

Importance of teachers in HE reforms: should teachers just teach or inspire?

Prof. Saša Popović

**University of Montenegro
Faculty of Economics**

Introduction

The subject of this analysis is the most fluid constituent of the educational process - the inspiring lecturer. The aim of the analysis is, in brief, to examine the notion, context and significance of an inspiring lecturer in higher education reform. This is a lecturer who surpasses the profile of a good instructor-type lecturer, as well as a lecturer capable of motivating others. The challenge is to point out, in an inspiring way, that the educational process needs good lecturers, who are, at the same time, the initiators of its changes.

Nowadays, many of the unresolved problems are inherited from the past, while, at the same time, the new ones appear. The complexity of the problem grows over time and conquers new areas. The education system should be an avenue through which we face these problems open-mindedly (a scientific method) and with a pure heart (the system of values). Searching for solutions to both types of problems implies a dynamic education system which is future-oriented, encourages creative thinking and has a high potential of transformation. Such an education system could make up for the shortcomings of the traditional education system.

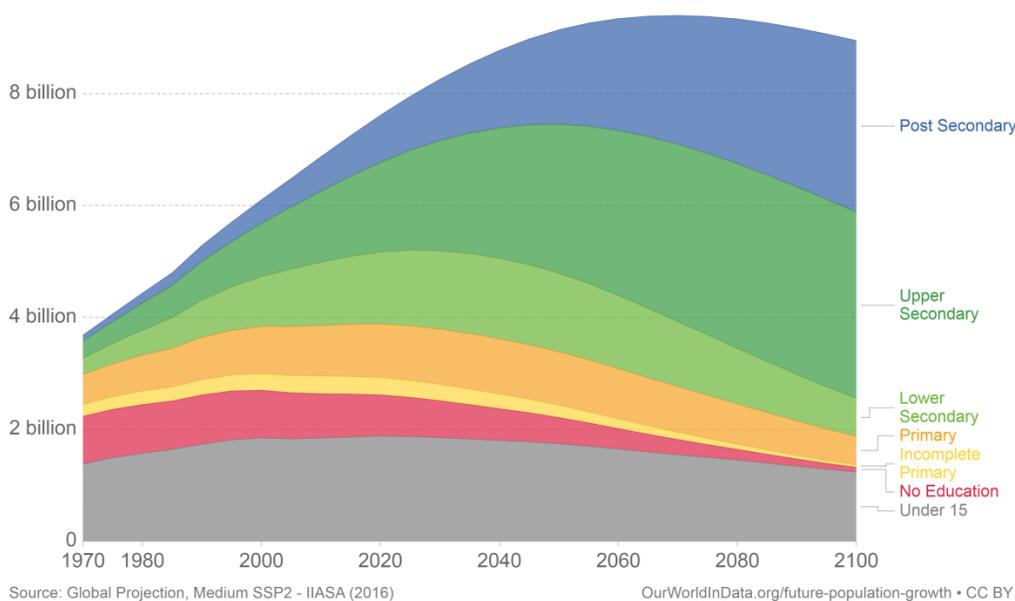
The changes relate to the re-examination of traditional teaching methods, the adoption of contemporary didactic methods and technical support to the educational process, change in the relation between a provider and a user of educational services, their common relation to nature, as well as the "cultivation of human beings" in the context of the improvement of their personal and social well-being. The traditional educational model: read-learn-reproduce, based on an untouchable lecturer, non-critical thinking, limited freedom for personality profiling and a rigid model of assessment, has only deepened the gap between itself and the labor market.

According to various projections, the global community will face a growing demand for education. This is certainly a consequence of the world population growth, their longer life expectancy, changes in the structure of people's needs, increased level of emancipation etc. IIASA (International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis)¹, which, in addition to the United Nations, is the most-cited source of population projections, reveals interesting scenarios in the future movement of the world population, according to the level of education (Graph 1).

¹ International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA): <https://ourworldindata.org/projections-of-future-education> , pristupljeno 25.11.2020

Projected world population by level of education

This visualization shows the Medium projection by the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA). The researchers who created this projection describe it as their "middle of the road scenario that can also be seen as the most likely path".



Graph 1. Projected world population by level of education, IIASA (2016)

Source: <https://ourworldindata.org/projections-of-future-education>

Graph 1 shows that our world will be populated by more and more educated people. The projection shows that the number of poorly-educated people will constantly decline, and that at the end of this century, the overall world population will be educated to some extent. The graph also shows that in 1970, there were about 700 million people in the world who acquired secondary or post-secondary education. It is expected that, at the end of this century, the number of educated people will increase 10 fold, and that there will be about 7 billion educated people.

The right to education has been recognized as part of fundamental human rights². There is a long development path from learning as an existential need, to education as “the most sophisticated social technology of societal change and targeted evolution”³. Learning is no longer a matter of safeguarding physical existence, but a lifelong process which, in a formal or informal way, meets the status, intellectual, spiritual needs and other needs of people.

The UN Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 in the system of sustainable development goals (SDG17) recognized the significance of education for the future development of mankind and defined it within SDG4 *Quality Education*⁴, whose general goal is “ensure inclusive and equitable

² Član 26 Univerzalne deklaracije o ljudskim pravima,

³ Global Education Futures Report: Educational Ecosystem for Societal Transformation, published by Global Education Futures 2018, pg. 2

⁴ <https://sdg4education2030.org/the-goal>, s Analysis (IIASA): <https://ourworldindata.org/projections-of-future-education> ,

quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". Within SDG4, the seven sub-goals have been recognized, of which, for the purposes of this analysis we emphasize sub-goal 4c, which indicates the need to substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing countries⁵.

The world's top higher education institutions (universities, colleges, institutes) have specific visions when it comes to the quality of education. Their common feature is that in their plans and programmes, they have higher expectations of teachers and students, as well as more ambitious educational and research goals, according to changes in the scope and structure of demand for education.

When it comes to supply, the role of teacher in the educational process remains very important, regardless of its changed position in terms of the transition from teacher-centered education to student-centered education. The teacher still gives lectures, i.e. conveys the content of the curriculum, delivers lectures, in order to facilitate the process of understanding the content and applying the lessons learned, and performs an assessment of students (TLA model, TLA - *Teaching, Learning and Assessment*). This formal triangle, i.e. the chain of competencies of a teacher, often dominates the essential thing which I called the "*3i model*": to awaken in students, the intellectual enthusiasm related to the issues examined, to encourage their readiness for finding solutions to the problems and support their perseverance in applying obtained results.

Systemic quantitative and qualitative determinants of the profile of a lecturer often cannot comprise, measure and reward a rare and an extremely significant aspect of a lecturer - the ability to inspire the audience. Su and Wood⁶ (2012) state that great teachers have that extra "something" which they refer to as being immeasurable, whereby "... lists of qualities are inadequate as a method to capture it". The ability of a lecturer, which provides him/her with the highest level of handover of energy and emotions, deep insight into the problem and perception changes, usually remains beyond the norms and is considered a deeply individual trait - charisma.

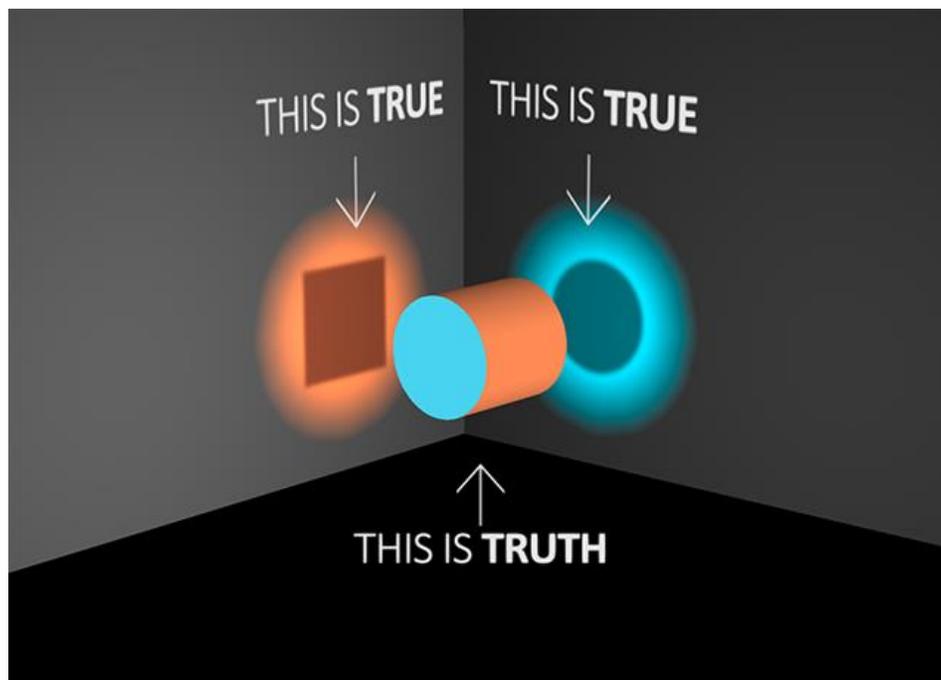
The etymological analysis of the word inspiration leads us to the root *spiritus* in Latin, which means spirit, so that inspiration could be perceived as spiritualization, i.e. a higher level of perception. However, this Latin word has multiple meanings, including *breath, breathing, life*. For example, spirometry is the name for a test used for assessing the capacity and function of lungs. In that sense, inspiration would mean "breathing life using total lung capacity", which leads to the poeticization of this notion. My hypothesis is that the notion of inspiration is more related to this second meaning - breathing, because we say in-spiration (the act of breathing) and not in-spiritation (spiritualization). But let the search for an answer to this semantic hypothesis be an inspiration to some linguistic researcher.

⁵ Target 4.c "By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States."

⁶ Su, F., & Wood, M. (2012). What makes a good university lecturer? Students' perceptions of teaching excellence. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, 4, 142–155.

The essence is in the following - the motive drives the will, and the inspiration drives the creativity. We find motives, and inspiration finds us. The words of Renate Lachmann, uttered in a completely different context, fit perfectly into this consideration: "It is about a definition of actions that betray expectations, recall astonishment and operate for unknown reasons."⁷

The inspiring lecture expands the domain of our understanding of reality. Doubting the facts, revealing paradoxes, expanding the context, creating a metaphor, activating emotion, these are some of the effects of an inspiring approach. Picture 1 shows the cognitive aspect of the inspiring approach, which confirms the previously mentioned: it is possible to tell the truth, and at the same time, not reveal the truth.



Picture 1 – Cognitive aspect of an inspiring approach
Source: *Google Images*

In addition to the previously mentioned, inspiration is very important for successful unlearning previous mistaken assumptions, notions, processes and conclusions. Unlearning is a very important element of learning. The human being learns and unlearns based on his/her life experience. That is why childhood is a happy misunderstanding of the world. The more the educational and intellectual capacities of the human being mature, the more his/her perception of the known world changes. The human being, without doubt, needs the help of a stimulating education system and a creative cultural code.

However, as is stated in the GEF Report, "we cannot teach people to be empathetic and emotionally intelligent by removing emotion and focusing primarily on cognitive abilities"⁸. Both personal and

⁷ Renate Lachmann (2002). *Phantasia - Memoria - Rethorica*. MATica hrvatska, Zagreb, str. 31

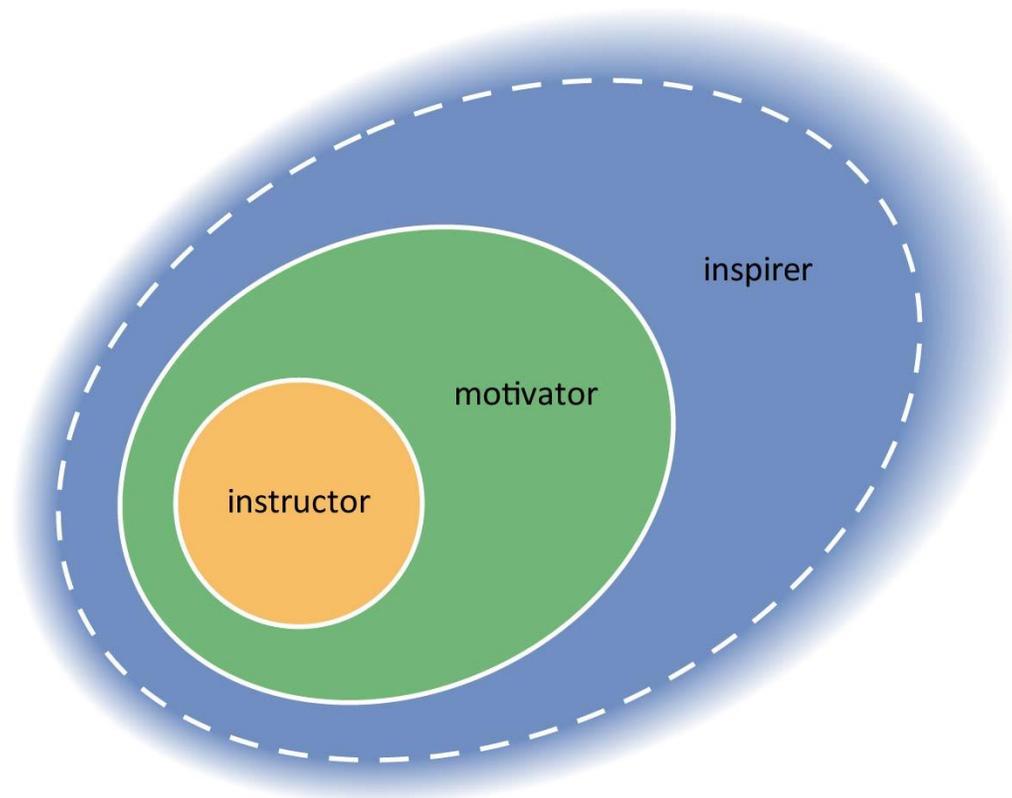
⁸ see the footnote 3), page 16

social transformation imply emotion as an integral part of the educational technology, and it belongs to the high level of involvement of a teacher in the educational process. This means that an inspiring lecturer activates spiritual storms in us. He does not convince us (this is the job done by the instructor), he does not stimulate us (this is done by the motivator), but he awakens us (the inspirer).

According to previous statements, I would like to suggest the following gradation of levels of involvement of a teacher into the educational process:

- basic level - *instructor*: the teacher is a guide to the curriculum; supports the learning process; reproducing knowledge and searching for reproduction of knowledge; his/her participation is mostly monologic;
- high level - *motivator*: the teacher motivates the students to learn and resolve complex problems; expands the basis of scientific sources; initiates teacher-student dialogue; argues the significance of learning; uses assistive technology devices aiming at visualizing the issues examined; argues the significance of learning and its utilitarianism;
- higher level - *inspirer*: teacher gives lectures and unlearns the lessons learned; presents different perceptions of the studied phenomena; reveals the inner potentials of students and helps them use them for personal and social growth and prosperity; encourages a dialogue between students; enriches knowledge with imagination and develops creativity

In order to point out the conditionality of these three levels, we will present them using the following graph:



Picture 2 - Hierarchical levels of involvement of a teacher in the educational process

The graph 2 refers to the conclusion that each level of involvement of a teacher in the educational process includes the other levels too. Thus, an inspiring teacher must satisfy all three levels - he/she must possess a good scientific basis for the talent for knowledge transfer (the basic level), needs to have the capability of discovering motives - external factors which stimulate learning (high level) and the power to change existing notions of the issues examined (higher level). At the highest level, knowledge and imagination merge and we get creation. Creation reveals the inner potentials of students and activates their transformation. Bearing in mind that higher level of involvement of a teacher implies his/her exceptional capability of abstraction, transcendence and spiritualism, by which the deconstruction of familiar knowledge and the construction of new knowledge are done, the last level is marked with a dashed line, in order to alleviate the impression of limitation, when marked with solid lines.

This type of gradation may lead to the conclusion that an inspiring lecturer is primarily focused on revealing new knowledge. However, this is rather the person who helps us cultivate the knowledge. In both the known and the unknown, a new thing can be discovered. "The reader should be surprised by the familiar", Ivo Andrić said.

If the education is more than learning, it should not make education institutions look like penal institutions, where fear of ignorance represents the basis of a teacher's authority. Ignorance is a natural state and a research challenge. You should be brave and love your ignorance because it represents a room to demonstrate a passion for research and self-affirmation? One brave and brilliant thinker went that far in this reflection and he said, "Now I know I don't know anything!".

Various technical possibilities which provide support to the contemporary educational process (web presentation, video lecture, software support) can significantly contribute to transferring a higher level of inspirational effects of a lecturer to students. Still, it all depends on his/her charisma. A person who uses computer slides to transfer a text from the book to the projector canvas makes two mistakes: encourages the unattractiveness of a book (learning from slides) and degrades the enormous power of visual aid.

Finally, a good auditorium inspires an inspiring lecturer. A good auditorium hints at a good lecture. But I do not consider a good auditorium a meeting of academics who know all the answers to the questions. It is rather the auditorium which is ready to discuss, to ask, to doubt, to show a different perception of a certain problem. In that way, a lecturer and students really become co-pilots of a continuous flight of research and knowledge. Because there is nothing more inspiring than a deeper knowledge of the nature of the world. It means that, by the nature of our being, we long to find out more about the wonder of the world. Wonder is, in fact, revealing the undiscovered but also the familiar, in its unlimited contingency.

