



Reflective Essays

Education in Times of the Pandemic COVID 19

Reflections From the Investigative Pedagogical Final Practice

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Abstract

In this reflective essay, I want to show the situation that I experienced in the last semester of my career, which was the investigative pedagogical final practicum at the Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia. I started developing this last stage in the “Escuela Normal Superior Santiago de Tunja”. Then, I had to change the institution, and I finished my practice in the “Institución Educativa Libertador Simón Bolívar”. In this process, the COVID 19 pandemic was expanding in almost every country, and the world stopped the normal development of activities, which included the academic institutions. For that reason, I decided to reflect about education around the world and some of the challenges that are always present. Also, I wanted to talk about the new difficulties related to the virus and the ways teaching could implement technological devices and internet connection. Finally, I write some of the implications that I consider important in these difficult times in which education will not stop.

Key words: COVID 19, education, technology, technological devices

Resumen

En este ensayo reflexivo, quiero mostrar la situación que experimenté en el último semestre de mi carrera, la práctica pedagógica final de investigación en la Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia. Comencé a desarrollar esta última etapa en la "Escuela Normal Superior Santiago de Tunja", luego tuve que cambiar de institución y terminé mi práctica en la "Institución Educativa Libertador Simón Bolívar". En este proceso, la pandemia de COV 19 se expandió en casi todos los países y el mundo detuvo el desarrollo normal de las actividades, incluidas las instituciones académicas. Por esa razón, decidí reflexionar sobre la educación en todo el mundo y algunos desafíos que siempre están presentes. Además, las nuevas dificultades relacionadas con el virus y las formas de impartir la enseñanza utilizando dispositivos tecnológicos y conexión a Internet. Finalmente, escribo algunas de las implicaciones que considero importantes en estos tiempos difíciles en los que la educación no se detendrá.

Palabras clave: COVID 19, dispositivos tecnológicos, educación, tecnología

Introduction

Education nowadays is facing many changes related to the eventualities that the world is confronting because of the COVID 19 pandemic. These challenges are producing new ways to face education. Almost all institutions in Colombia have followed the government's instructions to stay safe during this time. In this regard, the Ministry of Education (2020) released the following information in one of its pamphlets:

The Curricular Letter (conjunta) number 11 from the Ministry of Health and Social Protection on the 9th of March, 2020 has released the following prevention recommendations regarding education in the Newsletters 19, 20, and 21 published on the 14th, 16th, 17th of March, 2020. Additionally, Laws 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12 were established on the 20th and 25th of March, 6th and 7th of April, 19th of May, and 2nd of June, 2020. These newsletters and laws have established social distancing measures for children and adolescents to continue their educational processes at home

with guidance and pedagogical assistance from their teachers and families¹. (p. 9)

Based on my experience, I was supposed to start my teaching practicum in a specific school but, because of COVID, the school changed its mind on having pre-service teachers. I did not know where I was going to be. Initially I got used to the new process in a different institution with diverse normativity rules. One particularity was that all students had to be included despite the issues they were facing in their lives and the pandemic. In this way, the institution was open to receive all kind of students no matter the level of education, status, social class and circumstances. Several questions popped into my mind related to the pandemic and the situations in the schools because there are many problems in Colombia related to education and technological devices. Though many people use technological devices every day, it is still true that others do not have the same opportunities to communicate with their teachers and peers.

Based on that, it is important to think that the world does not always will work in the same vein and in the education field, it is crucial to search for new ways to teach in a

¹ Translated by the author.

globalized world. In this regard, I want to recognize the importance of technology, the benefits of virtual education, and the influence it has on students in this new situation that is affecting the entire world. With this information, I will situate this reflective essay through the following constructs: global challenges in the world related to education, obstacles of education due to COVID 19, virtual education, and Colombian education in the time of COVID 19. I have researched these topics to understand the situation we are living related to the education in order to reflect on the implications these concepts have on our context.

Global Challenges in the World Related to Education

Education is a global right in almost all the countries of the world. Patrinos and Psacharopoulos (2011) stated that “The United Nations, UNESCO, UNICEF, the International Labor Office and the World Bank have all been promoting education as a basic human right and growth engine” (pp.7-8). Around the world, countries have attempted to improve competitiveness and increase opportunities for its people through education. Based on that, education is the way in which people reach different

boundaries and limits. Through education, people can invent, innovate, create, and solve many problems that affect humanity. Patrinos and Psacharopoulos (2011) also mentioned that “Governments and international organizations alike have been trying hard to improve educational development over the past 50 years or so. Yet, such efforts have proved to be a real challenge in developing countries regarding basic education” (p. 7). In a way, the purpose of education is to improve employment opportunities and promote solutions in the areas of infrastructure, science, education, and other. Consequently, education becomes a country’s right and duty to provide its people with options and solutions to the challenges the world faces every day.

Even though education is important and must be implemented in each part of the country, Rassekh (2001) mentioned three factors that influence education:

1. Global challenges external to the world of education
2. Internal challenges of the education systems themselves
3. Challenges specific to the Region.
(p. 9)

In terms of global challenges, competitiveness is one of the main factors that affects education, curriculum, policies, regulations, and research. The needs and priorities of each country in relation to global challenges will vary greatly, as some countries will seek to help its people and others may opt for power and personal benefits.

Internal challenges are related political party reforms, infrastructure, and educational access. For example, rural areas are harder to reach and provide internet coverage than urban cities. Finally, when we talk about challenges to specific regions, we may consider connectivity to the world, diversification, the economy, and the interest each country had in terms of education.

Thus, education around the world is different in each country since every place is different and must adhere to its government's priorities. Smith (2014) stated that "Significant barriers to education, particularly within low income countries, include poverty, child labor, distance from school, unequal access due to gender or cultural factors and the existence of conflict" (p. 113). These problems are present in Colombia and around the world, and they interrupt adequate teaching and learning processes. The reality is that solutions are not

always available for these problematic solutions, not because of the intention of the people but because of the condition and priorities of the leaders of the country.

Obstacles of Education with COVID 19

Education has faced many obstacles throughout time which have included wars and severe pandemics. In the case of the current pandemic, COVID 19 has caused many issues and uncertainties around the world. Anderson et al. (2020) stated that "Governments will not be able to minimize both deaths from coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and the economic impact of viral spread. Keeping mortality as low as possible will be the highest priority for individuals" (p. 931). The need to protect people from the virus has taken over carrying out all normal activities including education. As Anderson et al. (2020) also stated "what is left at present for mitigation is voluntary plus mandated quarantine, stopping mass gatherings, closure of educational institutes or places of work where infection has been identified, and isolation of households, towns, or cities" (p. 932). These measures are the only method to control the virus and avoid its propagation. Regardless of economic

status, no country has the capacity to deal with a mass infection of its people.

However, despite the problems that have and continue to affect humanity, education has never stopped. Actually, the world counts on other sources that enable the access to knowledge and education per se. As stated by Wang et al. (2020), “The government might mobilize existing resources, perhaps involving NGOs, and create a platform for gathering the best online education courses” (p. 946). In this way, there are many other sources that institutions, teachers, and the government can use to implement education. Though virtual education is not the same as presence-based modality, it contributes to continuing the process of education during the pandemic.

Virtual Education

Based on the above, we are living a unique situation in many institutions around the world where education is being carried out virtually. Farrell (2001) mentioned that “most educational institutions are developing or planning to develop Web-based course delivery capability... A significant number of governments, institutional, corporate and private Web sites have emerged to chronicle the burgeoning numbers of virtual education initiatives” (p. 9). In many places, virtual

education has become a priority due to the users’ preference of virtuality over presence-based modality. Additionally, with the pandemic, it is almost impossible to carry out presence-based education activities.

It is difficult to generalize the circumstances of people in each country because many areas do not have access to an adequate internet connection or technological devices. Nevertheless, it is the institution duty to fix these issues in order to carry out educational activities without placing people’s lives at risk. As stated by Glass (2009), “virtual education in its contemporary form of asynchronous, computer-mediated interaction between a teacher and students over the Internet has grown from a novelty to an established mode of education that may provide all or part of formal schooling” (p. 1). Therefore, virtual education can produce excellent results, as well as access to many people. However, it is important to take into account that this kind of education requires resources like technological devices and internet connection that not all countries have.

Colombian Education in the Time of COVID 19

Based on the previous information, in the context of Colombia, the Ministry of Education on its official website mentioned that

la sociedad y sus dinámicas han cambiado. La forma de interactuar y aprender ya no es la misma, por lo que las tecnologías deben ser un elemento disruptivo que transforme las metodologías para enseñar y aprender en nuestro sistema educativo.

[society and its dynamics have changed. The way of interacting and learning is not the same, which is why technology is an element that transforms methodologies to teach and learn in our educational system].
(n.p.)

In this sense, the Ministry of Education has accepted the importance of incrementing the use of technology in academic fields. Thus, in the pandemic situation that we are living, the Ministry of Education has established the following parameters for its educational institutions. "They will continue as they came, in a virtual,

digital, remote work with the students at home, to finish their academic cycle" (n.p.). Also, students and teachers will "work with platforms and distance, guides, to guarantee the continuity of the academic process" (n.p.). In these circumstances, the government, institutions, teachers, students, and even families around the country have changed the way they use education because there is no option to continue with presence-based modality. Also, the Ministry of Education in Colombia in June 2020 created an informational pamphlet with parameters and regulations to maintain teaching processes in institutions around the world and overcome these times of crisis. The informational pamphlet of the Ministry of Education (2020) stated the following:

Facing the COVID-19 pandemic requires interregional coordination and risk management from educational institutions for school in emergency situations. Given the previous, educational institutions provide secure spaces that fortify the development and learning processes of girls, boys, and young people, thereby, contributing to a culture of resilience, adaptation, and

minimization of risk among the community². (p. 59)

Based on the above, the Ministry of Education is trying to coordinate instruction, develop an appropriate approach for students and institutions around the country, provide ideas and carry out procedures to maintain education active. In that sense, the labor of instruction and learning processes is for every person in Colombia and the world. Almost every person in our homes is connected to relatives that study and work in a virtual way or with the aid of technological devices. Thus, we must contribute to the process of education and take care of our health because this pandemic is real, and it depends on us how we choose to react to these difficult situations.

Implications

Based on the current situation, the world is showing us that human beings do have all of the answers to fix the problems affecting the planet. However, we have the possibility to reinvent our lives and reflect about the best strategies that will continue our daily processes and routines. In this way, it is

important to use the tools that we have, such as technological devices with an internet connection. There are many programs, apps, and tools to create material to teach and give classes in a virtual way. Thus, society has turned to these instruments to continue the process of education and construct the principles of knowledge in the students' minds.

At the same time, it is essential to understand that it may be impossible to connect everyone given the particular circumstances in each country. For instance, Colombia has many issues in terms of education, resources, corruption, and quality of education, and coverage. Colombia suffers these kinds of problems in presence-based modality education that reflects many uncertainties and lack of trust in the educational institutions. Also, in higher education, there are many students that want to study but do not have the possibility to do so because of a lack of resources. In this way, many organizations and institutions have created different ways to provide education. Nevertheless, switching from presence-based modality to virtual education is a challenge, especially because people are not guaranteed that the proper training, quality of

² Translated by the author.

information, and equipment for virtual education to function properly.

Despite all of these problems, it is necessary to adapt our needs and provide opportunities that continue the process of education. We must also keep in mind the rules necessary to protect our and other's health, while using the resources we have to learn and teach. Based on that, we need to take advantage of the sources that technology provides to teach knowledge and manage information. In this way, teachers must adapt their practice using sources proposed by the government, and students must search for ways to receive this information. It is noticeable that the circumstances vary according to the contexts, but it is also important to understand the situation of the world and try to adapt our circumstances. In the manner that we change our mind and understand the situation, we will know the influence of education in the lives of the people and the importance to search for ways to provide this knowledge in times of change.

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Luis Alejandro Novoa Romero holds a bachelor's degree in Modern Languages with an emphasis in Spanish and English from the Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia (UPTC). He has participated in several conferences held by the School of Languages and Master's in Language Teaching at the UPTC as an attendee, presenter, and organizer. Luis is a member of the research group TONGUE, and he has published before in ENLETAWA Journal. Additionally, Luis has made several contribution to the university radio program "Torre de Babel", which is part of the research group he belongs to. Currently, he is an English teacher at the Colegio Militar Cr Juan José Rondón.

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