

I decided that the responsibility was mine

Technology, an ally of educational inclusion



by Isabel Andrades Pelayo and Paulina Bánfalvi Kam

Two events stirred education to focus on inclusive education in the 1990's: Jomtien Congress in Thailand in 1990 and the Salamanca Declaration in 1994. Policy makers and experts from all countries embraced this idea and promised to work urgently for educational environments that respond to the needs of all learners, for an education that pivots around inclusive concepts. Thirty years have passed and even today most teachers recognise that they face many obstacles and barriers to ensuring inclusion.

But what do we mean by inclusion? We say that to include is "to leave no one out", but outside of what? Outside of our group, our context, our reality, our standard, what we consider correct, adequate, desirable? To include is not to work so that someone meets our requirements, but to offer an environment that meets theirs.

The use of educational technology makes it possible to offer these environments. It makes it easier to respond to different learning profiles, paces and expectations by generating resource banks with different levels of complexity and depth and through different channels of access to information; it allows students to access these

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resources in asynchronous time, respecting their pace and schedules; debate and interact at different levels -teacher/student, teacher/group and students among themselves-; manage response time, interaction, feedback and metacognition of both the student and the teacher with greater pause; share learning, doubts and reflections among all students, serving as models and opportunities for improvement. In addition, it allows the teacher to monitor and trace the work of their students one by one, which in turn contributes to building a more complete and complex learning profile, offering opportunities for the expression of learning through different channels and responding to the preferences and interests of the students. Finally, recording sessions provides an excellent opportunity for teacher self-assessment, peer assessment, observation of student attitudes, dispositions and responses, student and teacher metacognition, content review, extraction of evidence of learning and the use of various assessment tools aimed at improving student learning processes.

But are we taking advantage of all this potential? In recent decades, the avalanche of educational innovation methodologies and, more recently, with the health crisis, the leap to digital and online environments, have generated a false image of an inclusive response. Classrooms and discourses have been filled with new concepts, applications and tools, but inclusion is still a pending subject.

TEACHING INNOVATION VS METHODOLOGICAL



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INNOVATION

I have recently had the opportunity to do a master's degree in education, technology and innovation, a role I have combined as a tutor in online learning workshops for primary and secondary school students. As a student, I found myself in an online context in which most of the teaching staff used the same dynamics as my teachers 25 years ago at the teacher training college. Unidirectional classes in which the teacher is limited to the reading of notes and in which the students had to limit themselves to listening. The multiple resources for interaction and the inclusion of different learning profiles, starting points, expectations and professional experience were not taken into account by many of these teachers, neither when organising time and resources, nor for grouping and assessment processes. They talked to us about the opportunities that online contexts offer for inclusion, while at the same time resisting their use and treating us all the same.

Meanwhile, as an online workshop tutor, I have been able to see how my approach, my obsession to respond to everyone, my attitude to observe and find out why, worked in favour of inclusion, beyond the methods and tools.

Lucía came in as the youngest of an advanced group, in the middle of the year, with narrowly focused, disorganised and vague thinking and learning processes. Scattered, with difficulties in focusing her thinking and argumentation, she seemed to always go off on tangents, unable to conclude or reason using the evidence and relationships available

to her. I decided early on that the responsibility was not hers, but mine, and that her time was different. Slowly, but without taking a step backwards, each day seemed to open up a little more. Without slowing down the rest of the group, I reflected on my objectives, modulated the resources in response to her profile and offered precise and concise feedback to each of her contributions, helping her to move one step further and further. One academic year later, Lucía is back with us. She has changed her attitudes and willingness to think and participate, showing a reflective, focused, analytical and sometimes very creative way of thinking. Lucía gained confidence and that confidence has led her to find her way.

Alberto did not want to connect. He would turn off the camera, scream and kick and, on the rare occasions that his family managed to connect him, he refused to participate. I decided that the responsibility was not his, but mine. And I asked myself the "why" questions. I tried one thing, then another, and finally decided that this group was not his. The change worked a miracle. Meeting more like-minded profiles gave him the motivation to participate and get involved. Alberto is quiet and I have to respect him. That's why I look at the quality of his contributions and not the quantity, and patiently wait for "his moment". I earned his respect, respecting his time, and he rewarded me with a fabulous final product, which went beyond what was expected.

The science group was a challenge from the beginning. Each and every one of the students showed a profile with

a focus on data, obtained by rote, without understanding or relationship. Individualistic and personal, they did not listen to each other, they did not reflect on each other's interventions, they did not do the work they set out to do, they did not pay attention, they did not cooperate. I decided that the responsibility was not theirs, but mine. We continued to insist by offering feedback that would provoke metacognition, reflection on their thought processes and a change in attitudes towards collaboration and the construction of synergies to tackle the common objective and grow in themselves. Why? What for? we asked after each intervention. At the end of the course, they gave us a wonderful gift. When we arrived, we found them debating, listening to each other, interacting, sharing, cooperating, building on each other's ideas, focusing on causes, consequences, relationships, data and evidence drawn from research that seeks to understand and not just to retain.

Our responses were managed through the use of various platforms, applications, resources and digital tools, which facilitated our work and made it more effective. But the inclusion of students, the achievement of getting them involved in learning processes that lead them to enjoy and understand their role as learners, to feel valued and respected in their individuality, connected to each other through their interests, contributing and cooperating to achieve a common goal that serves as a challenge and stimulus to their strengths, that makes them feel the thrill of achievement through a process of personal improvement, guided by the teacher and the synergies of

their peers, that does not depend on the tools, methods or resources. It solely depends on me. I wish we innovated more in teachers than in models and methods.

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