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The futures of teaching

*Background paper prepared for the
Futures of Education Initiative*



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Executive summary

The Futures of Education initiative, launched by UNESCO in November 2019, seeks to mobilize ideas and action that can enable education to respond to the enormous challenges that humans are confronting. The initiative proposes a new social contract that views education as a public and common good nurturing hope, imagination and action for a common future.

This need for educational change has intensified with the COVID-19 pandemic, which has highlighted the need for robust public systems and infrastructures that put common wellbeing, care and education at their centre. The extraordinary closure of schools and the rush towards remote education from home revealed the persistence of inequalities in resources, infrastructures and outcomes, but also teachers' crucial role in fostering students' learning and wellbeing.

Being taught opens up the possibility of accumulating knowledge, as well as resisting and transforming it. This amazing capacity has allowed great leaps forward not only in adapting to the world but also in creating new worlds. Educating humanity's children is an act of the utmost responsibility, and requires protecting the right of those who are being educated to willingly receive or reject what is being taught to them. Teaching is an amazing capability. Teachers are central to the mission of schooling to make common knowledge public and available to all. Teaching can emancipate students and promote intellectual and affective autonomy. It demands knowledge, competence, care and sensibility.

Teachers and students need to be better equipped to engage with the multiple and conflicting demands they are facing

This paper explores the value and role of teachers and discusses some of the paradoxes and challenges that they face. Conversations about the futures of teaching tend to focus on technological change. This paper argues that teaching is a heavily contextualized practice and that current educational contexts pose conflicting demands. These conflicting demands may limit the futures that can be envisioned and hoped for:

- Inclusive educational policies may lack adequate support.
- Student-centered pedagogies sometimes cannot be accommodated in current working conditions.
- New openness to communities and families can bring different and even conflicting priorities.
- An increase in regulations along with new pedagogical ideals may lead to ever increasing requirements of teachers' performance.
- The expansion of the digital brings new epistemic and cultural possibilities but also involves new risks, such as the massive delegation of knowledge into gigantic platforms.
- The ecological crisis brings the need to promote a collective consciousness of the planetary that actively cares for the diversity of forms of life.
- Throughout, the gendered nature of teachers' work should remain visible in the analysis of these tensions and demands, as they affect the organization of work time, tasks, and burdens.

These conflicts cannot be resolved at a personal level, nor will they be settled solely by improving teaching strategies or promoting digital inclusivity. On the contrary, they have to be addressed institutionally and through public policies that protect and care for a common future.

This paper concludes by presenting reflections on the futures of teaching and recommendations on how to foster the role of teachers as central educational agents. These futures are not reduced to the question of whether there should be more or fewer digital devices in classrooms, or more or less evaluation or accountability. Instead, the quest for better futures should invite social dialogue and critical interventions so that schools, teachers and students are better equipped to engage with the multiple and conflicting demands they are confronting. The recommendations for policy makers and stakeholders are:

- 1.** Promote an open social dialogue to develop cooperative solutions to the complex issues that are at stake for the futures of teaching. These solutions should be sensitive to contexts while engaging with global challenges such as climate change and democratic instability.
- 2.** Improve the working conditions for teachers, not only through monetary compensation but through adequate class sizes, school safety, symbolic recognition and legitimacy, and institutional support.
- 3.** Develop consistent policy and institutional responses that organize collective networks to tackle complex pedagogical issues, because the challenges that teachers are facing cannot be solved on an individual basis.
- 4.** Strike a better balance between administrative and pedagogical requirements, including accounting for unpaid work outside the school setting, such as engagement with communities and other demands.
- 5.** Engage in a thorough and gender-sensitive revision of teachers' labour statutes and workload to align them with new educational goals and expand the diversity of the teaching profession.
- 6.** Design teachers' career paths to take into account competence, training and engagement with school programs, such as mentoring novice teachers, leading subject areas or cycles, and organizing educational services.
- 7.** Enhance recruitment by offering novice teachers induction programmes led by more experienced colleagues, and by addressing the needs of mid-career teachers who are disenchanting with their work.
- 8.** Rethink teacher education to resolve the problems pointed out by UNESCO's Futures of Education Initiative. Include new topics and realities in the curriculum, such as environmental change and activism, more consistent democratic and ethical education, gender equality and diversity, digital critical skills and epistemic and intergenerational dialogue about our common futures. Include dialogic and clinical approaches and seek to anticipate real contexts of practice.
- 9.** Include digital media not only as a means for distant training but above all as a topic of study, without endorsing technology as the solution for every education problem.
- 10.** Take advantage of the potential of futuring exercises – that is, imagining the futures of teaching – as a fruitful policy strategy to open up public conversations about the expectations and realities of teaching, including not only current anxieties and fears but also sources of hope and transformation.

Teaching for a common world: lessons from the pandemic

The Futures of Education initiative launched by UNESCO in November 2019 seeks to mobilize ideas and action to bring about educational change that responds to the enormous challenges that humans are now confronting. These challenges include climate change and environmental destruction derived from an unsustainable path of development; digital and biotechnological developments that contain promises and risks; increased population mobility; the transformation of work as a central human activity; democratic uncertainties; and the push towards intellectual decolonization and epistemic diversity. These challenges call for an urgent rethinking of the ways in which education is conceived and organized. UNESCO's International Commission is proposing a new social contract that views education as a public and common good that nurtures hope, imagination and action for a common future.

Since the end of 2019, the need for change in the direction of the commons has intensified. The COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a dramatic reminder of humans' vulnerability and interdependence

pandemic has been a dramatic reminder of humans' vulnerability and interdependence, and of the need of robust public systems and infrastructures that put common well-being and care at their centre. While it is too soon to measure the impact of the pandemic on educational systems, some trends are already visible. During 2020 and 2021, school authorities in most countries had to hastily develop new educational strategies that combined remote education with in-person classes, pushing for the digitalization of schools. They also had to design alternative ways to support teachers' work and to help them reach out to students through a heterogeneous and unequal infrastructure that includes digital and analogue technologies (International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2021). Inequalities became much more patent, causing significant numbers of students to disengage or even drop out completely and leaving teachers overworked and overwhelmed by conflicting demands.

On a more positive note, given the uncertainty of in-person teaching, there was room for experimentation and creativity. Teachers had to select content from usually long programmes and organize learning activities that took into account students' resources and interests. At times tests were postponed, and classroom interaction focused more directly on learning and wellbeing. In several countries, school buildings were closed and teaching shifted to the domestic space. This brought more parental involvement, which showed new solidarities but also the weight of economic and cultural inequalities (Delès

et al, 2021). Teachers' work became much more visible and also more valued, as it was clear that it demands expert knowledge and an intense physical and affective involvement.

Thus, it can be said that with the pandemic, concerns about inequalities of resources, infrastructure and

With the pandemic, concerns about inequalities of resources, infrastructure and outcomes have increased across most school systems

outcomes have increased across most school systems, but so has the legitimacy of teachers' role in fostering students' learning and wellbeing. While a few years ago it was common to hear public dismissals of the teacher as an obsolete figure repre-

sentative of a traditional mode of education, soon to be replaced by just-in-time, personalized software, during the pandemic teachers were placed among the essential workers whose job is to be protected in extraordinary times. Moreover, even if under duress and with severe constraints, in several countries teachers could expand their autonomy to make pedagogical decisions, becoming more reflexive about their own work and about the conditions in which their students live and learn. Even if it is not possible to know how these changes will settle once the pandemic is over, similar disruptions in the past, such as world wars or earthquakes, show that these openings tend to persist and even expand (Saint-Fuscien, 2021).

The unique value of teaching and the role of teachers

Humans, like all species, are capable of learning, but what is perhaps unique is their capacity to be taught, to be addressed through displaced communication (Gärdenfors & Högberg, 2017) and particularly through verbal language. From ancient times and in all cultures, humans have been able to be spoken to, directly or indirectly, by their fellow beings, and this has augmented their capability to know and to act upon that knowledge. More important in terms of human individual and collective development, the possibility to be taught calls for a decision: to follow that teaching or to resist it, which opens up a space for emancipation from received mandates or demands (Biesta, 2017). In liberal philosophies, this space has been called "freedom," but it is more than that: it is the possibility of becoming a singular subject, whose life is simultaneously like anybody else's – not more, not less – and unlike anybody else's: precious, unique, irreplaceable.

This capacity to learn and to be taught has implied a great leap forward in terms of humans' capabilities not only to adapt to the world but also to create new worlds. One of the latest examples of these new worlds is the swelling field of artificial intelligence,

with self-learning machines that can potentially go further than human intelligence and become autonomous from human management. If in the era of the Anthropocene we are starting to take stock of human creations, acknowledging their contributions

Educating humanity's children is an act of the utmost responsibility

as well as their costs and risks to the planet, it should not be forgotten that they are wonderful assets that could eventually help us build more inclusive and habitable worlds and configure reparative futures that deal with the wounds of our past (Sripakash et al, 2020).

To retrace this fundamental quality of teaching is important for adequately framing the role of teachers in contemporary societies and for rethinking its futures. Teachers are specialized agents who undertake the work of educating others within particular settings. Educating humanity's children is an act of the utmost responsibility, even more so when it involves protecting the right of those who are being educated to willingly receive or reject what is being taught to them, that is, as an act of potential emancipation and intellectual autonomy. It demands knowledge, competence, care, and sensibility. It is also, as Hannah Arendt stressed, an act of intergenerational love: love for the world, which would be doomed if it were not for the possibility of renewal that each generation brings, and for children, so as to make space and time for them to prepare for the task of renewal and to experiment with ways and worlds that adults cannot foresee (Arendt, 1961).

The notion that teachers are specialized agents is a recent development. Although teaching figures – such as shamans, priests or elders – can be found in most cultures, teachers as specialized agents emerged along with the institutionalized practice of schooling. Their role increased with the transformation of schools into a system of coordinated institutions under the aegis of the state, which became a worldwide model due to Westernization and colonialization.

Teachers shifted from being highly skilled and exceptional individuals, generally male, to a massive body of agents, mostly female, whose training and work was to be regulated by the state (Santoni Rugiu, 1996).

The feminization of the teaching profession has implied a reduced autonomy and a pay gap for several decades

Especially in primary schools, the feminization of the teaching profession has implied a reduced autonomy and a pay gap for several decades. Teachers were trained in normal schools and university-based teacher education, with a varying degree of theory-driven and practice-oriented subjects. Teachers became part of the caring professions that were to prepare new generations to become full members of the society, but they also organized in unions to improve their working conditions.

At the peak of the expansion of school systems, teachers were seen as symbols of collective entities and dreams such as the nation-state, the republic, modernity or the revolution, and were seen as heroes or saviours; they generally represented a unified and centralized culture that made scarce room for diversity and pluralism. However, their social prestige and legitimacy started to wane at the same pace as the decline of these unifying entities. Critiques of bureaucratization, corruption, authoritarianism and outdatedness became more common, and evaluative and accountability frames to regulate and control teachers' work were set in place in recent decades (Tenti, 2005). Moreover, the rise of neoliberal policies has implied a commodification of education. This has shifted the focus to skills and performance that can be accounted for and reduced education to the production of human resources (Ozga, 2020). Combined with austerity policies, this has worsened teachers' working conditions and lowered their salaries (Allegretto & Mishel, 2018).

Despite these great shifts in the social image of teachers and in their training and work regulations,

The core task of teachers is to educate others, to ensure that they can participate in and renovate a common world

the task of teachers remains at its core that of educating others to ensure that they can participate in and renovate a common world. There are wide cultural variations in how this participation is understood; sometimes it implies an ideal of creativity and originality, and others an alignment with tradition or communal life.

At any rate, it is clear that there can be no renewal of schools without teachers: they are central to the mission of schooling to make common knowledge public and available to all, and to promote intellectual and affective autonomy, a value shared by many different cultures, such as the notion of self-determination embraced by indigenous epistemologies (Bold, 2019). This mission is not a simple or an easy task: it requires those who teach to be responsive and responsible to contexts and to others, and it demands a special alertness and attention that needs to be trained and nurtured (Britzman, 1991).

Teaching, then, is a complex, intricate and challenging activity that has to deal with several tensions – between tradition and renewal, omnes and singulatum, the visible and the invisible, the normative and the local, the worker and the professional, the public and the intimate. It is institutionally defined, but there are local inflections that privilege different profiles and specialized knowledge and practices.

Broadly speaking, teachers have to make sure that some portions of public knowledge, always under scrutiny and renovation, are passed on to new generations while making room for those generations to make this knowledge their own or even challenge it. Their teaching has to be addressed to anybody and to all, as part of distributing human experiences to new

generations, but at the same time it needs to engage each student as a singular, unique human being. At a pedagogical level, it has to make visible and validate learning processes that might have many invisible, implicit, non-verbalized parts.

Nowadays teaching is institutional work, heavily shaped by state norms and regulations, but it still

Teachers' work has to be accountable, as it involves an enormous responsibility, yet the intimacy of those who teach and those who are taught needs to be protected

needs to be contextualized and adapted to the local contexts of practice, organized in routines and repertoires of action that are complex and heterogeneous (Jackson, 1986). As a state-regulated job, it is reasonable to expect unionization that defends workers' rights; however, it is also considered a profession that implies personal involvement and autonomy of judgement (Labaree, 1992). Teachers' work has to be accountable, as it involves an enormous responsibility, yet the intimacy of those who teach and those who are taught needs to be protected so they can embark with confidence on the task of renewal. Most of these tensions and paradoxes cannot be resolved; instead, they should be productively inhabited so as to make teaching a reflexive and responsible activity attentive to the value and the effects of its own acts.

The contexts of teaching and their conflicting demands

The complexity and intricacy of teaching is now being complicated even more by conflicting demands related to the contexts of practice in which teachers perform their work, which will very likely shape the futures of teaching. Most future scenarios place the digital as the central challenge for teaching. But the conversation about the future of teaching needs to have a broader scope than technological change, as stated at the 12th Policy Dialogue Forum of the International Task Force on Teaching in Dubai in 2019. In what follows, several conflicting demands are reviewed in order to carefully consider the complexity of teachers' work and its current and future challenges.

In the first place, in recent decades school systems have been dealing with increasing demands for equality and inclusion. These pressures, much needed and welcome as they have pushed for more social justice and inclusivity, have put a heavy burden on teachers, particularly in school systems with scarce resources. Inclusion policies have implied larger classes, greater linguistic and cultural diversity, more socio-affective issues at stake, and new pedagogical challenges of how to make powerful but difficult knowledge available to all. Some public policies have introduced support figures or programmes that have helped in this process,

In most school systems struggling against educational inequalities, teachers have borne the brunt of the expansion of school enrolment and the democratization of educational opportunities without receiving adequate support

for example teaching assistants or co-teaching in challenging classes, collective networks for planning and monitoring teaching and learning outcomes, or on-site training that focuses on the repertoires of teaching. However, in most school systems struggling against educational inequalities, teachers have borne the brunt of the expansion of school enrolment and the democratization of educational opportunities without receiving adequate support.

A second set of conflicting demands is related to the shift towards student-centered pedagogies that is taking place in a significant number of school systems. Currently, teachers' required competences are not only to master a body of knowledge but also to engage students through their interests and learning profiles. These personalized pedagogies are difficult to achieve in large classrooms and with fragmented timetables that allow only for sporadic interaction. They also remain a contested educational ideal as they may seem to promote competitive individualism and hence oppose the notion of a common curriculum focused on public knowledge. In addition, changes in intergenerational authority and intensifying violence or racial tensions in some societies make it more difficult for teachers to manage group dynamics in increasingly unruly or undisciplined classrooms. This is generally perceived as a daily struggle and as a personal success or failure, instead of a more generalized problem that needs institutional responses (Barrère, 2002).

A third set of conflicting demands is linked to a new openness to families and communities, which is not always recognized in labour statutes or included as

Teachers are expected to act as community and socio-cultural actors

content or topic in their training. Teachers are expected to act as community and socio-cultural actors, ready to enter into a dialogue with local and families' needs and demands. Digital technologies make this possible and quotidian, such as in text-messaging groups; this communication was extended during the pandemic and very likely will stay as an open channel.

In many countries, teachers take direct responsibility for their students' wellbeing, constantly monitoring them to avoid injuries, attending to nutritional programmes or leading efforts to get clothes, shoes, lenses or healthcare when they are needed. Teachers also have a legal obligation to report acts of abuse against children or reasonable suspicions that abuse might be happening. Where there are large numbers of migrants and refugees, teachers' role might also expand to help families deal with trauma and loss,

organize basic routines in camps, and give advice on legal and psychosocial quandaries.

Another source of tension with families and communities is that the teaching profession in its current makeup is not always inclusive; it needs to become more diverse to effectively promote of inter-cultural dialogue and understanding (Woodroffe, 2020). Within the profession, burdens tend to be unequally distributed by gender, with female teachers still seen as the primary caretakers. All these demands are reshaping the teaching profession, occupying more time in teachers' daily schedule and requiring loads of energy, which can cause conflicts with the focus on improving learning outcomes.

The fourth set of conflicting demands is related to changes in the nature and configuration of teachers' work. The bureaucratic regulations derived from the shift towards new public management and neoliberal policies are becoming increasingly time-consuming and all-encompassing, with digitalization allowing more and more areas of teachers' work to be monitored and accounted for. On the other hand, and parallel to the heightened value of creative pedagogies, teachers have to be proactive and implicated agents and team members (Duc et al, 2019). They are required to create new instructional resources, run additional programmes, and provide written reports to justify their decisions, while acknowledging the implicit norms still in operation. These demands extend working hours in the school, making it more difficult for women who still carry most of the weight of domestic work. All in all, the gendered nature of teachers' work should remain visible in the analysis of these tensions and demands, as they have different effects on the organization of work time and tasks.

Within these conflicting demands on the nature of teachers' work, the classroom as a privileged setting

Educational policies put a lot of weight on the efficacy of teaching as seen in students' tests performances, but the class is much more than improving learning outcomes

of this work needs to be singled out. As said in French, "faire la classe," to teach a class, remains a central activity of teachers. Educational policies put a lot of weight on the efficacy of teaching as seen in students' tests performances, but the class is much

more than improving learning outcomes. It is a space of collective work with content knowledge that also needs to be attentive to individual trajectories and affections. It is a time-space of public interaction in which students validate what they learn and confront it with their peers and teachers, yet it requires some intimacy so that students and teachers can try on ideas with trust and confidence.

Teachers need to be present, either physically or virtually, to lead discussions of complex problems or texts, introduce provocative questions, respond creatively when students raise questions, manage time, speed, and pace of tasks, and many other

context-specific interactions (Ball and Forzani, 2009). These interactions are less possible in settings where teachers do not have high degrees of autonomy and reflect a culturally specific teaching style more prevalent in Western countries. However, globalizing trends such as PISA, TIMSS, and international conferences and journals have boosted the currency of this style across different regions. It should also be said that most cultures value autonomy and context-responsiveness even if they vary in defining them as individual or as communal traits, and view education as an experience of growing and transformation – of becoming someone else (Kopenawa & Albert, 2013). In this way, different cultures can come together to define the class as a space of sharing, collaboration and collective work in order to construct knowledge. Such a space can nurture and expand a more democratic and inclusive commons built through cultural and epistemic dialogue and boundary crossings (Maher, 2012; Sumida Huaman, 2019).

The redefinition of teachers' work needs to take into account these cultural and pedagogical issues, and the settings in and through which this work is organized. Another important note can be made here in

During 2020 and 2021 teachers have had to reinvent classroom routines and scenarios

relation to the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic. The total or partial closures of school buildings shed new light on the importance of the co-presence of bodies in the classroom. The virtual classroom conducted from domestic spaces turned out to be particularly awkward, deprived of its character of "another place" different from home, a space for collective dialogue, and it became all too visible to other members of the household. This made it difficult to achieve what Anne Barrère (2002) calls the half-open doors of classrooms, the precise point in which teaching is made public and responsible yet it is also protected with a level of intimacy from outer gazes. On the other side, during 2020 and 2021 teachers have had to reinvent classroom routines and scenarios that made them more aware of the relevance of space, time, and artefacts or devices in the construction of knowledge, and invited experimentation with new media and asynchronous teaching. It can be reasonably hoped that this will lead to changes in teaching practices and resources, and in the preparation of new teachers.

A fifth set of demands, closely connected to the previous paragraph, comes from the challenges of the digital. Teachers were used to teaching according to state-prescribed texts and curricula. In the digital world, however, students and teachers rely more and more on online sources, bringing to the fore the relevance of critical digital skills to navigate the new knowledge landscape. Social media and digital platforms promote new content and new pedagogical styles – more playful, emotionally oriented, and usually short-term or ephemeral, such as exploring trivial knowledge about the natural or social world. Such content and styles involve as much emancipa-

tory potential as risk. As they follow the logic of the entertainment industry, they can be more motivating or seductive, but they are not easy to accommodate in curricular programmes and teaching strategies.

Moreover, knowledge in digital culture values “big data and the potential for searchability, pattern-seeking, storability, and high-speed transmission” (Appadurai and Morozov, 2021, p. 3). Artificial intelligence is increasingly important as an educational agent, not only performing low-level tasks but also “datafying” more and more school activities (Perrotta et al, 2020). While some of these traits bring important gains, they marginalize other ways of knowing – more reflexive, rigorous and critical ways, such as the ones privileged in the school curriculum. Also, they obliterate questions about the ethics and the politics of knowledge and set aside calls for epistemic dialogue with non-Western cosmologies, which are mostly invisible for search engines organized by algorithms of popularity that privilege the most visited or shared content. At least in the present status quo, there is a massive delegation of knowledge and knowing practices to the corporate platforms, whose algorithms and resources are the only ones capable of keeping up with these expectations of scale, searchability and storability. As said before, these demands cannot be solved at a personal level, nor will they be bridged by improving teaching strategies or promoting digital inclusivity. They have to be addressed institutionally and through public policies that protect epistemic diversity and education from profiteering agents.

On top of these layers of conflicting demands, there are the challenges of the planetary. Faced with an ecological crisis, if not catastrophe, schools cannot just aim for an idealized cosmopolitan learner who

An ethics of teaching that acknowledges the fragility and vulnerability of life and celebrates its creations is still not central to most teacher education programmes

feels at ease in an interconnected world. Education should instead promote a consciousness of the planetary that actively cares for the diversity of life (Chakrabarty, 2019). An ethics of teaching that acknowledges the fragility and vulnerability of life and celebrates its creations is still not central to most teacher education programmes. Educational systems have to be reorganized as ecosystems, much more responsive to the territories on which they operate and to the carbon footprint they are producing, and to promote an increased awareness in their constituencies. Teachers should also take into account and expand students’ mobilization on climate issues, in particular the School Strike for Climate or Fridays For Future movements. Such mobilization poses challenges to the meaning of schooling in the midst of the ecological crisis. Schools have to respond with increased awareness and activism in relation to climate change.

What futures for teaching?

How are educational systems, and in particular teachers, responding to these conflicting demands and challenges? In teachers’ forums, it is common to hear

There seems to be a crisis in the ways in which teaching is thought and performed, a mismatch between what is expected and what teaching ends up being

phrases like “we are not prepared for this”. Pre-service and in-service teacher education seems to leave teachers ill-equipped to face these demands and challenges, probably because they remain framed within a normative view of teaching that is more

connected to the past than to the present of teaching, and even less so to the futures that can already be envisioned (Ezpeleta, 2004). In addition, teachers often perceive themselves as disempowered, with little margin for action, and usually do not feel invited to debates and deliberations on educational policies. There seems to be a crisis in the ways in which teaching is thought and performed, a mismatch between what is expected and what teaching ends up being.

It is not surprising, then, that in several countries recruitment of new teachers has been declining. Teaching is a complex and demanding profession that does not always receive the symbolic and material recognition it deserves. Yet the situation could become even worse. Over 69 million primary and secondary teachers need to be recruited worldwide by 2030 to meet the targets of the fourth SDG (“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”) (International Teaching Task Force, 2019). Unless there are changes in teachers’ professional development careers, including improvements in salary, class size, appointment by hour or post, and opportunities for continuous education that promote higher expectations, and unless some of the current challenges and conflicting demands are addressed at an institutional and public policy level, it will be difficult to attract enough motivated candidates to make up the shortage of teachers (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). This is an urgent topic for public policymakers.

Yet the challenges also involve redefining teachers’ roles in a changing world, with new educational subjects. This is a complex issue that needs to be carefully

The challenges involve redefining teachers’ roles in a changing world, with new educational subjects

weighed. One possibility is outlined in a recent essay by the philosopher Michel Serres, who spoke of Thumbelina as a new educational actor. For Serres, the 21st century would be female and

young; the new human would be someone who writes, draws and orders the world from their cellphones

with a dexterity that the philosopher envied. For Serres, today there is a pressing demand to set everything in motion, to avoid passivity and conformity; no one wants to be driven, everyone wants to be a driver. In this context, Serres says, “in the lecture hall, there are no masters; everyone has now become a professor” (2015, p. 35). Serres opposed teachers (in French, “maître” is both master and teacher) to professors, who create their own speech and teach from their podiums. In contrast, teaching appears an unglamorous profession that has very difficult tasks, that enacts or performs a script (the curriculum) decided elsewhere, a position that is no longer tenable in the current knowledge economy amid distrust of authority and passivity. For Serres, there are no futures for teachers if they do not embrace listening, searching and inventing something original and rare.

But is that a desirable future? Even if Serres’ insights are relevant and provoking, and his love and optimism about the new generations are to be commended and praised, in his framing of the problem and its solutions there are significant absences. In particular, the classroom as a concrete, specific site of teaching, and the school as a space of constructing and sharing public knowledge, are lost, as are educational systems that still perform significant social tasks. The submission of the futures of teaching to Thumbelina’s present, moulded among others by the affordances of digital media and the shortcomings of school education, can be contested. Serres’ diagnosis also seems outdated. For decades now, teachers have not been subjected to an authoritarian notion of knowledge, nor are they indifferent to their students’ problems

Teachers’ work is complex, full of paradoxes and tensions

and feelings. On the contrary, they have been dealing with the demand to include difference and diversity, to engage with intercultural dialogue, and to balance as much as they can the weight of inequality. Teachers’ work is much more complex, full of paradoxes and tensions, than the caricature of teachers as oppressive masters (Rockwell, 2007). This does not mean that there is no room for improvement, reform, or even radical reshuffling, but the aspiration and hopes for other futures of teaching and teachers need to take into account the complexity of teachers’ work and do justice to the tensions and paradoxes that teachers inhabit.

There is no easy way out of many of these dilemmas, but we will find better responses and solutions if we face these challenges through democratic deliberation and honest, rigorous inquiry and experimentation. The futures of teaching are not reduced to the question of whether there should be more or fewer digital devices in classrooms or more or less evaluation or accountability. Instead, the quest for other futures should invite broad social dialogue and critical interventions so that schools, teachers and students are better equipped to engage with the multiple and conflicting demands they are confronting, making room for other possibilities (Yates, 2012).

These conversations cannot reinstate colonialist perspectives but should instead be aware of the diversity of voices and horizons in the dialogue (Greene, 2000) and of the different traditions and configurations of educational systems.

The Futures of Education initiative offers opportunities for plural debates on which futures we envisage

The moment is also ripe for a renewed sense of autonomy and experimentation on the part of teachers

and which ones we want for education and teaching. These opportunities should not be missed, particularly at a moment in which, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the world is more alert than before

to the weight of inequalities and the need for schools as part of the infrastructure of the commons (Berlant, 2016). The moment is also ripe for a renewed sense of autonomy and experimentation on the part of teachers and the public and communal solidarities in overcoming the crisis. These are resources that should be mobilized to nurture a different sense of the future, one that acknowledges the debts and wounds of the present while freeing itself from the constraints of previous experiences. Envisaging new futures can thus turn into a democratic exercise, a call for action and reflection on what teaching and teachers are, and what we would like them, us, to become.

Recommendations for the renewal of teaching futures

Envisaged in this way, the futures of teaching have to be part of a public and plural conversation among a wide range of actors, including policy officers and decision makers, teacher education institutions, teachers’ unions and associations, school governing bodies, students and parents. These conversations can take the form of public dialogue, reports, media initiatives, study groups and conferences, among others, and should aim at changes in regulations and norms pertaining to teachers’ work and recruitment, revisions of teacher education programs, expansion of educational resources and creation of institutional supports or devices where needed.

Considering what has been said about the complex and conflicting demands that teachers are facing, some recommendations for public policies can be advanced.

1. Promote a broad and open social dialogue to develop cooperative solutions to the complex issues that are at stake for the futures of teaching. Promoting a broad social dialogue could help bringing teachers’ knowledge and experience to the fore of educational changes and would be a clear invitation to speak up and take part in the renewal of education that the current challenges require.

- 2. Improve the conditions for teachers' work**, particularly in countries where their situation is precarious and where they take on the burdens of social and pedagogical inclusion. That means not only increasing monetary compensation but, even more so, improving the material conditions in which they work: class sizes, school safety, symbolic recognition and legitimacy, and institutional support. This improvement has been a longstanding demand of teachers' associations, but it has not been fully achieved in several contexts.
- 3. Develop consistent policy and institutional responses** that organize collective networks to tackle complex pedagogical issues. The complex challenges that teachers face cannot be solved on an individual basis; they require collective responses, for example through study groups, teachers' councils or departments, or pedagogical projects that demand joint deliberation, planning and action. In particular, teachers in challenging conditions should have extra support, such as pedagogical couples (two teachers working in difficult classes), peer mentoring, and on-site education.
- 4. Strike a better balance between administrative and pedagogical requirements.** In teachers' forums and policy meetings, there is an insistence on accounting for the invisible work implied in teaching, for example in settings where teachers are deeply engaged with their communities. The gendered quality of teachers' work should be acknowledged, to guarantee equal payment for equal work, equal opportunities for further education and higher responsibilities, and a redistribution of the burden of caring in schools and other social settings.
- 5. Engage in a thorough and gender-sensitive revision of teachers' labour statutes and workload** to align them with new educational goals. This revision should take into account the need to protect and expand the diversity of the teaching body, so that the profession represents all the differences in society and teachers can increase inter-cultural understanding and inclusivity. The revision should put social justice and equal distribution of work at its centre to repair current injustices.
- 6. Design teachers' career paths in ways that value classroom experience and promote accessible, relevant options for continuing education.** Progress should be based not only on years of experience but also on competence, training and engagement with school programmes, and include alternatives such as mentoring novice teachers, leading subject areas or cycles, and organizing support services such as tutors or councillors.
- 7. Enhance recruitment** by offering novice teachers induction programmes led by more experienced colleagues. These relationships between different generations of teachers, if organized accordingly, can pass on and renew teachers' knowledge and foster a sense of belonging to a community of practitioners and to their own institutions. Policies should also address the needs of mid-career teachers who are disenchanting with their work.
- 8. Rethink teacher education** to resolve the problems pointed by UNESCO's Futures of Education Initiative. The foundations and practical repertoires of initial training need to be revised and expanded on a permanent basis. Pre-service education institutions should work closely with schools, analyzing current problems and dilemmas and mobilizing resources to design strategies to tackle them. Central guidelines and standards have proved useful to align in-service training with educational priorities and orient it towards present challenges and needs. In addition, new topics and realities are emerging that push for curricular changes, including environmental change and global consciousness and activism; more consistent democratic and ethical education; gender equality and diversity; preparation to deal with the effects of social trauma and violence; and critical digital skills that include ethical reflections. Also, there is an increased demand to include diverse epistemologies and to open intercultural and intergenerational dialogue about our common futures.
- 9. Include digital media in pre-service training** as part of building new repertoires for teaching. Informational or digital literacy needs to become a relevant part of teacher education programmes and of the school curriculum. The pandemic showed that teachers can use a variety of media; these media can be brought to their own education not only as a means for distance training but also as a topic of study, to reflect on their pedagogical effects and their epistemic possibilities as well as their blind spots.
- 10. Take advantage of the potential of futuring exercises** – that is, imagining the futures of teaching – as a fruitful policy strategy to open up conversations about the expectations and realities of teaching, including not only current anxieties and fears but also sources of hope and transformation. Teaching is a central activity for the continuity of human beings; teachers as specialized agents can be critical informers and protagonists of this collective inquiry about our common futures.

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