The Impact of Professionalizing the Teaching Career in the Digital Age

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Abstract: The professionalization of the teaching career in the digital age considers the adaptation of teachers to new technologies through the development of digital skills, continuous training and the use of modern teaching tools. The advantages, opportunities, interactive lessons, open communication, challenges and risks, the transition from old to new, the validation of learning, the risk of confusion and teaching methods that harmoniously combine traditional and digital methods (Blended Learning) are aspects that have an impact on the professionalization of the teaching career in this context. The traditional transmission of knowledge to a facilitation-centered model, guided by European standards (DigCompEdu) and the digitalization of the educational act offer unique opportunities to modernize the education system. These will lead to efficiency, involvement, transparency but also to resistance, burnout, disorientation covered by the ethics and security of information, data and the development of skills.

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1. The Advantages and Opportunities of Professionalizing the Teaching Career in the Digital Age

The digital age highlights and imposes the professionalization of the teaching career. This professionalization process has advantages and opportunities in terms of rapid access to information, interactive lessons and open communication.

Rapid access to information involves the use of online platforms for activities with a high level of knowledge, analysis, comparisons, etc. The professionalization of the teaching career radically transforms the way teachers manage the huge volume of data available today. Rapid access to information is no longer an option, but a central component of modern teaching competence. Thus, the teacher's activity is based on rapid planning and the contents of lessons are updated in real time, directly from global academic and scientific sources. Open educational resources help teachers to download, adapt and use digital textbooks, lesson plans/courses and ready-made worksheets for free. By accessing communities of good practice on dedicated platforms, teachers exchange teaching materials and strategies in real time, which requires necessary skills in this regard, such as advanced search, critical thinking and the ability to combat disinformation. The use of filters and academic search engines to quickly find quality information develops an ability to quickly assess whether an online source is safe, correct and scientifically valid, and thus the teacher becomes a filter that selects only verified data to present to the beneficiaries of the educational act.

Interactive lessons transform the educational act from a simple entertainment exercise into a rigorous pedagogical tool, and the modern teaching staff no longer uses technology just to attract attention, but to activate the critical thinking of the beneficiaries. This leads to personalization of learning, instant formative assessment, controlled gamification, interactive whiteboards, micro-learning applications, quizzes, virtual labs and requires essential skills for digital classroom management. Digital platforms allow the teacher to adjust the pace and difficulty of tasks according to the level of each beneficiary of the educational act, personalizing the learning process. The use of game elements (points, badges, leaderboards) is subordinated to learning objectives, not just fun, known in practice as controlled gamification. Interactive whiteboards and specific applications have the advantage of building activity-specific conceptual maps, diagrams and dynamic schemes directly during the teaching activities, and through micro-learning applications knowledge can be fixed and thus eliminate the monotony of teaching. An innovative

advantage of the professionalization of the teaching career, we find in the simulation of processes in virtual laboratories where physical, chemical or geographical phenomena can be experienced that are impossible to reproduce safely. These technologies make the didactic lessons more lively and interactive, only if the teacher has essential skills for a digital didactic management that will emphasize attention management, digital didactic script and online collaboration and through the ability to alternate moments of screens with those of face-to-face discussions to avoid distraction, the exact design of the time allocated to each application so that technology does not block the transmission of content and the organization of virtual work teams, facilitating joint projects even outside class hours.

2. The Challenges of Professionalizing the Teaching Career in the Digital Age

The professionalization of the teaching career in the digital age has major challenges and vulnerabilities, since without solid pedagogical training, the simple introduction of technology in public and/or private educational institutions generates adverse effects for both teachers and beneficiaries of the educational act.

Among the challenges of the professionalization of the teaching career in the digital age, we can identify the digital divide in different areas and/or regions, the overload of participants in the educational act, the existence of continuing formal courses and even the dependence created by the use of IT and information infrastructure and architecture.

The environmental differences in teaching activity refer to the rural environment compared to the urban environment and have huge consequences on teaching activity and its professionalization precisely through logistics and teaching infrastructure. Designing teaching materials and lessons based on new, state-of-the-art technologies requires a considerable effort from both teaching staff and beneficiaries who are not yet adapted to new IT uses and do not have the necessary resources.

Developing real practical skills is another challenge of the digital age for teaching activity since many training programs offer diplomas and do not consider alignment with the requirements of professionalizing the teaching career and the socio-economic requirements of professional life.

Excessive digitalization of all teaching activities at all levels creates dependence on the existing infrastructure and an electricity outage, without providing batteries,

leads to the cessation of activity due to the internet network and thus blocks the teaching activity designed exclusively digitally.

Therefore, the transition from the old to the new of the teaching career is a challenge for its professionalization. Many teachers were trained using classical methods and find it more difficult to adapt to the new digital requirements, and the transition from the traditional to the digital model represents the most complex cultural and psychological barrier in the professionalization of the teaching career. It is not just about the acquisition of tablets, but about a profound change in the teacher's mentality, which starts from the rejection of digitalization to the integration of the profession in the digital age. The teaching staff shows initial resistance because technology is seen as an additional burden or as a factor that disrupts the tranquility of classes and uses the screen only as a classic blackboard, without changing teaching methods, but gradually they adapt from a pedagogical point of view and technology begins to be used to create new, interactive tasks, impossible to achieve in physical format.

The challenges of professionalizing the teaching career in the digital age are also determined by the digital anxiety of teachers, their high average age and the lack of time needed to adapt to new IT discoveries. The fear of teachers with experience in teaching, of not making mistakes in front of students is determined by their digital nativity as they master the devices better, and the teaching staff, most often has an average age of advanced and are anchored in daily bureaucratic tasks, with limited space to experiment and learn new tools.

The above-mentioned challenges can have transitive solutions towards success by ensuring reverse mentoring, the existence of support communities and through training focused on pedagogy. Thus, young teachers or even students can guide experienced teachers in the technical use of online digital platforms, creating groups in educational institutions where teachers openly share their technological mistakes and successes, without being judged, and courses must teach teachers why to use an application (the teaching purpose), *not just which buttons to press or which buttons to use*.

3. The Risks of Professionalizing the Teaching Career in the Digital Age

The professionalization of the teaching career in the digital age brings psychological, social, pedagogical and ethical risks that can affect the professional career.

Delving into the psychological and social risks shows how forced digitization transforms the identity and mental health of teachers, through digital overload of private space, technological complexity and culminates in Burnout. Thus, the huge volume of messages on WhatsApp, e-mail and different and multiple online platforms quickly exhausts the energy and the notifications received in the evening or on the weekend destroy the recovery time. Frequent switching of applications creates a permanent feeling of incompetence and instills in teachers a fear that they will be replaced by younger colleagues who are digital natives.

The Burnout dynamic is also imposed by the invisible work of teachers, such as the creation of digital materials and online correction, the pressure of quick and correct responses to the requests received in the online environment, but also by the continuous monitoring of dozens of video windows.

An important risk that must be taken into account refers to the professional isolation of teachers, as there is a sharp decrease in human interactions due to digitalization, as the "screen" can reduce empathy and emotional connection with the beneficiaries of the teaching act and process. By communicating messages and text lessons in the online environment, the tone of voice, body language are eliminated, and thus an erosion of empathy is reached.

Another element that leads to professional isolation, even professional loneliness, is determined by the "virtual office/chair" that cannot replace direct emotional support between colleagues, which in a very short time will lead to the degradation of social relationships but also to the impairment of the development of skills necessary for the teaching career for both teachers and beneficiaries. In addition to these psychological and social risks, the professionalization of the teaching career under conditions of excessive digitalization also has pedagogical and operational risks that are highlighted by the way in which technology can alter the quality of teaching and the administrative efficiency of teachers.

A risky trap is determined by the focus shifted from pedagogy directly to the use of digital tools, through the excessive use of fast online resources, which will decrease critical thinking, create a false illusion of efficiency and lead to fragmentation of attention. However, this standardization through algorithms and online platforms limits the creativity and spontaneity of the teaching staff and generates dependence on digital infrastructure and will create panic and instant blockages when the IT architecture fails. The false illusion of efficiency, fragmentation of attention, superficial automated assessment, digital passivity and loss of curricular autonomy are other pedagogical traps of the digitalization of the educational act. These

pedagogical traps are determined by the use of spectacular visual presentations that often hide the lack of depth of the content, the evaluation carried out on online platforms in the form of grid tests that eliminate argumentation and creativity, the inactivity of participants who become simple consumers of multimedia content, and the teaching of information from ready-made digital textbooks, giving up on personalizing lessons.

And in terms of ethics, there may be risks that deepen the inequity determined by disadvantaged environments, risks related to data security by not ensuring the confidentiality of the parties involved in teaching activities, but also risks related to intellectual property, with special reference to plagiarism and the unauthorized use of digital materials that become difficult to control. These risks in the field of ethics are based on the massive use of artificial intelligence tools by students to complete assignments that block their critical thinking, vulnerability to cyber attacks or phishing attempts targeting school data, accidental distribution of grades or images of students on unsecured online platforms and the expansion of harassment beyond the schoolyard, on online communication platforms created for courses.

4. The Concept of Blended Learning

An example of a teaching technique that harmoniously combines traditional and digital methods is the application of the Blended Learning concept.

The concept of Blended Learning is the ideal solution to eliminate confusion and maintain pedagogical balance as it uses technology to streamline the process, but keeps direct human interaction as a central element. Specifically, the “flipped classroom”, “classroom rotation” and a combination of these can be used.

Thus, at home, outside of class hours, students watch a short video (3-5 minutes) or read a digital material sent by the teacher to discover the new topic, and at “school”, the “class” starts directly with practical activities, debates, problem solving and clarification of ambiguities, collaborating directly in the desks. The “classroom rotation” takes into account traditional, digital and mixed aspects. Thus, the class is divided into small groups that rotate, against the clock (e.g. 15 minutes per station), through three work points in the room: the traditional one has direct work with the teacher for personalized explanations or fixing difficult notions and collaborates as a team on paper (creating posters, practical projects or worksheets) and in an online environment, in the “digital” one, work is done individually on tablets/computers

(quick tests, virtual simulations or viewing content) and in the mixed one, the basic lesson has a traditional character where the teacher teaches the fundamental theoretical concepts to the entire class, using classical methods (explanation, dialogue, work at the blackboard) and is combined with digital deepening, where switching takes place in the computer lab or using devices to apply the theory through specific educational software.

The advantages of this concept are the flexibility, interaction and efficiency of the educational act based on the program adapted for each participant in the educational act, on maintaining the human connection with teachers and colleagues and obtaining better results by combining the two styles.

The application of the Blended Learning concept depends on the pedagogical context, but the basic structure divides the subject between online activities (theory, training) and physical activities (practice, discussions). To implement this concept, it is necessary to choose the online platform (Moodle, Google Classroom or Microsoft Teams), share the content and teaching material through which the pure theory is moved into video, text or online podcast format, create digital assessments by using online questionnaires to quickly verify knowledge and at the same time, keep the classroom for interaction, only for debates and projects.

Although it offers flexibility, the blended learning model also comes with a series of major challenges for students, teachers and institutions. Thus, for students, regardless of their state, the challenge is isolation as the lack of daily physical contact can reduce motivation and voluntary and unjustified postponement of a task and requires a lot of self-discipline and good time management, but also frustration as technical problems or poor internet connection block learning.

For teachers, the challenge of the Blended Learning concept comes from the sphere of overload as the creation of digital online materials requires a lot of additional time, of resistance and adaptation to new technologies which can be difficult for some teachers but also of low control as it is more difficult to verify whether students are actually going through the theory at home. Regarding educational institutions, the challenges are financial, equality and security, as licenses for online platforms and video equipment are expensive, learners without high-performance devices at home are clearly disadvantaged and managing personal data on online platforms involves cyber risks.

5. Conclusions

Technology does not replace the teaching staff or the teaching career, but redefines their role. The professionalized teaching staff in the digital age governs technological tools with the aim of developing the critical thinking of the beneficiaries of the teaching and educational act, ensuring a balance between digital innovation and classical pedagogy. Pedagogical balance and human value are harmoniously intertwined in conditions where success does not come from the elimination of classical methods, but from their harmonious combination with digital ones (through models such as Blended Learning) and devices do not replace the teaching staff but take over their repetitive tasks to leave them time to be a mentor and facilitator. Official standards and combating the "teaching chaos" impose digital skills since institutional digitalization works only when the "school" as a whole chooses a single digital ecosystem, eliminating confusion for participants in the teaching act.

Professionalization implies strict rules of "digital hygiene", data protection and security, but also the right to disconnect to prevent burnout. The modern teacher must change his/her way of assessment to transform artificial intelligence from a copying tool into a learning partner. Ultimately, the professionalized teacher in the digital age is not the one who uses the most applications, but the one who knows exactly when, why and how to use them to support the progress of each participant in the learning process.

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