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Veteran Teachers and Challenges of Curriculum Innovation

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Being a teacher is an aging profession in Portugal. According to the OECD 2019 report on teachers, Portugal is the 4th country with the highest average age of teachers. This figure is higher than the average age of Portuguese citizens. The consequences of this for the profession are associated with an increasing generational difference between students and teachers, with the increase in the retirement age. This feeling has also contributed to the feeling of ineffectiveness of curricular work, as it is no longer motivating, nor capable of providing training to deal with uncertainty.

At the same time, since the school year of 2017/18, a curricular reform is running, entitled "Curricular Autonomy and Flexibility Project", which was proposed to schools that wanted it in the first phase, in order for them to make their own the curricular decisions that they considered relevant to ensure the educational success of their students. This means that is required in such project to deal with an innovative perspective about curriculum.

School innovation has become a trend in discourses on educational improvement, coupled with the necessary change in practice to ensure such enhancement (e.g., OECD, 2016). In this context, the desired new practices are seen as a means to address the challenge of preparing students for an unpredictable future.

The relationship between the concept of innovation and information technology is obvious and naturalized. It is not surprising, then, that veteran teachers (Orlando, 2014; Thorburn, 2014; Veldman et al., 2016) are immediately associated to a greater difficulty in accessing information technology, a situation which makes the achievement of the necessary innovation harder. This supports the question that drives present proposal: can ICT be a vehicle for the power of curriculum agency and professional re-enchantment for veteran teachers?

Methodology, Methods, Research Instruments or Sources Used
This communication derives from the development of a research project entitled Rekindle+50 – Digital migrations and curricular innovation: giving new meaning to experience and rekindle teaching profession after 50. It is a 31-month funded project, involving two universities in Portugal, with focus on supporting 50 years old or older teachers (N=40) in developing strategies for curricular innovation through the use of mobile technologies.
Data was collected through interviews, observations, products of training.

Conclusions, Expected Outcomes or Findings
In this communication, we aim to present the preliminary results of the project.

These could be organized in two main axes:

To identify changes in teachers' conceptions regarding fears and myths related to the use of ICT. Concerning these changes we invalidated the idea that veteran teachers are more disenchanted than their younger colleagues. Also it was possible to contradict the thesis that veteran teachers are more info-excluded than their younger colleagues, as well as the one related with students. We have invalidated the myth that students are more info-included than their more veteran teachers.

The second dimension was to map strategies, personal and group, of professional reenchantment and resilience. Concerning these issues, it was possible to validate the importance of collaborative work among peers who rediscover themselves as a factor of resilience, perhaps re-enchantment. Also, it was possible to validate the importance of support coming from school leaders and pedagogical and technical support to the introduction of innovations in professional practices as a factor of commitment to the profession. We found that veteran teachers who master the most proficient technologies, take more risks in the use of other technologies / devices that they do not know, assume this lack of knowledge with students and let students experience these (or other) technologies. Finally, we found a strong relationship between professional enchantment and participation in international projects and mobility.

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