

Introductory Note to the Special Issue: Teaching as an Intergenerational Profession: How Generational Diversity Contributes to Teacher Education and Professional Development

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In many parts of the world, the teaching profession is currently facing a growing generational imbalance. Fewer young people are entering the profession, reflecting its declining attractiveness (Thomas Dotta et al., 2025) and, simultaneously, the existing workforce is ageing – for instance, in Portugal 60% of teachers in basic and secondary education are aged 50 or over (CNE, 2025). Despite this expanding demographic gap, many teacher education and professional development models continue to rely on intergenerational learning, particularly in the form of mentoring, induction programmes, and communities of practice (Brücknerová & Novotný, 2017; Wenger, 1998) – reflecting the importance of intergenerational dialogue for teachers' professional growth across all career stages. Indeed, since teaching depends on the continuous articulation of theoretical, pedagogical, practical, and experiential knowledge, professional development should be understood as an ongoing process spanning a teachers' whole career (Gil & Sousa, 2025; Kowalczuk-Walędziak et al., 2022).

Intergenerational dialogue plays a central role in sustaining and renewing this professional knowledge by facilitating knowledge transfer, mutual learning, and collaborative reflection (Lopes & Thomas Dotta, 2024). Such interactions offer novice teachers opportunities for socialisation and professional support from experienced colleagues (Lopes & Sousa, 2024; Lopes, 2009), while enabling experienced teachers to rethink and update their practices through engagement with younger generations. This mutually enriching dynamic means that the fostering of meaningful exchanges between teachers who are at different career stages can have a profoundly positive influence on professional learning and identity construction. However, in reality, in many educational contexts, opportunities for intentional intergenerational interaction remain limited – thus risking the loss of invaluable shared or co-created professional knowledge.

The articles gathered in this special issue of *Revista Lusófona de Educação* contribute to this conversation by exploring how intergenerational dynamics shape professional development, educational practices, leadership, academic literacy, and teacher learning across diverse cultural and institutional contexts. Speaking from distinct educational settings and theoretical traditions, the articles converge to address how educational knowledge is produced, transmitted, negotiated, and transformed through the relationships that form between professionals who have differing trajectories, experiences, and forms of expertise.

As many articles demonstrate, this notion of intergenerationality cannot be reduced to age differences or to simplistic oppositions between experienced and novice professionals (Brücknerová & Novotný, 2017). Rather, intergenerational professional learning is explored as a relational and situated process involving the circulation of experiential knowledge, the ongoing negotiation of professional identities, the co-construction of practices, as well as the transformation of professionals at all career stages.

It is this broader structural level that Filipe Oliveira addresses in his article which conceptualises teaching as an intergenerational profession through an interpretative review of recent European and Portuguese research. The article highlights persistent structural tensions affecting the profession, including the ageing of the teaching workforce, the reduced numbers of new people entering the profession, the declining attractiveness of teaching as a career, and limitations in access to continuing professional development. Rather than approaching these as isolated problems, the study argues for understanding the teaching profession as an intergenerational epistemological community in which professional knowledge is collectively and ethically constructed – arguing that professional development models grounded in intergenerationality, collaboration, and lifelong learning are essential for securing the future of teaching. The article more specifically argues that intergenerational learning can support teachers in addressing sensitive and contested topics in culturally diverse

classrooms, by enabling the development of historical literacy, ethical positioning, and pedagogical strategies across professional generations.

Ana Arcadinho, Mónica Prates and Assunção Folque focus on the newest generation within the teaching profession, analysing the contributions of intergenerational dialogues to the construction of teacher professionalism among pre-service teachers. Based on narrative accounts emerging from interviews and interactions with experienced early childhood educators and primary school teachers, their study demonstrates how contact with professional life histories develops pre-service teachers' professional identities, reflective capacities, and emotional understandings of teaching. The article highlights the formative value of professional narratives – that is teachers' or teacher educators' stories about their own development, work, challenges, values, and relationships within the profession – and argues for the inclusion of intergenerational dialogue from the very beginning of teacher education trajectories as a means of fostering a more reflective, relational, and humanised profession.

In the Brazilian context, Luzia Bueno and Eliane Gouvêa Lousada's article analyses the role of dialogue between senior researchers and novice monitor-tutors in academic literacy laboratories. Drawing on sociodiscursive interactionism and the Clinic of Activity model, the authors examine how interviews with experienced researchers support the professional development of novice monitor-tutors – particularly through the transmission of knowledge to teach and knowledge for teaching, and expansion of participants' power to act. Conceptualising professional learning as a process grounded in interaction, reflection, and the appropriation of other professionals' practices, this article reveals those dimensions of academic writing and research work that are usually not visible, openly discussed, or recognised. Situated in higher education, rather than school-based teacher education, it extends the concept of intergenerational professional learning to the academic sphere.

Bringing this issue's focus into the digital space, Anh Thao Ngo and James Underwood consider questions surrounding professional learning and intergenerational exchange in their article on social media-based communities of practice among Vietnamese ESOL teachers. Situated within the broader context of educational transformation in one of the world's fastest growing economies, this study demonstrates how autonomously created virtual communities facilitate professional knowledge-sharing, networking, emotional support, and identity construction among teachers with different levels of experience. Challenging deficit-oriented views of professional development in hierarchical educational cultures, this article shows that intergenerational exchanges in online spaces can be bidirectional: experienced teachers value the technological knowledge and emerging practices shared by younger colleagues, while novice teachers seek practical and experiential guidance from more experienced professionals.

Ana Rute Martins' article also considers the place of the digital in teacher development: focusing on Portuguese teachers participating in a short professional development course on the attention economy, her article analyses how continuous teacher education can serve as a space for intergenerational exchange on digital literacy and pedagogical practice. The study reveals conceptual progress among participants at all career stages, and highlights how they mobilise different forms of expertise throughout the training process. Experienced teachers contribute understandings of educational change and classroom dynamics gained from long-term practice, while newer teachers introduce them to emerging digital practices and new forms of technological mediation. The article thus illustrates how intergenerational learning not only ensures that the profession remains up-to-date, but also facilitates collective reflection on broader societal transformations affecting schools and families.

Ana Patrícia Almeida, Ana Mouraz, and Irina Borges engage with questions of continuity and institutional sustainability in their article on the potential of intergenerational mentoring for the training of school headteachers in the Portuguese setting. At a time when many long-serving school leaders are approaching the end of their mandates, the authors investigate how accumulated experiential knowledge can be preserved and mobilised during leadership transition processes. The study identifies the potential of relational trust, contextual knowledge, and institutional support as well as key structural constraints – including the absence of a regulatory framework, organisational overload, and the cultural association of school leadership with self-sufficiency – that must be addressed in order for intergenerational mentoring to become institutionally viable rather than dependent on goodwill on the individual level. The article ultimately argues that intergenerational mentoring should not be understood as a unidirectional transfer of experience from those with to those without, but as a reciprocal process that merges experiential wisdom with the emerging competencies of newer generations of school leaders.

Taken together, the articles in this issue demonstrate that intergenerational learning operates across all educational scales and career stages: from initial teacher education programmes to academic literacy laboratories, online professional communities, continuous teacher education initiatives, and leadership succession processes. They also show that intergenerationality intersects with important contemporary educational concerns, including digital transformation, professional identity, educational leadership, academic literacy, emotional well-being, and organisational sustainability. Two of the articles focus on intergenerational learning in the context of initial teacher education and academic formation; three address further stages of teachers' careers, namely continuous professional development, virtual communities, and leadership transitions; and one provides the structural and theoretical framing that underpins them all.

Above all, the contribution of this issue lies in its refusal of simplistic narratives surrounding generational difference. Rather than reproducing falsely binary oppositions between digital ‘natives’ and ‘immigrants’, or between an innovative younger generation and established older generation, the articles here reveal the complexity, reciprocity, and situated character of teachers’ professional learning. Experience is posited neither as an unchallengeable authority nor as obsolete knowledge, but as a rich and dynamic resource continuously reinterpreted and extended through interaction with new and emerging professional, technological, and institutional realities.

At an institutional level, this thematic issue invites reconsideration of how professional development is conceptualised: taken together, the articles prove that for professional learning to meet contemporary needs effectively, it cannot be reduced to the acquisition of new tools, methods, or individual skills. Instead, professional development is posited as a fundamentally relational process, dependent on opportunities for participation, collaboration, recognition, and knowledge circulation across all professional generations. This has significant implications for educational policy and institutional design. If intergenerational learning is to become a meaningful organisational resource, it requires intentional structures capable of supporting intergenerational collaboration, mentoring, dialogue, and collective reflection.

Finally, this issue highlights the importance of recognising intergenerationality not as a peripheral theme, but as a central dimension of educational transformation in contemporary societies. In contexts characterised increasingly by demographic ageing, technological acceleration, and institutional uncertainty, the capacity to foster both continuity and renewal is critical. The contributions gathered here demonstrate that educational institutions already possess vital and invaluable intergenerational resources for confronting these challenges, that can only be activated and drawn upon when spaces for dialogue, reciprocity, and collaborative professional learning are cultivated. The geographical and cultural diversity of these contributions – spanning Portugal, Brazil, Vietnam, and England – reinforces the expansive relevance of intergenerationality, both as a research topic and as an organisational resource across distinct educational systems and traditions.

We hope this thematic issue contributes meaning and inspiration to ongoing debates around professional development, educational leadership, teacher learning, and academic work – as well as encouraging further reflection and action on the strategic role of intergenerationality for the future of education.

Guest Editors

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