

# **Variables which facilitate learning in multiple educational contexts and shape student and teacher's professional development**

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## **Abstract**

Over the last decades studies related to the psychological perspective on education have, in reality, mostly been *about the learning and motivational process*. There have been lots of theories developed which tried to explain how learning is produced, what happens during learning, and how all these results could be translated into learning strategies to improve the process. Also, previous research tried to identify those variables which stimulate learning, how learners explain their success and failure, and what the impact on the further learning behaviours is.

In that context, the necessity to develop models through which we can explain and make predictions on the future students' performance becomes obvious. Moreover, we need to find ways to improve this performance by designing and shaping the educational environment, curricula, strategies, specific instruments, or by developing learning skills (Weinstein & Way, apud Reynolds & Miller, 2003). In other words, all the theoretical constructions should find their utility in instructional and educational practice, because learning is not only about retaining a significant amount of information, but involves the development of the ability to learn, to transfer and to apply a variety of strategies to different contents and contexts. The ability to learn is essential for adaptation (Weinstein & Way, as cited in Reynolds & Miller, 2003).

Through its contents, the habilitation thesis entitled: *Variables which facilitate learning in multiple educational contexts and shape student and teacher's professional development* proposes a coherent analysis of several variables that influence learning. This analysis is highlighted by a presentation of the scientific work from the last fourteen years, since I defended my PhD in Educational Sciences. The thesis begins with a synthesis of the doctoral research, topic which has been shaping my entire career. My scientific and academic study centres on the process of learning from the perspective of two essential actors: student and teacher.

The paper is made up of two main parts: (1) previous scientific and professional work; (2) future directions in research and career development. The first part, with a retrospective character, emphasizes three essential aspects: (a) scientific contributions to streamlining teaching, learning and assessing activities; (b) learning in various educational contexts, with impact on professional development; and (c) contributions to developing specialists in the field of Educational Sciences and Psychology. *The first section* highlights the scientific input for the efficiency of the three main educational activities: teaching and assessment – from the teacher perspective, and learning – from the student perspective. The focus is on the way that these are reflected in the academic achievement of the two actors – academic achievement being considered the result of their development process. The learning process is presented from the perspective of teachers too, but it will take the shape of continuing training and it can be found in the *second section* of the thesis. The *third section* presents the contribution to the training of specialists in the field of Educational Sciences and Psychology.

Highlighting the natural continuity of career development on the basis of previous work, the second part of the paper returns to the major topics explored. This time, however, the approach is more profound and more extended. Thus, the emphasis is on the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment activities and their relationships with academic performance – in order to identify as many as possible variables which determine or influence performance gains. Some of these variables have already been investigated, but now they have been put in relationship with others, to get new insights regarding the inquired topics. Also, improving the professional development of teachers is another subject which has continued to be investigated. The interest goes beyond individual learning and reaches teacher learning communities, because these communities enhance teachers' quality – which is the most critical factor in enhancing student achievement.

To sum up, we can say that my interest was and is focused (previous achievements and future development) on two educational actors: *student and teacher*, and the essential process in which these actors are involved: *learning*. I have been preoccupied with understanding as many as possible variables involved in the academic performance of students and academic achievement of teachers, as a measure of achieving their development objectives. I have been looking for this understanding in the variety of formal and non-formal educational contexts where the actors were involved. Moreover, I have been interested not only in individual learning, but in organizational learning too, which is considered to be more than the sum of the individuals learning. Despite the diversity and multitude of the variables, what I have accomplished is to outline trends and to extract the benefits for educational practice.