

Reports of Focus Group Discussions:

Group D – The Role of Teachers: Lifelong Learners in a Community of Practice

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1. INTRODUCTION

We begin by thinking about the roles of the teacher. How can teachers support students to become lifelong learners in a *networking* society? To give an answer we have to answer different questions:

- What do the learners need, how do they learn, what do they want to learn, how can teachers achieve that?
- What must the teacher do, what tools does s/he need, what learning environment(s) can s/he offer/design?
- How do the answers to these questions influence the school's infrastructure and the school as an organization? What role can the teacher take in this process?

2. MISSION COMES FIRST

Our vision of education specifies the way we want our students to learn, what roles the teachers should have, how we use ICT and what organization of the school will make this work. All professionals involved in the school (not only the teachers, but the managers and supporters as well) should be aware of their mission. We as members of one of the working groups 'Roles

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of the teacher' made the following mission statement: "to support students to become lifelong learners in a *networking* society." Within this, we'll focus on the roles of the teacher.

First of all we have to define 'lifelong learning' and 'a networking society'.

Lifelong learning is defined as an attitude or mindset that you can learn at any time and at any place. A networking society refers not only to physical networks but also to the constant exchange, interaction and reflection of different institutions and people. Schools, teachers and learners should be viewed as an integral part of the networking society.

3. TEACHER ROLES

3.1 Supporting the learner

When the teacher has this role s/he should be able to create learning situations to enable learners to construct cognitive, affective and social knowledge.

In order to do this the teacher first of all must be a coach who knows the learner through formative evaluation of cognitive, social and affective knowledge. As a coach s/he also challenges the learner perhaps by confrontation or by putting up a mirror to create reflective situations, so both teacher and learner know where the learner stands.

With this knowledge the coach sets tasks with achievable goals. By doing this, the teacher motivates the students.

When the teacher uses this knowledge (i.e. the knowledge the learner has acquired from reflection) to find the right way (material or resources) to get the learner to the next step or a higher level, s/he acts as a facilitator. A facilitator also knows how and when each individual learner can attain the curriculum objectives.

The teacher in the role of conductor knows what has to be done to attain the curriculum objectives for the whole group/class. How and when to get there. S/he also knows how to manage the class(room).

Last but not least, the teacher is a resource. S/he knows where to get the relevant information and when to use her/his own knowledge to help the learner, or who or what else can help.

S/he also publishes the products of the learners' learning process for other learners to access and encourages the students to do so.

3.2 Supporting the learning environment

The learning environment has to be considered as a whole: the roles, the tools, the content, the tasks, the actors, their relationships, the context, et cetera. The teacher is the designer of the classroom arrangements. S/he brings in innovative elements, setting the tools and the activities the students have to engage in.

The teacher suggests from her/his background of media-, content- and pedagogical competences what elements of the learning environment could be helpful for the learning process.

In this sense s/he is a consultant and advisor for the improvement of the learning environment.

3.3 Supporting society

Teachers are accountable to society. Different societies might put varying pressures upon the teacher and this will affect the roles of the teacher.

Teachers need to make decisions about their role and how they implement social issues within their learning community.

Specific roles within the 'societal' role are discussed below.

3.3.1 Duty of care role

Teachers have a duty of care to their students in the absence of the parents. This may include acting like a social worker and a parent. Crucial to this would be a communication role with the parents. This communication can be facilitated by ICT.

3.3.2 Ethical role

Ethics can be perceived differently by different people. The teacher has a role to play both in behaving ethically themselves and promoting ethical behavior in the students. This ethical stance will be influenced by the culture within which the school is situated. Good citizenship both online and in society are necessary in this role.

3.3.3 Cultural role

Teachers make decisions about how to present cultural aspects of their curriculum. ICT may be used by the teacher to raise awareness of their own and others' culture.

In some cultures the teacher has a role in facilitating the parental role in the education process.

3.3.4 Certification role

Society expects the teacher to produce students of a specified standard. These expectations may be through benchmarks, external examinations and/or certification.

3.3.5 Organizational role

The teacher is a cooperator, a change agent and an integrator. Overall s/he is a lifelong learner.

3.3.6 Cooperator

S/he is aware of the mission given by society, s/he is able to discuss it, and to make it concrete by developing a platform of common values with her/his colleagues. In this way s/he acknowledges the vision of the school to be communicated within the organization and outside to the stakeholders.

3.3.7 Change agent

The change- agent is a leader. S/he is future oriented, is a meaningful part of her/his team and has the skills to be a team player. Seeing the importance of making the school a learning organization, the teacher needs to contribute to change, always ready to share ideas to construct collective knowledge. Of course s/he also fulfils her/his responsibilities within the organization.

3.3.8 Integrator

The integrator makes different things on different levels fit within the organization, with the student at the centre of the developments. People and ideas are adopted in a functional/rational way.

It is essential that teachers are organized in teams. Roles are distributed within the team according to talent and competencies. Even though teachers within teams are responsible of different aspects of the teacher roles, they all need to take care of 'all' roles, if needed.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusions

The role of supporting students to become lifelong learners in a networking society is multi-faceted and complex. It is not fair or reasonable to expect all the roles defined to be in one person. 'Teacher' in a networking society needs to be a team. The expectation is that teachers must be professionals who are members of a community of practice. The community should be an eclectic mix of professionals with different expertise within and outside the school. Within this framework ICT is used to enhance and expand the team and to help individuals to grow personally and professionally.

4.2 Recommendations

1. When organizing a teachers' team it should be realized that this has consequences for the school as an organization. It should not be a hierarchy, but a learning organization that knows how to use Human Resource Management and how to deal with teachers who are also learners.
2. The teacher as a lifelong learner must have full access to ICT and be given enough time to develop as a professional.

Section 4

Teaching and Learning Environments of the Future