Ethical Use in the Teaching of ICT and Initial Teacher Training: A Preliminary Study on the Descriptors of the Observational Tools

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ABSTRACT

The use of technology within the field of education by those who are responsible for the training of teachers has not always been an undisputed subject of discussion. The ethical issues are often linked to the use of new media within the field of education, and the procedural and logistic difficulties are identified as the main sources of concern in the professionalization of teachers; difficulties which sometimes lead to unjustified hypotheses on the social and educational nature of training. The relationship among quality, ethics and technology requires the development of new literacy prospects and innovative training methods to operate through information and communication networks that are able to widen the repertoire of teachers and of cultural and professional educators. Similarly, the quality of their teaching activity strictly relies on the political support shown towards their professional development. The study reports on the development of tools that try to understand the point of view of initial training teachers on the ethical use of technology within the field of education, by making use of the competence indicators available in the literature, and investigates their level of ethical awareness with regard to the multimodal and multicultural nature of ICT. The study focuses on the validation of the tools described above, and especially on the “ethical dilemmas” of future teachers in the use of ICT and on their degree of “ethical awareness,” by referring to the results of previous international studies.

KEYWORDS

Ethics, Higher Education, ICT, Quality, Teacher Training

1. INTRODUCTION

The study mainly aims at outlining the relationship between ethics, technology and quality in initial teacher training. It is a matter of focusing on the way in which pedagogic literacy is accompanied, strengthened and enhanced by technological literacy through the use of specific ethical behaviours, which are considered in this case not from a moral point of view but according to their ethical implications, i.e. according to the degree of intentionality, awareness and responsibility required to manage the teaching-learning processes and concretize the quality and effectiveness of education. Sadler, Amirshokoohi, Kazempour and Allspaw (2006) have pointed out how - when teaching ethically sensitive scientific subjects – that teachers generally feel not prepared to face controversial debates that involve the entire class, mainly ascribing such inability to the lack of appropriate personal and cultural resources apt to structure these experiences (Sadler, Amirshokoohi, Kazempour, & Allspaw, 2006, p. 357) and, therefore, make their results assessable. According to these authors, in order to
overcome such obstacles, it would be advisable to integrate some moments of reflection and “focus on ethics” within the teachers’ training programmes to help them establishing virtuous connections between the latter and science, enabling them in this way to better face their professional tasks, as well as the challenges and difficulties constantly posed by the teaching activity. Therefore, it would be a matter of - through a reassessment of the ethical dimension - urging them to improve the quality of their work, strengthening all those domains of competences and knowledge that will enable them to better perform the professional tasks they will be asked to carry out in the future, as teaching is an activity that requires the use of a set of techniques, tools and actions destined, through “conscious and deliberate” efforts, to build the knowledge, competences and behaviours of a certain group of individuals. The aim is to enable these individuals to achieve an adequate integration within the society and a full self-fulfilment to promote the social, economic, political, scientific, cultural and technological progress (Afe, 1995; 2006). These words acquire even more value when new technologies are used within teaching activities to make the educational proposals even more efficient; however, the use of new technologies generally conveys an asymmetric relationship between the teacher and the student in terms of competences (usually more advanced in the student), which requires the assumption of a cross-cultural ethical perspective. The integration of ICT within the teaching context brings with it the image of the “hybridization” and cultural “métissage” that is taking place within the global society and that develops amplifying the Creolization process precisely through the new information and communication technologies which constitute a fundamental condition for the contamination among cultures and their new configuration. This process of contamination among cultures concerns professional aspects, life forms and habitus and specific competences, abilities, knowledge and teaching methods etc., sometimes very different from each other, pushing education towards the exploration and bringing with it the need of alternative paths. In this sense, some researchers (Eraut, 1994; Carr, 2003; 2005; 2006; Alexander, 2009; Curtis, 2010) have made a plea in favour of the integration of ethics within initial teacher training programmes to make their professional profile stronger by focusing on the construction of a set of competences that will enable them, at the time of their integration within the school context, to efficiently guide students in the fulfilment of the learning objectives, directing them towards a selective and strategic use of ICT and towards the adoption of appropriate teaching and assessment behaviours able to promote the processes of change towards the training success. From a transcultural point of view, an ethical approach to initial teacher training can offer an important contribution to help teachers to discover “other” professional cultures, become more aware of their own “prejudices”, pre-existing and “pseudo-scientific” explicit personal beliefs and of their own educational paradigms by challenging their appropriateness and providing the opportunity to examine, formulate and integrate the new knowledge within their belief systems (Gore, Ladwig, Griffiths, & Amosa, 2007, p. 7). Such kind of approach promotes the development within a real context of a process of updating and transfer of competences for the demolition of out-dated teaching methods, the pulling down of those obstacles that prevent us from changing the teaching systems and for the assertion of innovative methods that can enable us to discuss at school about important issues, such as human rights, conflict resolution, social justice, education to social values and active citizenship and so on. All these aspects can be assisted and strengthened by an effective use, within the school context, of ICT as fundamental tools to support the teaching processes and the individualization strategies needed to treat the “differences” and, therefore, support the cultural variability in terms of original and efficient prospects from a disciplinary and methodological point of view.

Therefore, ethics is an element able to interconnect all teaching dimensions, which go from the reflection on the school background - to better understand its complexity - to the objectification processes, including the relationships between the teacher and his/her students, between the teacher and his/her colleagues, between teachers and parents both in and outside the classroom. It mainly connotes the adoption of appropriate behaviours that concern such relationships and it brings to the surface the functional or structural dependences and interdependences among those components that should enable the different competences acquired in formal, informal and not formal contexts to act
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