of the world. Social and cultural events, close collaboration with the socio-economic environment and a deep understanding of the needs of contemporary society, help to build a professional image that is line with the expectations of others. There are complex relationships between the academic environment and other institutions, the latter regulating the best policies for the highest standards in education. Teacher's voice in society is revealing because it

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advocates for the importance of education at all levels, shapes attitude, instils values, promotes justice and equity and most significantly promotes human quality to ensure an effective long-term work environment. School train experts for the community and the community provides the necessary tools for inclusion and recognition of competences.

In conclusion, the teacher's voice transcends the classroom environment through community-based learning experiences. Understanding school's commitment as an integral part of the community, respecting cultural diversity, and inoculating a sense of social responsibility are fundamental in fostering strong ties between educators and society.

4. The voice of the learner

Listening to the voices of young students is actively advocated both in the context of formal education and within the professional framework. If the education of the past was more focused on the teacher's skills, the student having a rather passive role, contemporary pedagogy has brought a new vision of learning, as an active, collaborative, and integrative process.

Students make their voices heard both in the academic community and in other social, political or economic spheres with a view to producing the desired changes. Academic and social dialogue, working in partnerships, visibility of outcomes, the exchange of cultural experiences are all possible today by dint of technological evolution.

Beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge and retention of information, there has been created the psychology of learning meant to explore the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects of how individuals engage with technologies. The student's voice can now be distinctive and penetrating due to the huge amount of multimedia content.

Today's educational setting lays more emphasis on creating online platforms, personalized learning experiences and the design of educational methods with attention to aesthetics, usability, and emotional engagement. The student's voice has become more functional and powerful since it generates new meanings, constructive dialogues and initiatives that open further communication channels.

It is not of little importance students' participation in curriculum design and incorporation of diverse perspectives, regarding the relevance and inclusion of content, based on the learners' backgrounds and interests. Only through close collaboration and open dialogue can parties value each other's contribution.

The student's voice is dynamic and multifaceted on the condition that it conveys emotions, intentions, and meanings in communication. A democratic learning community embraces diversity, inclusivity and acknowledges the rights of both learners and educators. Offering valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of educational programs, communicating their thoughts and ideas effectively, fostering emotional intelligence and incorporating their feedback may

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contribute to creating an environment conducive to both academic and personal growth.

5. The voice of behaviour and attitude in learning

Behaviour and attitude are integral parts to the learning process. The depth approach of learning does not only include "the filling of empty vessels" Marton & Saljo (1997), but rather making changes at the attitudinal level, in the sense of creating an intrinsic motivation for learning. Attitude and behaviour influence teachers and students alike and help them through their educational endeavours.

A positive attitude should characterize all learning actors along with their commitment, curiosity, motivation to explore new domains, perseverance, and constructive communication. Practices, experiences, and perception on what we learn form themselves a type of attitude. Respect for the educator, determination to evolve, the way students manage time in carrying out tasks, the aesthetics and emotional valence of learning influence the participants in learning and trigger desirable patterns of behaviour.

The perspective of whether learning is a source of pleasure or a burden can vary widely among students depending on such factors as: personal perception, the nature of the subject or compliance with each individual's learning styles and needs. Engaging in activities that bring them a sense of accomplishment or exploring topics worthy of interest can be inherently pleasurable. On the other hand, monotonous tasks, an unsupportive or highly demanding learning environment, characterized by fear of failure or the inability to keep up with the current educational trends may become burdensome.

Last but not least, social pressure and individuals' constant concern to comply with societal expectations or norms, inhibit creativity and limit the so much valuable autonomy in learning or teaching. The attitude shown both in the academic environment and outside it is an echoing voice, whose purpose is to be heard, implemented and perfected throughout human evolution.

Fostering a positive behavioural climate should become a prerequisite for modern education. In contrast, lack of a benevolent attitude stiffens both the act of learning and interpersonal relationships.

6. Conclusions

Voice in education is unique and represents the experiences, perspectives, and ideas of each participant in the learning process. Understanding the value of voice means celebrating diversity and encouraging change. Voice also reinforces the democratic principles of equality, inclusion, and the right to hear and to be heard. Recognizing and valuing the diverse voices contributes to a richer educational framework.

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