

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUES IN COVID-19: DIGITAL CULTURE, INNOVATION, AND ONLINE PEDAGOGY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

DIÁLOGOS INTERCULTURAIS NO COVID-19: CULTURA DIGITAL, INOVAÇÃO E PEDAGOGIA ONLINE NO ENSINO SUPERIOR

DIÁLOGOS INTERCULTURALES EN COVID-19: CULTURA DIGITAL, INNOVACIÓN Y PEDAGOGÍA EN LÍNEA EN LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR

Maria Cristina Lima Paniago

Universidade Católica Dom Bosco

Gustavo Henrique da Cunha Moura

Brandon University

Miriam Brum Arguelho

Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso do Sul

Cristina Devecchi

University of Northampton

ABSTRACT. *This paper explores how conversations about digital culture, innovation, and online pedagogy can inform practices accentuated during the pandemic. The immediatism adopted by universities around the world due to the urgency of lockdowns is problematic in many ways. Firstly, the little time to switch to an online environment, advance online delivery, and ensure assessment is undeniable. Second, the extent to which universities were at different levels of digitally ready infrastructure and related staff and students' development, training, and readiness to learn and teach remotely is also challenging. However, research shows the important role of digital culture in pedagogical choices inside the classroom, as much as it considers how individuals cope with technological innovation in their daily online practices. From a Freirean perspective, pedagogy is reflective and transformative and online pedagogies can reconceptualize knowledge and practice, minimize physical and intangible spaces, and redefine time, constructing new ecologies of learning for an inclusive pedagogy. This paper addresses the above by presenting data from interviews with instructors, administrative staff, and students at three universities in Brazil, Canada, and the UK. This qualitative study uses intercultural concepts of pedagogical innovation, and how participants have adapted their practices in digital culture. We further explore the pedagogical implications of their attitudes towards online learning, the reconstruction of their self-awareness, and aim at corroborating future comprehensions on how COVID-19 will impact higher education. This paper is timely in problematizing concepts that are important to understanding and dealing with digital culture, innovation, and online pedagogies in learning contexts post-COVID.*

Keywords: *Intercultural. Innovation. Online Pedagogy. Digital Culture. COVID-19.*

Maria Cristina Lima Paniago, Gustavo Henrique da Cunha Moura, Miriam Brum Arguelho, and Cristina Devecchi

RESUMO. Este artigo explora como as conversas sobre cultura digital, inovação e pedagogia online podem informar práticas acentuadas durante a pandemia. O imediatismo adotado pelas universidades de todo o mundo devido à urgência dos lockdowns é problemático de várias maneiras. Em primeiro lugar, o pouco tempo para mudar para um ambiente online, a antecipação do ensino online e avaliações condizentes com o contexto são questões inegáveis. Em segundo lugar, o modo com que as universidades estavam, em diferentes níveis de infraestrutura digital, junto do desenvolvimento, treinamento e prontidão de funcionários e alunos neste ensino e aprendizado remoto também foi um desafio. No entanto, a pesquisa mostra o importante papel da cultura digital nas escolhas pedagógicas dentro da sala de aula, tanto quanto considera como os indivíduos lidam com a inovação tecnológica em suas práticas cotidianas online. De acordo com uma perspectiva Freireana, a pedagogia é reflexiva e transformadora e as pedagogias online podem reconceituar o conhecimento e a prática, minimizar os espaços físicos e intangíveis e redefinir o tempo, construindo novas ecologias de aprendizagem para uma pedagogia inclusiva. Este artigo aborda o exposto, apresentando dados de entrevistas com professores, funcionários administrativos e alunos de três universidades no Brasil, Canadá e Reino Unido. Este estudo qualitativo utiliza conceitos interculturais de inovação pedagógica e como os participantes adaptaram suas práticas na cultura digital. Exploramos ainda as implicações pedagógicas de suas atitudes em relação ao aprendizado on-line, a reconstrução de sua autoconsciência e visamos corroborar futuras compreensões sobre como o COVID-19 afetará o ensino superior. Este artigo é oportuno ao problematizar conceitos importantes para entender e lidar com a cultura digital, a inovação e as pedagogias online em contextos de aprendizagem pós-COVID.

Palavras-chave: Intercultural. Inovação. Pedagogia Online. Cultura Digital. COVID-19.

RESUMEN. Este artículo explora cómo las conversaciones sobre cultura digital, innovación y pedagogía en línea pueden informar prácticas acentuadas durante la pandemia. El inmediatez adoptado por las universidades de todo el mundo debido a la urgencia de los cierres es problemático en muchos sentidos. En primer lugar, el poco tiempo para cambiar a un entorno en línea, avanzar en la entrega en línea y garantizar la evaluación es innegable. En segundo lugar, la medida en que las universidades se encontraban en diferentes niveles de infraestructura preparada digitalmente y el desarrollo, la capacitación y la preparación del personal y los estudiantes relacionados para aprender y enseñar de forma remota también es un desafío. Sin embargo, la investigación muestra el importante papel de la cultura digital en las elecciones pedagógicas dentro del aula, tanto como considera cómo las personas enfrentan la innovación tecnológica en sus prácticas diarias en línea. Desde una perspectiva freireana, la pedagogía es reflexiva y transformadora y las pedagogías en línea pueden reconceptualizar el conocimiento y la práctica, minimizar los espacios físicos e intangibles y redefinir el tiempo, construyendo nuevas ecologías de aprendizaje para una pedagogía inclusiva. Este documento aborda lo anterior al presentar datos de entrevistas con instructores, personal administrativo y estudiantes en tres universidades en Brasil, Canadá y el Reino Unido. Este estudio cualitativo utiliza conceptos interculturales de innovación pedagógica y cómo los participantes han adaptado sus prácticas en la cultura digital. Exploramos más a fondo las implicaciones pedagógicas de sus actitudes hacia el aprendizaje en línea, la reconstrucción de su autoconciencia y nuestro objetivo es corroborar las comprensiones futuras sobre cómo COVID-19 afectará la educación superior. Este artículo es oportuno para problematizar conceptos que son importantes para comprender y abordar la cultura digital, la innovación y las pedagogías en línea en contextos de aprendizaje posteriores a la COVID-19.

Palabras clave: Intercultural. Innovación. Pedagogía Online. Cultura Digital. COVID-19.

1 INTRODUCTION¹

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted society in many ways. Bell (2021), for instance, calls our attention to the amplification of social injustices and inequalities (e.g., unequal internet access, availability of technology devices, etc.) since the beginning of the outbreaks in March 2020. Shah, Stat, Shankar, Schwind, and Sittaramane (2020) included statistics that millions of people were pushed into poverty, while thousands more had been negatively impacted in their finances. And studies have emphasized the outrageous contexts in which underserved people have found themselves during a time full of uncertainty (GAYLE; CHILDRESS, 2021). In education, the realities of universities changed drastically when institutions shut down their physical doors and abruptly transitioned students, teachers, and administrative staff into remote work (NORTH; VITTO; HICKAM; SANTEN; MESSMAN, 2020; SAVIANI; GALVÃO, 2021).

To further investigate what the perceptions around remote learning were, we also consider introducing some key terms that have been rather prevailing in academia. Therefore, this paper aims at presenting and discussing some concepts of digital culture, innovation, and online pedagogy from university members – students, administrators, and faculty members – in Brazil, Canada, and the UK. The data and findings shared here are a result of a qualitative study which uses the narratives of its participants to contribute to more situated practices in higher education programs across the globe.

The participants of this study shared their experiences with pedagogical innovation and how they have adapted their digital practices within their universities during the COVID-19 pandemic. We further explore and theorize the pedagogical implications of their attitudes towards online/remote learning, the reconstruction of their self-awareness (FREIRE; SHOR, 1987), and consider how impactful the pandemic context was in education worldwide.

¹ All citations in Portuguese were translated into English (our translation).

1.1 Methodological pathways

This is a snapshot of a qualitative research that involves scholars from three different countries: Brazil, Canada, and the UK. As research methods, we used semi-structured interviews with participants, which enabled them to have an open and flexible space to express their reflections, perceptions, concepts, and day-to-day experiences. The participants' practices are related to digital culture in their educational contexts, with an emphasis on the role of digital technologies in times of COVID-19 and remote learning.

Participants' shared experiences were used as narratives, and we believe they work as a tool for us to develop and reshape our (new) experiences. Almeida and Valente (2012), for instance, say that "narrating an experience refers to the record of memories about everyday social life; to the specific of the subject; to the collective of a group; to the meanings that the subjects attribute to the events" (p. 63). Therefore, through narratives, we found relevant ways of understanding digital culture and innovative and ubiquitous educational practices in higher education. These experiences highlight tensions, challenges, and advances of pedagogical practices focused on ubiquity, collaboration, and intercultural matters.

The interviews with participants were done via Google Meet, recorded, and later transcribed. Consent was given either orally before each interview, or in written forms. Participants' personal and identifiable information was kept anonymous, according to the guidelines of the ethics committees to which the research project was submitted. Once transcribed, the collected data was transferred to a software called IRAMUTEC, which supports the analysis of qualitative data. This software was useful in organizing and categorizing our findings onto themes. This paper specifically focuses on emergent themes such as digital culture, innovation, and online pedagogy.

Methodologically, we also understand this research from a postcritical perspective (MEYER; PARAÍSO, 2014). That means, we approach our data knowing it carries complexities and movements. Our research is part of an on-going changing society that transforms education and turns it into a social fluid experience. Given the nature of our intercultural encounter, we adopted a perspective of looking into our findings in a non-binary

logic, which means we try to consider the pluralities and varied different meanings (FLEURI, 2003) that were produced from our interactions and with our participants.

2 WHAT DO WE HAVE TO SAY ABOUT DIGITAL CULTURE?

The concept of interculturality assumed in this article is the mutual recognition of all cultures, without hierarchization (MARÍN, 2009; MATUSITZ, 2014). From this concept, we allow ourselves to consider the different encounters, interactions, dialogues, and knowledge produced in the development of the study as the most important aspect of this research (SAVVA, 2017; HINNER 2017). Taking interculturality as a perspective allows us to recognize and value other cultural systems, in addition to any hierarchy, in a context of complementarity that allows for the construction of dialogues.

It is a challenge to open to the others, as Candau (2010) points out: “[...] the perspective of interculturality is a complex and challenging task” (p. 24-25). Yet,

[...] interculturality tries to promote dialogical and egalitarian relationships between people and groups that belong to different cultural universes, working on the conflicts inherent in this reality. It does not ignore the power relations present in social and interpersonal relationships. Recognizes and assumes conflicts, looking for the most appropriate strategies to face them. (CANDAU, 2005, p. 19).

We define digital culture as different ways we use digital technologies to speak, write, live, socialize, work, study, produce, consume, communicate, and relate to others to name a few. To sum up, we see digital culture because of what we do, believe and how we act when using digital technologies. It is possible to notice that digital culture (or cyberculture, used here interchangeably) has reconfigured social and technological matters (LEMOS, 2002). Socially, digital culture has expanded people’s notions of collaboration, authorship, and experimentation (RUBIM; RUBIM, 2017) which characterizes a culture that was dematerialised by a virtual reality where space and time are faced as ubiquitous (SANTAELLA, 2013). Technologically, the analogical has become the digital (COSTA, 2021; CANCLINI, 2018), and often having access to a digital device is the guarantee of one’s participation and immersion in such a context as of the digital culture.

Considering what was said above, Lemos (2002) recognizes the limitations of defining cyberculture. For example, besides the fact that this term comprehends different meanings, the prefix cyber (or the term digital in digital culture) can create a technological determinism. That is, cyber or digital are historical terms which are being used due to their role in contemporary society and the notion that digital technologies are current artifacts. On the other hand, the term culture can also assume a social construct of digital and technological immersion as our lives are marked by online banking, electric means of transportation, and electronic voting systems among others.

For one of our participants (In1-Brazil), we cannot talk about digital culture without conceptualizing culture. For them, “[culture] produces the way we think, how we live, the relationships we establish with each other, the way we experience our bodies and our relationships with technology”. She adds on saying

“[...] digital culture enters into this with this specificity that certain technical devices, such as desktop computers, apps, programs, internet, come to place themselves in our lives and do more than mediate our relationships, they establish a certain way of living in the world” (In1-Brazil).

That said, our notion of digital culture moves away from determinisms – technological and social – but understands that it is a direct consequence of the evolution of modern and technical culture. Yet, the Brazilian instructor reminds us of the interference that digital culture causes both in our work environment and in the ways we think about the digital world:

“[...] I do not consider that this digital world is a world that will fit everyone and that everyone will fit [...] some processes of social inequalities assert themselves as this digital culture comes to be an almost unavoidable condition for us to live our contemporary life” (In1-Brazil).

Aligned with the view of inequalities within digital culture, an administrator from Canada contributes to this perspective when they comment on their interest in the possibilities of digital technologies in such contexts, mostly in the development of connections and empathy. As the participant narrated, they were “[...] very interested in the power of the possibilities within technology for fostering connection and empathy” (Adm1-Canada), and that means to be aware of oppression and marginalization patterns that can be reproduced also within digital culture.

The awareness needed to establish connections and empathy dialogues with Morin's (2015) concept of comprehension, which varies from one individual to another. Morin (2015) says that comprehension "[...] is intersubjective, human understanding requires openness to the other, empathy, and sympathy" (p. 73). Recognizing the other is a precondition to unpacking any hierarchical power-dynamic relationship, and Morin (2015) states that once it is figured out, it still has the potential to become oppressive. "Human understanding requires comprehension, but above all, it requires seeing the other and that the other lives" (MORIN, 2015, p. 80).

In a context such as digital culture, where relationships and connections are strengthened and emphasized through social collaboration and agency (RUBIM; RUBIM, 2017), we move beyond the micro-levelled settings of a classroom. As the Canadian administrator determined, the role of digital technologies in the reshaping of our cultures and digital culture is concerning when we observe the macro aspects of it, and that is exemplified when they say: "[...] I am very concerned with finding ways to use developments in technology both in and out of the classroom. Not just to connect students, to bodies of knowledge, but to connect the university to the wider community" (Adm1-Canada).

This idea that connection is present in the wider community speaks to Lemos and Lévy's (2010) interpretation of the network in digital culture. According to them "[...] everything communicates, and everything is part of a network: people, machines, objects, cities. It is the era of what some people call the 'internet of things', where the most diverse objects and subjects start communicating while connecting to the internet" (p. 46). In addition, Lemos (2003; 2005; 2010) informs us about a generalized connectivity since everything is networking, our personal computer, the collective group, the ubiquity, cell phones, and Wi-Fi connections, it is all about a technical evolution that fosters new relationships among humans-machines-humans.

Following the different perspectives on the definitions of digital culture and its implications in collaboration and agency, it is important to note that the virtual network influences pedagogical practices as well. From an online pedagogy lens, we judge it

necessary to assess and problematize what participants are choosing to do or are doing in a time of exalted remote educational practices due to a global pandemic.

3 ONLINE PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES: SOME IMPLICATIONS

We understand pedagogy as a heterogeneous, diverse, multidimensional practice that combines social, cultural, and biological aspects (MIRANDA; PISCHETOLA, 2021). Besides this, our approach to pedagogy relies on an ecological lens, which articulates knowledges with people's networking activities, both interactively and dialogically. As a result, this ecological pedagogy intersects different ways of knowing, experiences, conceptions, and environments, and promotes more reflective practices that contemplate people's individualities (MIRANDA; PISCHETOLA, 2021).

As Miranda and Pischetola (2021) argue, articulating digital technologies and education through an ecological pedagogy can be interpreted as decentralizing techniques. This way, we are invited to rather focus on the role of culture and of the environment, so our immersion within such contexts – digital and social – will eventually reflect what can be created from our interactions with one another. This process means reinventing oneself in a context of digital culture, for example, with the wisdom and humility of understanding that we cannot be the ones who have absolute knowledge about everything. Moreover, an ecological pedagogy teaches us that our practices can be redefined, reshaped, and redesigned in a more collaborative way.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, such practices were intensified, according to some of the participants in the study. They shared that the concept of time has significantly changed, whether that is time in front of a device or time spent with relatives and family. For instance, one administrator in Brazil said:

[...] I am always connected; this is very good for an administrator. For the university, it is good, for the management process, it is good. But for the individual, sometimes I don't think it is good. Why don't I ever disconnect [...] it causes a significant pressure increase. (Adm1-Brazil).

Arguably, the comment of this administrator on the advantages the university will have with their overtime online work is an example that the pandemic has not changed the

focus of institutions and their profit. The universities in the three countries heavily rely on students' tuitions, and the ecological pedagogy that we discussed earlier often becomes instrumentalized. Particularly when such institutions make use of providing digital devices or 'innovative' pedagogy (see more in the section below), the ecological aspect of it is left aside as the capital overrides any sociocultural facet.

Another example of how online pedagogical practices were being impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic is what a Canadian instructor called 'unwelcoming ubiquity'. In summary, ubiquity is understood as the outcome of digital culture in people's notions of time and space. The virtual realities reconfigure time as people across hemispheres exchange information instantly, and space as physical boundaries are non-existent in digital spaces. The instructor exemplified this saying:

[...] I don't know anybody who's really enjoying this process and finding it better than being physically present in the classroom. I don't know anybody who's finding it an improvement. I think some people are appreciating the blended learning opportunities and the ability, you know, there are different ways to structure knowledge, acquisition, so that it's not just one thing, but a lot of us, you know, especially after a day of zoom meetings, you know, I can have six hours of zoom meetings and then a three hour class [...] I feel my work is crowding out every other part of my life. And I'm not enjoying that feeling very much. This is the kind of job. And I know, you know, that can take up all of your life if you let it. And I think it's always a challenge to strike a balance between work and life, especially if you're doing something you genuinely care about. So, you think about it all the time, you know, I think there's important weights that I need to segment my life in order to be productive. And I think the ubiquity of this technology and its intersection with my recreational technologies, [...] it's just something that's unwelcoming. (In1-Canada)

Prior to COVID-19, the instructor's notion of space and time had been defined by knowing they would be in the university for classes and students' appointments. Now, the pandemic has rearranged those fixed time frames, calling them to reflect upon time management a lot more often. The easy access – a look on your phone – and the fast-paced information flow in online communities have become one of the challenges faced by several university members, and the lack of a structured routine interferes with these individuals' pedagogical practices.

Along with the difficulties that these participants are finding with the newer configurations of time and space, another relevant characteristic raised in their experiences relates to the appropriation of digital technologies in class and the development of more

social and cultural practices. It is challenging to overcome barriers that impede one to rethink their meaning-making processes when the pedagogical goal does not include sharing information and experiences collaboratively. According to Miranda and Pischetola (2021), for a meaningful use of digital technologies, we first need to understand them beyond their instrumental role. We ought to seek an autonomous, curious, inclusive, active, interconnected, and conscious approach using digital technologies, which enables us to learn through discovery. For another instructor,

[...] So, that's what I realized, for example, looking at it as a manager: lack of knowledge and distance. These are two things that need to be overcome. People need to get closer to this and, above all, they need to learn to use it, and they need help to be able to learn to use it. Because not everyone is self-taught in all fields of knowledge. And especially when fields of knowledge provide things that have a certain degree of sophistication, which is another type of sophistication compared to the sophistication that person is used to and in which he moves comfortably as a researcher and as a teacher. So, I think that training programs are needed there. More serious and less occasional training programs to be able to make this transition in mentality. I think that one of the big problems that ITs can encounter are mentalities that continue to resist, because they were not systematically and continuously given the possibility of getting closer and starting to exercise control over what previously caused them fear and consequent distance. So, as a manager I saw this happening, including in my personal case as a professor, because I am a manager but also a professor, that is, I have to enter the classroom; I have to get into masters and doctorate. I have my laboratory and my research group that work weekly with my students, we started doing it all at a distance. (In2-Brazil)

Amidst such provocative changes and transformations, our discussions around ecological (online) pedagogy propose questions that challenge the notion of innovation next. Indeed, the instrumentalization of digital technologies and transition to a more immersed practice into cyberculture offers insights for changes in pedagogical models and approaches. However, is such practice embracing all its opportunities or just maintaining a pedagogy supported by non-situated, binary, uncritical, hierarchical, and linear conceptions? To explore these ideas, below we present some key discussions and perceptions of participants on innovative educational practices.

4 SHARED PERSPECTIVES ON INNOVATION

Innovation can be overly emphasized, mostly when we are dealing with digital technologies and digital culture. Among the diversity of concepts and interpretations, we

understand the limitations we are subject to when trying to comprehend it. However, our attempt is to broaden definitions which only include elements such as infrastructure and new equipment when we talk about innovation. Based on Mill and Pimentel (2020), we conceptualize innovation as something that brings in change, growth, and reform. And as Cardoso (1993) stated, we see innovation is not just a regular change.

The change we highlight in this paper is something intentional and deliberately chosen (CARDOSO, 1993; MILL; PIMENTEL, 2020). That is, such innovation is not a result of a natural or linear progressive evolution. Our concept of innovation represents a growth full of ruptures which can be both partial and temporary. Innovation challenges instituted dynamics of power and therefore growth becomes an act of resilience and resistance. Our participants shared such view on innovation, and as a reflection, this Canadian instructor shared that:

[...] structural reform is a key component for me, in terms of thinking about what it means to innovate. And the institutional structures are many and vary, they're large and small. So, within the classroom, there are certain kinds of structures that have to do with the way information is presented, and the structures having to do with technological infrastructure for example. (In1-Canada)

When we think of how to promote such innovation within the educational field, in general, Mill and Pimentel (2020) show that educational policies must be central in this reform. Our proposed reform through innovation is "accompanied by curricular changes, introduction of new teaching and learning processes, products, materials, ideas, and people" (MILL; PIMENTEL, 2020, p. 11), and more importantly the different possibilities of creating such changes. One administrator in Canada also presented that

[...] The availability of certain ways of presenting information to students. And one of the things I've seen over the last ten years has been the effort by my university and other universities to diversify the range of resources we have available to us in terms of presenting information to students. That is more kind of intimate structural reform, I think that at the end of the day, innovation for me has always meant to kind of, you know, an under-laboring kind of work in which what you are doing is addressing structural components, or the structural logic of the institution itself through one's teaching and one's practices, one's outreach practice. (Admn1-Canada)

Now, bringing the concept of innovation to a more pedagogical lens, we see a hybridization between the concepts of culture of the media, and digital culture. Within their specificities, these concepts lead to an inherent overlapping that occurs due to the use of

different medias within the broader digital culture. Santaella (2003) argues that the ubiquity and intersection of these different cultures – media and digital – need to be carefully considered.

In our understanding, digital culture is being developed convergently to the media, and digital culture is something more comprehensive than the media itself. Digital culture includes images, sounds, texts, and the most varied linguistic tools which go through the expansion of distribution of concepts rather than a closed and stable concept. Digital media, however, is the means to the repercussion of immersive and interactive environments created by digital culture. Regardless, digital culture enables potential opportunities for change in meaning-making processes, ways of knowing, and knowledge production (DOMINGUES, 2009). A British administrator also comments that

[...] my number one is flexibility. I think it gives us a chance [...] it helps us to meet the needs of students, [...] engagement, [...] the speed. [...] But there are all sorts of reasons why students might benefit from a chance to revisit material, revisit an engagement sometimes. And you can share it with apps and people which is brilliant, and I know pros and cons of that in terms of participation, but I think the fact that you can [...] in a session is wonderful. I really like the fact that you can extend and augment something, create something together in a session, you can record it, layer it, add to it. (Adm1-UK)

It is also important to point out the critical aspect when adopting media, digital technologies, and digital culture as an innovative pedagogical practice. Firstly, the need to analyze conditions and requirements of the contexts and community in which such practices are taking place is essential for unveiling challenges that could emerge. This analysis, which is often restricted to the psycho-pedagogical and technical dimensions (FERRETI, 2018), should dismantle socio-political and educational one-size-fits-all realities. Consequently, innovation in this regard urges us to reflect on the reason why we employ these concepts into our practices, as another Canadian instructor shared

[...] I think that people aren't discerning [...] and they just think, oh, great, it's technology. I'll use it. I think you have to differentiate between what you want to teach and how you're going to teach it, and whether technologies are good for that or not". (In3-Canada)

From the experiences and concepts shared in this section, we weave in some considerations that will inform higher education programs in understanding the complex

dynamics of digital culture, innovation and ubiquity, and online pedagogy. We further explore some tensions that should be considered in any educational contexts.

5 CONSIDERATIONS TO MOVE FORWARD

After exploring some methodological and pragmatic results from this research, we came up with some considerations for moving forward. It has been discussed that the COVID-19 pandemic magnified aspects that were already present in academic discussions (e.g., online pedagogy, digital culture, and innovation), but it also brought light to features that are generally overlooked. They include a) intercultural research collaboration, b) power dynamics and social structures re-enactment in digital culture, c) the imposition and implications of digital technologies in pedagogy, and d) the unpacking of innovation in the context of digital culture. These considerations will inform higher education programs in rethinking that university members will benefit from a well-structured technological environment, but that cannot be dissociated from their sociocultural being.

Firstly, the collaboration among the authors from different countries is an example of how universities across the globe might strengthen relationships to assess local and global educational matters. The internationalization of knowledge through research collaborations among scholars has increased considerably (MOREIRA; SCHLEMMER, 2020; MORIN, 2015), even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Though it is expected that these scholars visit different localities in person, the restrictions in travel urged them to think out of the box to become familiar with their research contexts.

Our research and collaboration meet the concept of protagonist, both from participants and ours, as this study

[...] emphasizes the construction and socialization of knowledge, the operationalization of the principles and purposes of education. So, anyone, regardless of time and space, can become an agent of their learning using differentiated materials and means of communication. That allows interactivity and collaborative work both synchronous and asynchronously (MOREIRA & SCHLEMMER, 2020, p. 14).

The online intercultural exchange among scholars who speak from different countries is defined by challenges in communication, conceptualizations, and

contextualization of perspectives as well as by different time zones for meetings, language skills, and technical issues. However, on the other hand, the richness is within the plural meanings, diverse cultural backgrounds, and uniqueness that each individual carry with them. Therefore, fostering more encounters with the other means to consider possibilities, value different systems, and work towards the acceptance of the unknown (MOREIRA; SCHLEMMER, 2020; MORIN, 2015).

Following Morin's (2015) stance on complex thinking,

[...] we find the possibility of reconnecting and at the same time reconnecting the human being from nature and the cosmos. We can re-establish the dialogue between two cultures, the scientific and the humanistic. We can situate ourselves in the universe, where local and global are connected (p. 119).

Being immersed in intercultural relationships should not be considered as a tool to find commonalities, but rather a tool to demystify the aversion to the differences and promote more plural insights.

Secondly, this study reinforces that digital culture carries on power dynamics and social structures. Higher education programs are spaces – whether an online or physical space – in which people circulate opinions and re-enact social behaviours. This is a call to understand that digital culture is not neutral and digital technologies are not impartial tools either. One may consider the cyberculture a democratic setting, where its citizens freely develop their agency. However, from a pluralistic perspective (BATISTA; PESCE, 2018), democratization may be at risk when we essentially ask ourselves 'is it democratic to whom?'. Like a Canadian student shared,

I think it's [digital technology] more democratic, [...] it's allowed more freedom or more accessibility, but also it depends on where you are. If [...] you're in the Northern Communities [in Manitoba], even if they are democratic, it has to do with economics, the potential is there. And to give you an example [...] not everybody has computers and even ourselves, we struggle with this, um, which is supposed to be accessible for everybody, but we don't have that luxury. But the potential is there. The students can go anywhere. They can go to Brazil to study virtually, and they can go to the best university. So, in that sense, it's more democratic. [...] but at the same time, it's still an economic problem to make it more accessible, more equal. (Std1-Canada)

The student's concern about the democratization of digital technologies also references our third point, which sees the potentialities and challenges in the relationship between technology and pedagogy. Because of COVID-19, we observed that higher

education programs kept their own pace in the implementation of digital technologies into university members' practices. As some of our participants mentioned, the choice was there, and it was up to them whether they would use/allow devices into their classrooms, for instance. From a broader administrative view, the marketization of digital technologies needs to be further investigated as the imposition of devices and online access can greatly impact pedagogy.

Considering the concept of online pedagogy as an approach that considers individualities, differences, and uniquenesses (MIRANDA; PISCHETOLA, 2021), we witnessed university members who are overwhelmed with the ubiquitous impact of digital culture. The potentialities of digital culture and technologies in pedagogical practices enhance and deepen individuals' understandings of the other (Authors) through classes that are engaging and inclusive. For example,

[...] there is something really interesting going on when you get students who are in different parts of the country, or the world, all participating simultaneously. That's a real benefit. [...] I think that making the transition from analog face-to-face teaching to digital online teaching has required me to look very carefully at all of the teaching materials that I have used, all the assessments that I have used. It has really prompted me to have a concerted look at how I have done things [...] up to some years ago, I got lecture sessions that had been unchanged for decades. I had to very drastically redesign them. It has been hard work but actually very productive, hence the quality of them [...] I had to radically rethink the best way of delivering this [...] I find face-to-face teaching quite anxiety inducing, I find it quite challenging [...] when I'm teaching online, I find it a little bit less anxiety inducing, and I feel a little bit more relaxed and capable. (Adm2-UK)

On the other hand, the pedagogical work cannot be omitted from a critical analysis for the insertion of these technologies as if using them would enhance material conditions and quality of learning. Indeed, the elements that are present in digital culture (e.g., media, apps, different notions of space and time) are an indisputable reality. Nevertheless, their presence might implicate more tensions rather than an even and linear outcome. Personally speaking, considering that the nature of digital culture and its technologies are at the service of the humanization of educational practices, the life-long learning aspect of it should be the greatest goal to pursue instead. As our participant pointed out,

[...] I believe that as we consider in my definition of digital cultures, it is about interactions like human interaction and learning is definitely at least the way I conceive of it. It's definitely social as well. So, I guess the short answer would be that

as we see ourselves in the role of educators, we are facilitators of learning and learning is about changing participation in the world. (In3-Canada)

Finally, concerning innovation, we understand that digital culture and digital technologies can collaborate in such a way that the student can be a builder of their own knowledge. The relationship with and the access to the current elements of digital culture today will enable learners and the broad university community to be with the world (VALIANDES; NEOPHYTOU; HAJISOTERIOU, 2018). That means, digital culture and digital technologies, through an innovative approach that seeks change in social elements, will offer individuals subsidies to interpret reality in a critical and reflective way. For instance,

Those core essentials, human connections, respect, inclusion, critical consciousness, they are all always going to be there. So, we must be mindful of how we are using the technology. But there is another factor which is attraction. We need attractive methods, and we need to keep people attracted. So, we can't just force people. People are not in prison. They choose to come to class and that helps them make different choices. (Adm2-UK).

Thus, we reaffirm that the teacher education, even among the interdisciplinary scope of higher education programs, and the integrating pedagogical practices of the digital culture are important for the construction of an innovative pedagogical work. This may promote digital fluency in the construction of knowledge by different individuals in a critical way, and it can be considered innovative as it carries elements for education in contemporaneity.

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Sobre os autores

Maria Cristina Lima Paniago

Possui graduação em Letras - Faculdades Unidas Católicas de Mato Grosso (1986), mestrado em Lingüística Aplicada e Estudos da Linguagem pela Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (2000) e doutorado em Lingüística Aplicada e Estudos da Linguagem pela Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (2005). Pesquisadora visitante da Universidade de Manitoba, Canadá (Estágio Pós-Doutoral) Department of Family Social Science - Faculty of Human Ecology. Atualmente é professora do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação Mestrado e Doutorado na Universidade Católica Dom Bosco (UCDB). Foi vice-coordenadora do PPGE-UCDB de 2011 a 2012 e atualmente é orientadora de mestrado e doutorado em Educação. Tem experiência na área da Educação, atuando principalmente nos seguintes temas: tecnologia educacional, educação a distância, ensino-aprendizagem de línguas, formação de professores e práticas docentes. É líder do Grupo de Pesquisa e Estudos em Tecnologia Educacional e Educação a Distância (GETED). Bolsista de Produtividade em Pesquisa 2 CNPq.

E-mail: cristina@ucdb.br

Gustavo Henrique da Cunha Moura

Gustavo é PhD em Educação e sua dissertação se concentrou em desvendar as identidades de professores LGBTQ+ ocidentais usando o inglês como meio de instrução. Nos últimos anos, teve ampla experiência como pesquisador na University of Manitoba, Brandon University e Simon Fraser University, e como parceiro de pesquisa em estudos internacionais no Brasil e no Reino Unido.

E-mail: mourag@brandonu.ca

Miriam Brum Arguelho

Doutora em Educação, pela Universidade Católica Dom Bosco (2018), na linha de Práticas Pedagógicas e suas Relações com a Formação Docente; mestrado em Educação - área de concentração em Tecnologia Educativa, pela Universidade do Minho-UM (2003), pós-graduação em Técnicas e Contextos de e-Learning, pela Universidade de Coimbra (2005); graduação em Pedagogia, pela Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso do Sul (1999). Atualmente sou professora do curso de Pedagogia do Campus de Ponta Porã e coordenaora do Curso de Pedagogia PRIL/AGEAD, na Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso do Sul. Estou chefe da Secretaria de Inovação das Licenciaturas - SEILI/PROGRAD - UFMS. Sou Co-líder do Edutec - Grupo de Pesquisa em Educação, Tecnologias Digitais e Formação Docente, membro do Grupo de Pesquisa e Estudos em Tecnologias Educacionais e Educação a Distância - GETED e do Grupo de Pesquisa Science With R - SWR (CNPQ). Colabora na Rede de Pesquisa qualidade e regulamentação no contexto da Educação Aberta, Flexível ou a Distância Brasil- Internacional. Atuando principalmente nos seguintes temas: Formação de Professores Ensino/Aprendizagem; Fundamentos e Metodologias de Alfabetização e Letramento; Aprendizagem Criativa e Metodologias Inovadoras, Pedagogia do Afeto. No que se refere a investigação, seus interesses centram-se na cultura digital e suas relações com os processos de ensino/aprendizagem, letramento crítico e multiletramentos.

E-mail: miriambaa@hotmail.com

Cristina Devecchi

Cristina é bacharel (com honras) em Línguas Estrangeiras Modernas (Inglês e Alemão) pela Universidade de Turim, Itália, e mestre em Necessidades Educacionais Especiais e Inclusão, e MPhil em Pesquisa Educacional (reconhecido pelo ESRC) e doutorado pela Universidade de Cambridge. Lecionou italiano na Inglaterra e no Líbano, onde montou o primeiro curso de língua italiana na Universidade Libanesa. De volta ao Reino Unido, Cristina trabalhou como RP e secretária executiva do Diretor do Centro de Estudos do Oriente Médio da Universidade de Cambridge e como pesquisadora da Faculdade de Educação da Universidade de Cambridge. Antes de fazer seu doutorado, ela trabalhou como Assistente de Ensino de Aprendizagem em uma escola secundária. O interesse de Cristina pela inclusão está focado principalmente na implantação de recursos humanos em escolas e universidades, com especial interesse na área de gestão do conhecimento e capital intelectual.

E-mail: cristina.devecchi@northampton.ac.uk

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