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TEACHING UNDER THE ATLAS SYNDROME

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Abstract

Atlas is a character from Greek mythology, a titan who was condemned by the Olympian gods to carry the world on his back. This concept associated with university teaching has been highlighted in the research and reports developed by various organisations and universities on the evaluation of teaching during the period of confinement as a result of the health crisis caused by Covid-19.

The aim of the work is to demonstrate the need for a change of roles in the university environment where the teacher has to stop acting as Atlas and help students to take responsibility for their learning.

The methodology used for the development of this article is based on a narrative literature search. The search was guided by the objective established for this article. The key words were: university teaching, university students, university education in times of confinement. The bibliographic sources were from: WOS, SCOPUS, GOOGLE SCHOLAR, ERIC. A synthesis table was drawn up with the results and a conceptual analysis was carried out.

The lack of autonomy of students and the demands placed on teachers as to what is expected of their role within the social imaginary. They have shown that there is a need for a change in the roles of university teachers and students. Focusing mainly on encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning and gain autonomy, in this way we will move towards a new pedagogy that is aligned with the far-fetched and poorly implemented Bologna changes.

1 INTRODUCTION

By March 2020, the pandemic generated by Covid-19 had initiated a drastic trial against institutionalised structures worldwide. Among them, it is worth highlighting those that cater to the student population, of which around 70% have been affected according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [1], as they stopped receiving classes, considered as we have known up to now, face-to-face classes located in a specific space and at a specific time.

As recently reported by UNICEF [2], the unleashed situation completely changed the conditions under which teachers used to carry out their work. This means that teachers have been forced to adapt to the new situation, often without any guidance or support and at their own expense (i.e. when devising mechanisms to communicate with their students using their own devices and mobile data).

From this perspective, educational institutions at all levels - either public or private - had to adapt to the context of the pandemic, thus questioning the roles of all their agents, i.e. their function has been questioned, as well as their preparedness to address the imminent challenges that the health context had brought about.

Thus, focusing on University teachers, the teaching role wondered about the place it had to assume within a University institution which, after this situation, was infantilised by its bureaucracy and especially by its almost incapacity to serve the society to which it owes its duty. This situation was reaffirmed by the EOI [3] in its latest report on the subject, "The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the serious problems and inefficiencies in our education systems".

This teaching role has been in debt for about 20 years (Bologna, 1998), as it was one of the pillars on which the methodological renewal resulting from the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) relied. This implied a new didactic approach, giving greater importance to learning than to teaching, underlining the need to move from teacher teaching to student learning. It sought to promote, with the help of the teacher, a teaching model more centered on the learning process itself [4]. Therefore, it called for a new style of teaching where a greater role is sought for students in their training. Thus, teaching should be organized according to the competences to be achieved, promoting the acquisition of tools for

autonomous and lifelong learning. Hativa adds that Universities must train students to think at a high level and turn them into autonomous learners [5].

Faced with this role demanded by the EHEA, the aim of the university lecturer is to orient, guide and support the constructive activity of students by providing them with the necessary educational aids. This implies a more active work of the student, who will have to assume his responsibility, design and manage his own learning process for the non-classroom time. As it has been stated: "the teacher has to stop being the main source of knowledge and consultation, although he will of course accompany the student throughout his learning process" [6].

The question that arises is: are University teachers like this? The aim of this study is to investigate the roles that University lecturers have assumed during the pandemic and how this has been reflected in the academic narrative, and also to project the following question: which should be the true role of University lecturers?

2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for the development of this article is based on a narrative literature search [7]. The search was guided by the objective established for this article. The key words used were: University teaching, University students and University education in times of confinement. The bibliographic sources used were: WOS, SCOPUS, GOOGLE SCHOLAR and ERIC. The results obtained were used to draw up a summary table, and a conceptual analysis was carried out.

3 RESULTS

As a result of reading the material (peer-reviewed articles, essays and official documents from international organisations), a table with the main findings was drawn up (Annex 1). A summary is presented in Table 1.

It is clear that international organisations have not been concerned about the methodological aspect that teachers have assumed during the process of adaptation and change in this singular and critical time. Their main concerns have turned around digital competence, resources (including economic resources) and training for adaptation to these learning environments and contexts. This situation allows us to extract a hidden reading of what they expect from the teaching function.

Firstly, they expect University teachers to take on the role of technical applicators who can adapt their teaching, without any questioning of methodologies, but simply to make the system work similarly in a new virtual environment. Thus, the hybrid classrooms that have received all the economic investment to adjust to these changes have only served to accentuate the model of the narrative and transmissive classes of the teacher through technology. In other words, neither the educational institutions, nor the administrations making the investments, nor even the teachers, have considered the need for a methodological change to take advantage of the current situation. It has been assumed that the best thing to do was to continue doing the same thing but now mediated by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

Secondly, they expect this new virtual environment to be compatible with the real, everyday environment of the family space, although in many situations it has become evident that reconciling work and family life is not easy and has often caused endless emotional stress.

Thirdly, all of this should be done in the shortest possible time to avoid major imbalances within the system. This implied that working hours of both teachers and students had to be extended.

Therefore, both time and space have been critically affected. For many years, these two components have been the main conditioning factors that have constrained teachers from fulfilling the function or role that the social imaginary attributed to them in their role as the immovable "source of knowledge", centered on narration as a methodology for transmitting knowledge. The resounding fall of these barriers has initiated, almost unintentionally, a path towards educational change that has no way back. What has not been achieved by the introduction of ICTs in the educational system is made visible by these variables "time and space", which I hope that, as in physics, will be able to break the paradigm of educational innovation.

Another of the pedagogical aspects implicit in this moment of crisis was the close role and the feedback that the teacher has given to the student. Thus, teachers often had to provide some socio-emotional

support to the students. Teachers assumed this role without any previous preparation in his training, since it is a competence that does not appear in most of the training plans.

Table 1. Sources.

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4 CONCLUSIONS

This study sought to investigate the roles that University teachers have assumed during the pandemic, in order to address the following question: Which should be the real role of the University teacher?

It has become clear that the role that is most recurrently evident when talking about normalising the University educational situation is a role that returns to lecturing, to making use of the narratives that endorse it as a source of knowledge, and which now use ICTs as mediators.

Once again, history condemns teachers to carry the responsibility for their students' learning (Atlas) on their shoulders, which is a heavy emotional and social burden. If we emphasise the social aspect, it could be pointed out that future citizens will foreseeably be people with little capacity to decide, undertake, promote or innovate... people who during their time in the educational institutions were not prepared to take responsibility for their learning, their future or their environment.

It is time to liberate Atlas from the condemnation of the gods... The system must allow teachers to step down from the pedestal of absurd, watertight knowledge and take on a new role. Today, more than ever, we need teachers who are first and foremost humanising and approachable, who must act as guides or facilitators of learning, and who must allow students acquire autonomy and responsibility for their learning.

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