

Teachers' lifelong learning: Emerging dialogues from Gert Biesta's philosophical views

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Abstract

It is our contention in this article that lifelong learning for teachers is something that is essential and fundamental for the improvement of the teaching and learning processes in education. Here, we consider some aspects related to this important subject. First, we discuss official documents dealing with teachers' lifelong learning: that is, we aim to understand the historical development of this topic and what has been proposed by international legislation. Second, we explain and discuss some theoretical views related to the theme of teachers' lifelong learning, especially those put forward by Gert Biesta. Finally, following on from what we have discussed previously, we put forward some suggestions for teachers' lifelong learning that aim to make a difference with regard to how teachers carry out their day-to-day activities.

Keywords

Lifelong learning, teacher education, reflection, Gert Biesta

Introduction

The recent document *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good?* from UNESCO (2015), highlights difficulties faced by teachers worldwide. In both the northern and southern hemispheres, there are concerns about the ability of teachers to deliver sound educational experiences in the classroom. This situation arises out of a number of complex factors: financial issues; reduced autonomy (restricted by official requirements); standardized assessments; and differing social realities that require working processes unique to teachers' individual situations. As such, it is our contention that teachers' lifelong learning is an essential element in providing a high-quality education system.

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Further, the document (UNESCO, 2015) emphasizes that it is necessary to rethink curriculum content and the educational goals set for teachers in order to make the student's learning process more fulfilling, and broaden the understanding of diversity and inclusion. There is a need to develop the skills required to address these core issues successfully and so allow teachers to teach effectively today. Teachers are fundamental in creating and encouraging a respectful and safe environment in schools, promoting students' self-esteem and autonomy, while employing diverse didactical and pedagogical strategies to help achieve these goals.

The above corroborates the thesis that contemporary society demands more and more professionals who are capable of dealing with daily challenges and able to cope with often unforeseen variables, all of which can interfere with a person's learning, as well as engaging in the more formal role of imparting knowledge and encouraging self-development. How can teachers, regardless of their own teaching discipline, reconcile these demands? What is it truly necessary to teach and learn? How do we evaluate the pedagogical practices of teachers?

These are not easy questions to answer, but it is clear that current educational and teacher practices cannot be the same as in the past. Action is necessary and, in fact, there is an urgent need to develop pedagogical theories that will make a significant difference to daily practice. We understand that teachers' lifelong learning has a central role to play in restructuring the basics that are fundamental to the educational environment: the ability to reflect on its own practice, both the individual and collective dimensions; curriculum content; the learning processes; methodologies; and other issues that surround professional development.

The concept of professional development is part of the broader process of professional learning, as it establishes meaning for the personal and professional life of the teacher. It includes learning from experience, which helps to develop greater skills and, in turn, helps to improve the quality of the classroom environment and that of the school as a whole. In addition, professional development involves both training and teaching activities, which provide informal as well as formal opportunities for learning, within and outside the classroom (Day, 2005), all of which are part of the lifelong learning requirement.

Nóvoa (2007) theorizes that the basis of education is a critical reflection on both a person's practices and the development of a person's permanent, personal identity. Therefore, according to the author, it is important to invest in the person and to give credence to the knowledge gained through someone's personal experiences. Behrens (2007) goes further and argues in favor of an innovative paradigm, which proposes a critical, reflective and transformative vision of education that requires interconnections with multiple approaches, visions and scope. It seeks to overcome a reductionist approach and proposes a new concept that is more encompassing.

'In order for teacher education to conform to the new paradigm it requires processes of continuous qualification that have a critical, reflective and transformative view' (Behrens, 2007: 445 – our translation). Another author corroborating this understanding – the importance of fostering critical skills in teachers' education – is Gur-Ze'ev, who argues for the 'improvising teacher', who is critical and encourages criticism (Gur-Ze'ev, 2010). Since the term 'improviser' can lead to a misunderstanding, it is worth emphasizing here that the teacher is an improviser in the sense of having a developed critical rationality and, thus, able to handle the most diverse situations and subjects with his/her students; he/she is not an improviser in the sense of being unprepared, unfit and incompetent.

Thus, in order to better develop teachers' lifelong learning, reflection becomes indispensable and fundamental for high-quality teaching and learning processes. In this article, the following points were taken into account: first, we try to make sense of the literature dealing with teachers' lifelong learning; second, we explain and discuss theoretical concepts that deal with the theme, focusing particularly on Gert Biesta's views; and third, on the basis of the preceding two points, we bring together the various considerations and inquiries concerning the topic of lifelong learning, and so propose a new structure that can make a difference to the daily life of teachers and, in turn, to that of students. Regardless of the nomenclature used, due to the differing terminologies employed by different authors when discussing the professional development of teachers, we emphasize that our position follows an understanding of teacher development that goes beyond a restrictive form of learning; rather we defend a position that is challenging to the individual, one which encourages the individual to reflect on his/her and the other's position in and conception of the world.

Lifelong learning: A theoretical overview

The idea of lifelong learning and education is not new since it can be observed even in Plato's *The Republic*, in which it is suggested that study and learning can be undertaken throughout a person's life. However, it is worth noting that the concept of lifelong learning seems to have been first used in the book entitled *Lifelong Education* by Basil Yeaxlee published in 1929. Almost prophetically, Yeaxlee (1929: 28) characterizes lifelong learning and suggests:

We discover more, and not less, need of adult education as we make progress. It will not have a fair chance until better preparation is made for it during the years of adolescence. On the other hand, we are unlikely to achieve a thoroughly sound and complete system of primary and secondary education until the adult members of the community, by continuing their own education, realize how mischievous a thing it is to abbreviate or mishandle the school education of boys and girls. But adult education, rightly interpreted, is as inseparable from normal living as food and physical exercise. Life, to be vivid, strong, and creative, demands constant reflection upon experience, so that action may be guided by wisdom, and service be the other aspect of self-expression, while work and leisure are blended in perfect exercise of body, mind and spirit, personality attaining completion in society.

More recently, and of importance to our argument in this article, Gatti and Barreto (2009) call our attention to the limitations of programs of teachers' lifelong learning as being overly concerned with the individual cognitive aspects. Such programs disregard teachers as essentially social beings, immersed in group relations from which they derive values and attitudes that give meaning to their personal and professional choices and serve as a reference for their actions. In this sense, the processes of lifelong learning that seek to modify concepts, attitudes and practices have the premise of taking into account what teachers think and the influences of the sociocultural environment in which they live and work. The challenge for teacher education in the 21st century is to break with passive education that focused only on rationality and the reproduction of content. More than 'ready-made recipes', teachers need to develop their capacity for research, authorship, curiosity and critical judgment.

For Gatti and Barreto (2009), the challenges faced in relation to modernizing teachers' lifelong learning are developing a more contextualized and autonomous teaching practice while at the same time searching for an educational ethos that promotes social objectives – what are the objectives? The challenge is to create and engage in a structure that will incorporate practical and theoretical elements, bringing the realities of school and society closer together. Thus, it is necessary to think about and plan for teachers' development in a way that encourages their effective participation as protagonists and not as mere spectators, and provides spaces for dialog, research and reflection on current needs and learning.

Therefore, Day (2005) bases his idea of lifelong learning and education on teachers' willingness to participate in teacher education and, further, he insists that a prerequisite for this participation is active collaboration between colleagues. This perspective is consistent with the vision of a complex and innovative paradigm which, according to Behrens (2007), arises out of a re-articulation of its parts, resulting in a need for interconnection and interdependence of knowledge. The effects of continuing education are more likely to be maintained when teachers can adapt to their reality and receive support from school management.

Thus, we argue that lifelong learning must be intrinsically connected with teacher education as Day (2005) argues. According to Hernandez (2014), teachers' learning is mainly supported through collaborative practices in the workplace. The emphasis is on the relational character of the knowledge and experiences of the people involved. By participating in ongoing training processes – with the goal of peer collaboration – teachers build their knowledge and understanding of their own practice. This process becomes a relevant aspect for narratives and reflections on the daily routine and tensions in both the classroom and the educational environment as a whole.

Teachers' lifelong learning: Some reflections based on Gert Biesta's views

In recent years, Biesta has deepened his studies on the role of the teacher (Biesta, 2004, 2006, 2010, 2012a, 2013b). He raised awareness of the misconception of the teacher being solely a facilitator, which was based on the constructivist perspective. However, epistemologically speaking, constructivism, as a theory that presents the human being as active in the process of cognitive development, does not attribute the role of facilitator to the teacher; quite on the contrary, the teacher must actively participate in student learning through challenging the student and promoting critical thinking and mediation. Biesta's criticism is consistent with Meirieu (1995: 1), who commented in the 1990s that: 'We witness strangely to an act of "refounding" the professional identity of teachers because we turn to "fundamental learning" and the prioritization of the disciplinary contents, with the detriment of the whole pedagogical dimension of the profession' (our translation).

Educational processes are broader than merely facilitating because they involve both learning and teaching. They are also greater than the particular needs of the individual. Learning, although it may seem to be something pertaining only to the individual is, however, greatly influenced by external sources. It is logically impossible to conceive of the learner as being solely responsible for his/her own learning. The role of the teacher in the process of formal education is unquestionable, since he/she has mastered the daily planning of educational practices and has accumulated knowledge that the students do not possess. So, learning within the formal education context is, for the most part, learning

something, for some purpose, from someone, be it from the teacher or from peers. Thus, Biesta (2012a: 36) says:

The quickest way to express what is at stake here is to say that the point of education is never that children or students learn, but that they learn *something*, that they learn this for particular *purposes*, and that they learn this from *someone*.

Biesta is critical of the terms ‘learning’ and ‘learner’, preferring the terms ‘education’ and ‘student’. This is because the author understands that the field of education has undergone a paradigm shift, in the Kuhnian sense, from the paradigm of instruction to the paradigm of learning (Barr and Tagg, 1995; Biesta, 2012a). However, what is being said is that the instruction paradigm was focused on the transmission of teacher content to the student, and that in the learning paradigm there is a focus on how the teacher can help the student learn. Biesta (2013b) comments that in the learning paradigm, the idea is that the teacher facilitates the students’ learning based on their interests. This latter conception is insufficient for explaining a process as complex as the educational one – in which both the student and the teacher participate actively – as well as the idea of facilitating learning. The role of the teacher is much greater, in that it engages, critically analyzes and organizes the learning process. This is the opposite of the idea that the teacher solely passes content through the action of teaching and through directive practices and is equally insufficient. The paradigmatic change did not happen by chance, and is mainly due to the demise of a type of education that was based on authoritarianism, on an understanding that the teacher is the absolute authority and has all knowledge in the classroom, and on a view of the student as an empty receptacle. Such a view was criticized by several authors (Becker, 2001; Freire, 2005).

Biesta (2013b) understands that this paradigmatic change is also due to the development of constructivist theories in the field of psychology that have gradually eroded the role of the teacher, giving greater importance to the activities of students, activities that are commonly called ‘learning’. As has already been said, in our view, his criticism applies to a misuse and superficial understanding of these theories in the field of education. The criticisms raised by Biesta in his writings do not necessarily apply directly to the theories, but to their application in the field of education.

César Coll (1990), one of the great scholars of constructivism in the classroom, justifies our understanding and also points out that there is mistrust and a feeling of fatigue in relation to constructivism. This situation is not due to the fact that constructivism is not considered to be a valid theoretical framework of reference, but rather to the diversity of approaches and proposals that define themselves as constructivist, making it a kind of ‘wildcard’, into which almost everything fits. Thus, we believe it should be made clear that there is a difference between the constructivist theory and the different methodologies which claim to use it. We know reality through models that we construct to explain it, and these will always be susceptible to improvement or modification. Therefore, in the constructivist theory, knowledge derives from the interaction of the subject with the other and with the world in general. As Meirieu (2011: 10) comments: ‘all children need to study, but the fundamental thing is not to learn, but to study together in school’ (our translation).

The perception of the teacher as a facilitator, so criticized by Biesta (2004, 2006, 2010, 2012a, 2013b) and by valid constructivist theory, is not philosophically new, since it is present in Plato’s writings. For example, in the *Theaetetus* dialog, Socrates comments that his role is similar to that of a midwife:

Theaetetus: I do not know what to say, Socrates, for, indeed, I cannot make out whether you are giving your own opinion or only wanting to draw me out.

Socrates: You forget, my friend, that I neither know, nor profess to know, anything of these matters; you are the person who is in labour, I am the barren midwife; and this is why I soothe you, and offer you one good thing after another, that you may taste them. And I hope that I may at last help to bring your own opinion into the light of day; when this has been accomplished, then we will determine whether what you have brought forth is only a wind-egg or a real and genuine birth. Therefore, keep up your spirits, and answer like a man what you think.¹

Todd (2003: 23, cited in Biesta, 2012a: 41) comments that Socrates, as a facilitator and midwife, resembles the perfect killer because he ‘makes it appear that teaching has not taken place, who leaves the scene without a trace, and who, moreover, is convinced of his own innocence’. Thus, to suggest that the teacher is not an important element and is only there to help the student to attain his/her knowledge, is a misrepresentation of what actually occurs, and diminishes the importance of the teacher’s role in the education process. Such diminishment illustrates Biesta’s concern about this educational phenomenon in his writings. Thus, we defend the importance of the role of the teacher, insofar as his/her pedagogical work allows for experiences in which the student can learn with others, either by interacting with the teacher or with classmates. In the contemporary context, pedagogical practices that allow for an inflated view of teacher competence through authoritarianism and hierarchical structures are not welcome. Both teachers and students, being partners in education, go through a process of cognitive development where their roles are fundamental, as is that of the environment to which they belong. The construction of knowledge is a subject that has been much discussed and researched in recent times, and several explanations have been given by specialists in the field (Bruner, 1991; Vygotsky, 1995).

In this respect, and as we have mentioned before, valid constructivism does not portray the teacher as a facilitator. This can be demonstrated convincingly by referring to the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky and Bruner, which considers that the individual learns in the condition of a social being. Through education, the subject receives models and cognitive supports that help him acquire certain knowledge. Viewed from this perspective, the teaching and learning process uses an instrument that plays a fundamental role: language. It has two functions, one communicative and the other cognitive: communicative, because, through language, those who teach and those who learn exchange their thoughts; cognitive, because it is the vehicle through which the child internalizes the concepts of his/her culture. This theoretical model is important insofar as it gives a central role to the social aspects of learning (Lacasa, 1994). Following on from this, to understand the individual aspects of the construction of knowledge, it is fundamental to understand the social relations in which the individual develops. Vygotsky considers that the transition from the social to the individual implies a transformation. To explain this process of change he elaborated the concepts of ‘Internalization’, ‘Zone of Proximal Development’ (ZPD) and mediation of the ‘More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)’ (Vygotsky, 1995).

César Coll (1990), the great theoretician of constructivism previously mentioned, helps us to understand the process of teaching and learning from the perspective of sociocultural theory. He states that the constructivist concept is organized around three fundamental ideas. The first is that the student is ultimately responsible for his/her own learning process. It is he/she who builds his/her knowledge and no one can replace him/her in this task. The teaching is fully mediated by the constructive mental activity of the student. The second idea refers to content, which has a degree of social construction. Educational

knowledge is practically pre-existent: students internalize, construct or reconstruct objects of knowledge that have already been socially elaborated. The third idea is related to the previous one: since the objects are pre-existing and accepted as cultural knowledge this changes the role of the teacher. The teacher's function cannot be limited solely to creating the optimal conditions for the student to realize his/her own individual rich and diverse mental construction. The teacher, as the MKO, should manage and guide the students' activities so that their developing comprehension progressively understands the meanings and representations of the culture. This guidance occurs through the ZPD, establishing what the student already knows, and what can be learned with the help of the MKO.

In addition, we pointed out that the teaching and learning process should be seen as a shared venture between the teacher and the student. Both, along with pertinent content, are responsible for the process. This does not mean that there is perfect symmetry between them – in the educational interaction – as the teacher and the student play different roles, even if they are to be understood as equally essential and totally interconnected. In this sense, we consider that the teacher helps his/her student in his/her learning process at the same time as the student also participates in the teacher's learning process. There is an exchange of knowledge because the student, as well as the teacher, can be the MKO in certain topics, in aspects of professional life and in personal life history, as opportunities arise. Thus, it is evident that the teacher's role in constructivism is fundamental and that what has occurred in the educational field – this view of the facilitating teacher – is highly criticized by Biesta, and is, in fact, a distortion of theory.

Also, Biesta (2010, 2013c) points out another development that has had a significant impact on the teaching profession: the emergence of a management culture and the use of evaluation and measurements in educational practice, for instance, the detailed lesson plan with strategies and outcomes. However, teacher 'efficacy' in planning is not a sufficient criterion to serve as a basis for teacher education and for the teaching and learning process. The obvious reason for this is that results are not always predictable, that is, as Biesta says, education involves a 'risk', an unpredictability that cannot be measured. Biesta (2013c: 2) comments that

the desire to make education strong, secure, predictable and risk-free is an attempt to forget that at the end of the day education should aim at making itself dispensable – no teacher wants their students to remain eternal students – which means education *necessarily* needs to have an orientation toward the freedom and independence of those being educated.

The purpose of education is to enable autonomy and individual critical thinking, and the teacher is fundamental in this process. Thus, this culture of management and measurement has a significant impact on the teacher because he/she is submitted to, as Ball (2003: 220) says:

The teacher, researcher, academic are subject to a myriad of judgements, measures, comparisons and targets. Information is collected continuously, recorded and published often in the form of League Tables, and performance is also monitored on an ongoing basis by peer reviews, site visits and inspections. Within all this, there is a high degree of uncertainty and instability. A sense of being constantly judged in different ways, by different means, according to different criteria, through different agents and agencies. There is a flow of changing demands, expectations and indicators that makes one continually accountable and constantly recorded. We become ontologically insecure: unsure whether we are doing enough, doing the right thing, doing as much as others, or as well as others, constantly looking to improve, to be better, to be excellent. And yet it is not always very clear what is expected.

There are many documents dealing with teacher education in the European Union, for example the OECD's PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) and the document *Initial Teacher Education in Europe: An Overview of Policy Issues* (European Commission, 2014), which consider education of teachers to be essential and the use of learning assessments as important elements in the current context. However, Biesta (2012b) sees all the tests and quantitative assessments that permeate school life from a negative point of view, because they indicate a system with too much emphasis on control that does not necessarily measure the quality of teachers. Such is the problem with external and instrumental evaluations that insist on schools measuring teacher effectiveness by simply doing what certain documents suggest should be done. This approach denies autonomy and merely follows inflexible directives, which contradicts the idea of the critical teacher put forward by theorists such as Biesta, Nóvoa, Behrens and Gur-Ze'ev, as already noted. Biesta (2012b) understands that the focus on teacher performance is also directly connected to the influence of constructivist psychology on education, an understanding contradictory to our conception because it is based on the misinterpretation of the theory. Richardson (2003: 1627) comments that 'the creation of environments, activities and educational methods based on the constructivist learning theory aims to develop students' personal interests in topics of their interests as well as their mental abilities for future learning'.

This line of thought demonstrates how the language of learning, especially that based on a misunderstanding of constructivism, has repositioned the role of the teacher as someone who was at the center of the educational process because he/she had something to teach, to one who lies on the margins, merely facilitating learning. Of course, as we have already pointed out, the discourse on learning emerged from the need to question authoritarian forms of education but, in the process, the important role of the teacher was neglected (Biesta, 2012a). There is some irony in moving away from one form of authoritarianism (the old form of educational practice) only to replace it with a different kind, albeit one arising from the best of intentions. The teacher changes from someone who assists in the formation of character and the 'citizen', who has knowledge to be taught to a new generation, to a person who merely facilitates the learning process of the student, being constantly evaluated in the matter of how satisfied the student is. Regrettably, this creates an immediacy in education, making teachers hostage to student assessments, and fosters a culture of entertainment where the teacher has to produce a 'show' with each class. This creates a great deal of pressure on teachers, especially as Ball (2003) has noted that the parameters are never fixed or clear but constantly changing. It is paramount that teacher education instills certain competencies in the teacher if he/she is to manage these situations.

Biesta (2013a, 2013c, 2005) is clear and precise when he states that we need to engage explicitly with the purpose of education. In his studies, he has referred to this as a positive issue for education in order to emphasize that when we do not engage critically with the learning processes, we are unable to distinguish what is educationally desirable. It highlights the need for a new language and a differentiated relationship for education that would be based on and grounded in looking at people as unique beings. Of course, for both the author and our interpretation of education, cognition – knowledge – is only a way of relating to the world and not necessarily the most important or liberating way in which this can be done, either. Today, the most important question is how we can each respond responsibly to the other. Education must be understood as the result of a combination of different trends, developments and

relationships that are partially contradictory. There is the need for a *transcendent education*, and the emergence of a society that is aware of it. Biesta (2013c: 46) comments:

The question I wish to address is what it might take to give teaching a place again in our understanding of education, that is to give teaching ‘back’ to education. And the thesis I wish to explore is whether it might be that case that the idea of teaching only has meaning if it carries with it a certain idea of ‘transcendence’, that is, if we understand teaching as something that comes radically from the outside, as something that transcends the self of the ‘learner’, transcends the one who is being taught.

Thus, Biesta broadens the concept of competence. We should not understand ‘competence’ in a reductionist sense of the word. Biesta questions the way it is interpreted by policy makers, because there is no discussion about ‘the competencies’. It is necessary to reject this lack of discussion and keep an open mind that allows for the possibility of thinking differently about education and what teachers should be able to do. Teachers should, at the very least, distance themselves from actions or practices that do not permit reflection in education. In the same way, the author criticizes the document *Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications*, because it deals with the competencies that teachers should have but, again, underestimates the autonomy that should be seen as inherent in a teaching role.

The author makes important points, which offer a more innovative approach to education and teachers’ lifelong learning. The first point is the multidimensionality of education as an objective; this is precisely what makes education interesting. Second, it is important to have a critical attitude to teaching practice itself. Thus, Biesta suggests that engagement with the question of the purpose of education requires a dialog between three domains: qualification, socialization and subjectification.

For Biesta (2013a), qualification is the process by which people become qualified to do something, that is, they have the competence to perform a certain activity or function. It is a domain restricted to the acquisition of the knowledge and skills necessary for an individual’s extensive and successful personal and professional development. Directly related to the concept of qualification, there is socialization, since this is concerned with presenting knowledge about the world and the interrelations between people. In the educational process, this would be represented by the teacher’s role with his/her students. The teacher is, in one way or another, representing and presenting the world to the student, placing him/herself within a particular tradition but, at the same time, not limiting him/herself to the reproduction of a particular social tradition in the students. For this reason, the author lays great emphasis on the concept of subjectification. This third domain, subjectification, is essential for broadening the perception of the human being in his/her individuality. Biesta stresses that education must have as its goal the interconnections between people and the person him/herself. He is emphatic in asserting that the individual is unique and singular and must be educated not only to become autonomous, but also to be a subject of action and responsibility. People should be viewed as having individual characteristics, but at the same time they need to be aware that they are part of a world, of a global collective.

In this way, we need a form of teacher education that is not evidence-oriented, not even in the sense of competence, but one that promotes educational wisdom and which takes into account the creative processes that are open to the future. In order for these three domains, mentioned above, to take root and flourish, it is fundamental that educational practices are

not restricted to merely the misconceived constructionist view of learning but, rather, that they are viewed as an educational relationship permeated by constant challenges, in which people reflect critically on their role in the world.

In the article entitled *The Role of Educational Ideals in Teachers' Professional Work*, Biesta (2005) reports on the experience of a project developed with teachers. He explains that the aim of this project was to help teachers gain a better understanding of the ways in which educational ideals can function in their daily practice, so that they may be more able to use those ideals in a more thoughtful and deliberate way. Educational ideals go beyond learning: they are part of what teachers do and think, and guide teachers' actions. It is extremely important to emphasize that all teachers were considered to be the most important aspect of the whole process, being given the time to reflect on their work in a systematic way and, even more importantly, being able to do so in an academic dialog with other teachers. This project demonstrates the importance of the already mentioned competencies defended by Biesta: qualification, socialization and subjectification.

Biesta (2013b) resists the 'common misconception', based on a misinterpretation of constructivism applied to teaching, that the teacher is the one who has nothing to give, who is only there to extract what is internalized by the student and to facilitate students' learning, instead putting forward the view that the teacher should allow different experiences and in so doing mediate the process of teaching and learning. We must do away with the perception that the learning process should be as smooth and enjoyable as possible, and likewise that it should not ask difficult questions or explore difficult subject matter.

This is a story where teachers are not disposable and dispensable resources for learning, but where they have something to give, where they do not shy away from difficult questions and inconvenient truths, and where they work actively and consistently on the distinction between what is desired and what is desirable, so as to explore what it is that should have authority in our lives (Biesta, 2013b: 459).

Based on such assumptions, we acknowledge the common belief that the role of the teacher is fundamental in the education of students (that is not to say students' learning); however, we consider this to be as a result of the teacher being the educational professional. His/her influence goes beyond both the classroom and the school environment. Teachers' lifelong learning helps to promote spaces for reconstruction and reflection that contribute to the progress and autonomy of students to 'come to the world' as well as gain an appreciation of their responsibilities to their immediate social setting and to society in general. To come into the world means to enter into the social fabric and this, therefore, must be entirely relational. It consists of responding to the other and thus also being responsible for what and who the other is.

Conclusion

In revisiting lifelong learning from the view of Gert Biesta our motivation was to seek and understand the concepts that permeate the activities of teachers, concepts formed by the notion of learning as strictly synthetic and disconnected from the subject, the pupil, and the world in which he/she lives. We believe that one of the main challenges facing education is allowing teachers to give students the opportunity to get to know the world, acting and interacting in a dynamic and committed fashion.

Perhaps some of the great challenges in teaching are: to boost students' confidence and encourage them to lead and to be autonomous and creative; to open spaces that allow students' voices to be heard; to understand students' needs; to understand students' worldviews; and to have the resources to provide an education that meets students' demands, respecting the complex needs of the individual and working in partnership for the formation of a fully rounded person.

Faced with a world driven by capitalist consumption, and by the constant standardization of everyone and everything, it is imperative that we break with the linear and individualistic logic of the teaching and learning processes to which we are accustomed. The teacher must contribute to the character formation and socialization of the individual, so that he/she recognizes him/herself as unique in the world, but at the same time, knows his/her responsibilities within the environment in which he/she lives. It is not enough to adapt to the curricular parameters required by legislation, but it is essential that the teaching profession encourages inquiry and discussion, and can constantly re-evaluate and reconstruct that which constitutes knowledge.

Biesta (2013a) states that teachers should be careful not to say what the world is, but should encourage students to confront and relate uniquely to it. In this way, teachers need to be prepared to adopt a broader and more sensitive view of education, understanding the human being in its complex completeness and be able to welcome and know how to live with uncertainties as a conceptual, attitudinal and procedural presupposition of the educational process.

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1. Plato's *Theaetetus* is available online at <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/theatu.html> (accessed 12 January 2016).

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