

European Intellectual Platform for Professionals in the Field of Typhology: a challenge/proposal

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Abstract

The creation of the “European Intellectual Platform for Professionals, with a view to Sharing Theoretical and Practical Knowledge in the Field of Visual Impairment and Related Areas” (we believe this will be essentially professionals in the field of typhology) will make a promising inclusive reticular means, on the online socio-communicational dimension, to exchange information and experiences about the unquestionable personal and social, as well as professional, capabilities and consequent employability of blind and visually-impaired people. Our paper involves a challenge, or rather a proposal, in which we express all our academic and scientific interest in sharing widely in the CONVIDA network and in the Enviter European Network on that Platform, in the field of Communication and Education Sciences (from an educommunicational perspective), research and results in the graduation areas of Alternative Communication and Support Technologies, advanced research and specialized training in Inclusive Communication in the Special Education of Blind and Visually-Impaired Students, in the Inclusive Communication in Early Intervention in Childhood, in Cultural Communication and Mediation for All, including the exchange of in-depth issues leading to full access and usability of online social media by blind and visually-impaired people.

The School of Communication, Architecture, Arts and Information Technologies (ECATI) of Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias (ULHT) is a pioneer in Portugal and in Europe in the research and development of in-depth issues in augmentative and alternative communication and support technologies, having created a Master degree in Alternative Communication and Support Technologies in 2005. This degree has been in operation since then, and from its genesis research and development areas have been arising, namely “inclusive educommunication and culture”, and “typhloperceptibility and multisensory supplementarity”, “communication and social interaction of and with blind and visually-impaired, deaf, deafblind people, people with multi-disabilities, with autism/global developmental delay, with neurogenic communicational pathologies”, “interpersonal communication and inclusive social interaction: face-to-face and online networked”, “communicational ecology and inclusion”, “literacy and technological communication, special languages and personal learning environments”, the issue “of the empirical/multisensory to the abstraction and conceptualization – essentially in blindness, deafblindness and deafness”, the “communicational universalization of accessible digital content”, the “foundations of the early intervention and communication theories in the issues of disability in general”, the

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“communicational didactics and sensory-cognitive development”, the “strategic methodologies to assess and develop communicational competencies”, the “semiotics of alternative languages: glossary and thematic dictionaries for the different communicational problems”.

Keywords: Typhlo-perceptibility and inclusion; Multisensory supplementarity; Educability and culture; Sociocommunicability; Communicational pedagogy; Communicational ecology.

Resumo

A criação da “Plataforma Intelectual Europeia para Profissionais, no sentido da Partilha de Conhecimento Teórico e Prático no Campo da Deficiência Visual e Áreas Relacionadas” (pensamos que se trate essencialmente de profissionais na área da tiflogia) constituirá um promissor meio reticular inclusivo, na dimensão sociocomunicacional online, para a troca de informações e experiências sobre as inquestionáveis capacidades e competências pessoais e sociais, profissionais e consequente empregabilidade das pessoas cegas e com baixa visão. A nossa comunicação envolve um desafio, ou uma proposta, em que manifestamos todo o interesse académico e científico em partilhar com todos na Rede CONVIDA e na Rede Europeia Enviter nessa Plataforma, nas áreas das Ciências da Comunicação e da Educação (numa perspetiva educacional), investigação e resultados nos domínios da graduação em Comunicação Alternativa e Tecnologias de Apoio, da investigação avançada e formação especializada em Comunicação Inclusiva na Educação Especial de Alunos Cegos e com Baixa Visão, na Comunicação Inclusiva em Intervenção Precoce na Infância, na Comunicação e Mediação Cultural para Todos, incluindo a permuta de questões aprofundadas conducentes à plena acessibilidade e usabilidade nas redes sociais online, por parte das pessoas cegas e com baixa visão.

A Escola de Comunicação, Arquitetura, Artes e Tecnologias da Informação (ECATI) da Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias (ULHT) é pioneira em Portugal e na Europa na investigação e desenvolvimento das questões aprofundadas da comunicação aumentativa, alternativa e tecnologias de apoio, tendo criado em 2005 um Mestrado em Comunicação Alternativa e Tecnologias de Apoio e tendo-o em funcionamento desde essa data, em cuja génese têm vindo a nascer áreas de investigação e desenvolvimento, designadamente a “educação e cultura inclusivas”, a “tifloperceptibilidade e suplência multissensorial”, a “comunicação e interação social de e com pessoas cegas e com baixa visão, surdas, surdocegas, com multideficiência, com autismo/atraso global do desenvolvimento, com patologias neurogénicas da comunicação”, a “comunicação interpessoal e interação social inclusiva: em presença e em rede online”, a “ecologia comunicacional e inclusão”, a “comunicação literária e tecnológica, linguagens especiais e ambientes pessoais de aprendizagem”, a questão “do empírico/multissensorial à abstração e conceptualização - essencialmente na cegueira, surdocegueira e surdez”, a “universalização comunicacional de conteúdos digitais acessíveis”, os “fundamentos das teorias de intervenção precoce e comunicacionais nas problemáticas da deficiência em geral”, a “didática comunicacional e desenvolvimento sensoriocognitivo”, as “metodologias estratégicas para aferição e desenvolvimento das competências comunicativas”, a “semiótica das linguagens alternativas: glossários e dicionários temáticos para as diferentes problemáticas comunicacionais”.

Palavras-chave: Tifloperceptibilidade e inclusão; Suplência multissensorial; Educabilidade e cultura; Sociocomunicabilidade; Pedagogia comunicacional; Ecologia comunicacional.

Foreword to our “challenge/proposal”

The scientific area of the Master in Alternative Communication and Support Technologies (the only European 2nd Cycle intervening in the field) and the inherent polynomial expression in advanced research and development “*Educommunication-Accessibility-Relation-Interaction-Inclusion/online-Quality of Life of blind and visually-impaired students, teachers and researchers*” pursue, in Portugal, a unique educommunicational, pedagogic and cultural purpose, already with a scientific significance of undeniable relevance. Therefore, we believe it also deserves a paper in the Enviter Network, so as to further broaden and internationalize this exchange with a view to increasingly and jointly furthering and disseminating the results of this pioneering undertaken by ECATI at ULHT, which should be enriched by everyone’s increasingly broader research contribution, extensive to the scientific community that handles in-depth issues of typhology and inclusion. This is the reason we aim to present and share this, to our mind innovative, approach to the Annual Conference of the Enviter Network (in November 2015 under the theme “Network and New Technologies”), within the scope of the Annual Meeting of its Members, with the purpose of creating an “Intellectual Platform for Professionals”, aimed at “sharing theoretical and practical knowledge in the field of visual impairment and related areas, focusing especially on innovative methodologies, practices and tools”, this representing a networked typhological and socio-intellectual added value that was lacking. Its specialization and innovation has opened up a new online networked socio-communicational space which can greatly contribute to the employability and quality of life of European blind and visually-impaired people.

Grounding our contribution as integration and sharing “challenge/proposal” on the Platform in question, we are well aware that “communicating is like breathing. No one can live without breathing and without communicating, whatever the manner and type; with it we all relate to and interact with one another, we develop and humanize, carrying out a professional activity and helping to build, humanize and make a more ethical world of life for all.” (Guerreiro, Augusto Deodato, 2015: 10 June).

We are fruitfully working on an inclusive scientific space, where educommunication, communicational pedagogy, culture and sharing are called upon to fulfil a role open to researchers, also in the field of typhlology, and to citizens with limiting or conditioning issues of various kinds, namely sensory, socio-cognitive, neuro-motor, socio-communicational, relationship- and interaction-related, of orientation and mobility, autonomy and independence, with particular focus on blind and visually-impaired people. So that these purposes may develop and be achieved, we are studying and furthering in laboratory and in the preparation of dissertations and advanced research and development projects, and developing in this Study Cycle and in collaboration with other national and foreign related scientific areas:

- a) The complex communicational and socio-communicational issues of students (children, youth, adults and the elderly) with sensorial and sensorial-cognitive problems, neuromotor problems, neurogenic communication pathologies and others, based on strategic methodologies for early and lifelong intervention, which make reciprocate communication possible using augmentative and alternative communication, support technologies and complementary human means of communication, aiming at the progressive and natural instauration of educommunication and training, of cultural communication and mediation for all, of inclusive employability and culture, encompassing blind and visually-impaired people;
- b) The development of personal and social competencies (of the target population and those they work with, with a goal of reciprocity in relation and interaction), at the biopsychosocial and human level of the said population, through the application of inclusive theories and good practices, within the socio-communicational and educational scope, and along a dimension of relational and interactive equity, and equal opportunities in their process of teaching-learning and the desirable accessibility and usability in the different contexts of living;
- c) Processes of adjusting and adapting the different urban spaces, public and private services and facilities, and the different online

social media (from an inclusive perspective of communicational ecology) to those with mobility and orientation impairment, or that cannot normally walk, see and/or hear, speak, write or read.

We have emphasized communicational typologies, such as the Portuguese sign language and its application to the different fields of knowledge; alternative writing on the palm of the hand; pictographic communication; self-description; braille (including the computerized version) applied to Portuguese and other languages, as well as to the different scientific scripts; communication in digital inclusion; augmentative and alternative communication in the different areas of disability (blindness, deafness, deafblindness and syndromes that inhibit communication systems that prevent the use of the oral language), as well as Courses and research fields like:

- The Post-graduation Courses of Specialized Training in “Inclusive Communication in the Special Education of Blind and Visually-Impaired Students”, “Inclusive Communication in Early Childhood Intervention”, “Cultural Communication and Mediation for All”, including the exchange of in-depth questions leading to full accessibility and usability of the online social media by blind and visually-impaired people.
- “Communication and social interaction by and with blind and visually-impaired, deaf, deaf-blind people, people with various disabilities, with autism/global developmental delay, with neurogenic communication pathologies”.
- “Interpersonal Communication and inclusive social interaction: face-to-face and on online network”.
- “Communicational ecology and inclusion”.
- “Literacy and technological communication, special languages and personal learning environments”.
- “From the empirical/multisensory to abstraction and conceptualization – essentially in blindness, deafblindness and deafness”.

- “Communicational universalization of accessible digital content”.
- “Foundations of early intervention and communication theories in the issues of disability in general”.
- “Communicational didactics and sensory-cognitive development”.
- “Strategic methodologies to assess and develop communication competencies”.
- “Semiotics of alternative languages: Glossaries and Thematic Dictionaries for the different communication problems”.

Besides the different communicational and educommunication-specificities which are emerging in this scientific field, we place special furthering to the typhological-perceptual development and multisensory supplementarity, with a strong emphasis on the issues of inclusive educommunication in early childhood and lifelong intervention in blindness, on literacy and socio-cognitive development at various levels, on orientation and mobility, on autonomy and independence, on employability and quality of life. In this scientific field, there are eyes that see and hears that listen... hands that speak... hands that also see... There is here an infinite body and cultural expressiveness, living communicational process that enables relationship and interaction, the understanding between the different citizens, establishing to this end the necessary mutual understanding. In this sense, we also use “visual-motor, or hand-visual, communication as production of a natural language through a three-dimensional space where the configuration of the hands, the movement of the body, the facial expression, the placement and orientation of the hands are the basic phonological parameters, the hand and the body being what describes everything surrounding us, everything we see, feel, think and convey” (Guerreiro, Almada: 2014). In the same manner as bilingualism and biculturalism, as co-evolutionary binomial which, consciously and duly trained and practised, will give the deaf community back the natural personal and social competency to deal with conceptuality and with abstraction, in perfect synchrony and

dialogue with the hearing community, including blind people, naturally.

It is in this process of broadening the communicational paradigm that we have been conducting scientific research, which is related with the development of personal and social skills and competencies of blind people, so that they can naturally be seen and accepted in society in equal terms of citizen rights and duties and in equal opportunities as regards access to labour and quality of life (as people who can see), cultivating and refining typhloperceptibility and multisensory supplementarity. «*Typhloperceptibility* is the sensory and cognitive, sensory-intellectual and neuromotor/perceptivemotor skill/competency of the blind person, consubstantiated in the functionality and operability of the *set* of his/her sensory modalities and social competencies, *grounded* in accumulated experience, duly *stimulated* and *developed*, at the same time *integrating* a broad and experienced social-cognitive and interactive/relational development. This translates into the biopsychosocial and human development as well as the development of multisensory supplementarity, advanced perceptibility of all the remaining sensory systems, with exceptional advantage for the blind person's mobility and orientation, independence and autonomy, socio-communicability and interaction, employment, self-concept and self-confidence, self-image and self-esteem, inclusion and quality of life.» (Guerreiro, Augusto Deodato, 2015: 18 May).

In the field of augmentative and alternative communication and support technologies, Portugal is a pioneer in Europe, having officially started on this path in 2005. At present we are making an effort to establish the necessary European telematic communication bridges which may help us internationalize our scientific and graduation studies at B-Learning and E-learning levels. To this end, we seek to eliminate the terrible cyber spatial barriers which continue to proliferate in the network of planetary multimedia networks, so that accessibility and usability can indeed become, without any type of conditioning or obstruction, socio-communicational added value on the Internet for blind and visually-impaired people. Considering the scope of the European Network Enviter, it is particularly interesting for us to mention the typhloperceptual studies and the inherent

multisensory supplementarity, where we have been conducting research, as well as disseminating and also sharing with the CONVIDA Network in Portugal, by organizing various scientific events in our country and abroad, from an educommunicational inclusive, pedagogic and cultural perspective in early and lifelong intervention.

Digital inclusion, inclusion in the various social media, social participation and sharing, equity in human rights and duties, in opportunities and in citizen duties and commitments, relationship and interaction, the communication and socialization of all citizens, regardless of the difficulties of each one of them, is the basic principle of inclusion where our scientific purposes are based, as well as our research and development projects, with special emphasis on the educommunicational and cultural field, the pedagogic area and human training, the professionalization and quality of life of blind and visually-impaired people. It is from this perspective that we have been defending that:

“Specific communication and education issues or specific or special educommunication issues vary according to the extent of the sensory, cognitive, neuromotor deficit or any other deficit we are dealing with.” (Guerreiro, Augusto Deodato, 2015, Madrid, Universidade Complutense: 9 April).

However, “in the field of inclusive communication in early childhood intervention or intervention at any other age level or field of knowledge, we can never feel as the holders of absolute knowledge, because we will always be in a permanent process of learning and socialization, in an educommunicational megapuzzle, a megapuzzle of socio-cognitive and human training which will never be complete. We have to know how to discover and find ourselves in the silences and in sharing knowledge and revolutionary intentions for the transformation of minds, acknowledging the smallness of our supposed greatness, the great strength of our humility and the fertile effects of experience on our frailties, so that we grow aware of the great human values that illuminate us and make us grow increasingly in dignity to awaken consciences and stimulate behaviour towards development and progress, opening the windows of intelligence and heart to all,

eliminating or alleviating one another's disadvantages and shortcomings with our differences and, to that extent, being inexhaustible sources of generosity and courage, of gratitude and abundance for the well-being and quality of life for all, in equal rights and equal opportunities." (Guerreiro, Augusto Deodato, 2015: 18 April).

To conclude and further a little more this conceptual and thinking sense, «we are a megapuzzle which will never be complete, which is constantly being improved, along a path that holds tears, pain, flaws, rocks of various kinds on our paths, constraints, obstacles, also of various types... Tears are the rainbows of the soul, with which we water tolerance, "the greatest religion in the world" (Victor Hugo, 1802-1885), so that it remains lush, like the primroses, but increasingly becoming mutual acceptance. The rocks of various kinds that surprise and hurt us throughout life end up refining our patience, which "is more powerful than force" (Plutarch, 46-120), and nobody grows without difficulties, without blocks in their path. We all grow adapting to the errors that circumstances make us do, but it is from these errors that little by little we carve our serenity, we grow in dignity, having or sharing some kind of difficulty or pain, which can even polish our pleasure. If we do not face obstacles throughout life, the windows of our intelligence and of our dignity will remain locked for ever. Therefore, we need these obstacles so that these windows may open wide, the windows of our intelligence.

So that we can help children, adolescents, youth, adults, senior citizens be happy, we actually need to be able to love and know how to love. Love is a competency that needs to be always unconditionally available to intervene at the smallest warning sign. The more generous we can be as to infusing others around us with happiness, the more grateful we may feel about the life and the beauty we give people's lives as regards training, development, well-being and quality of life.

So we need to sow and nurture generosity and gratitude in ourselves, because as we manage to do this, in this case from a human and scientific point of view, we also sow and nurture harmony, solidarity and sharing, naturally involving us and connecting us in this mutual

process of promoting well-being, transforming generosity and gratitude into an inexhaustible source of social participation, solidarity, sharing and abundance.” (Guerreiro, Augusto Deodato, 2015: Lisbon, ULHT, 18 April).

From the crib, we assimilate and use concepts, through training and learning, social interaction, theorization and pure reasoning. “The course and effect of concepts is like the growing pressure of the large flow of a river exerted on its banks, making them naturally give way, enlarging and consequently gaining and filling with its waters more and more empty and thirsty spaces.” (Guerreiro, Augusto Deodato, 2014, Feijó: 22 August)..

It is our conviction that, in order for blind and visually-impaired people to be able to feel more effectively they have the full right to citizenship, in a dimension of equity and equal opportunities regarding access to information and socialization also through the different social media, in employment and life in society:

- it is crucial to raise the awareness of families, professionals and researchers, institutions, the media, the State and civil society about the crucial importance of the inclusive process of the development of multisensory, socio-cognitive, relationship and interaction supplementarity of children with visual impairment and/or at risk;
- it is crucial to reflect more methodologies and strategies for the use and application of the different specific communication systems and inclusive education and training processes in early intervention;
- it is crucial to further foster the necessary educommunication-al consensus to undertake an increasingly deeper reflection and consequent action and performance in structuring socio-communicational and socio-educational methodologies and strategies for early childhood (and lifelong) intervention, which promote personal and social competencies that foster natural inclusion and quality of life in blind and visually-impaired children (as well

as in adolescents, youth, adults and senior citizens with that sensory deficit) and their respective families, in a society where they all have a place.

It is by communicating that we socialize and evolve, that we become professionals in any field and earn a job to live and help others around us live a sustainable life, that we humanize ourselves and humanize the world for all. The creation of an Intellectual Platform of Professionals in the Field of Typhology will constitute an excellent reticular inclusive process for exchanging information and experiences, especially about the employability of visually-impaired people. It will be an online socio-communicational medium for all – as long as it comes with the specific functional and operational assurance of full accessibility and usability – where knowledge and know-how can be exchanged in presenting, grounding and disseminating the unquestionable skills and competencies, also professional, of blind and visually-impaired people.

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[The 112 issues published in audio cassette and on digital support/CD are available at Gabinete de Referência Cultural – Cultural Reference Office].