



The Transformation of the Teachers' Role at the End of the Twentieth Century: new challenges for the future

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ABSTRACT *The purpose of this paper is to offer a view of social, political and economic changes transforming the meaning and the orientation of the work of teachers in education. Rapid and profound social change has deeply affected our present-day teaching institutions. When our societies have been so profoundly changed we remodel our teaching systems and programs of teachers' training, but the educational reforms were formulated in a new time marked by disenchantment. The change from a system designed to educate an elite to one of mass education not only increased the numbers of teachers and pupils, it also brought perplexing problems related to quality. How to achieve high standards of education in these circumstances is a personal and social challenge that needs much creative thought and determination from teachers. Teaching today is much more difficult than 20 years ago, and presents teachers with new challenges for the future.*

The Transformation from the Former Education of a Small Elite to the Formal Education of Entire Populations

During the last 20 years fast-moving social, political and economic changes have transformed the structure of our societies. A brief review of these changes is sufficient to explain and justify the attempts made over the last few years in all European countries to introduce educational reforms. When our societies have been so obviously and profoundly changed we should remodel our teaching systems to make them flexible and compatible with the new realities (Helsby, 1999).

Education in the last two decades is characterised mainly by the compulsory schooling of all our children in primary schools and by unprecedented pupil populations in secondary education. The change from a system designed to educate an elite to one of mass education that aims to educate the whole of the youth of our countries, not only increased the numbers of teachers and pupils, it also brought perplexing problems related to quality. How to achieve high standards of education in these circumstances is an enormous organisational and personal challenge that needs much creative thought (Gray *et al.*, 1999). To teach today is a very different activity to that of 20 years ago. It is very much more difficult to deal with mixed-ability classes that comprise 100% of the children of the area with all the social and psychological conflicts of our present societies, than it was to teach more or less homogeneous classes of children selected for their academic ability. This

then, was the root cause of the initial disenchantment of many of our teachers; those who did not know how to change their teaching roles or how to reorient their teaching methods to cope with the new situations (Woods *et al.*, 1997).

Many of our teaching colleagues have a feeling of bewilderment from the scholarly world around them, especially if they compare the homogeneous groups of pupils they knew in the past with the heterogeneous classes of today. Their scepticism, or even rejection of the teaching reforms is the outward expression of their insecurity accumulated over 20 years of profound and continual changes in their immediate working environment. Teaching has changed. Today, more complex teaching activities are evolving to cope with changed classroom circumstances. Some teachers cannot, or will not, adopt them as their own.

Teachers Disconcerted by Social Change

Teachers faced with social change are like a company of actors on stage in period dress who are subjected to a sudden change of scenery in the middle of an act. A new backdrop is quickly rolled down to hide the previous scenery. The new scenery is postmodern; there are lively fluorescent colours that contrast completely with the classical atmosphere on stage seconds before. The first reaction of our actors would be surprise and confusion, before tensions give rise to aggressiveness in certain of them, who demand an end of the play and an explanation.

Naturally, the reactions of all involved in such a situation are likely to be varied, but the word 'disconcerted' describes the different feelings of the actors on stage faced with unexpected change (Esteve, 1994).

Like the actors just described, the teachers of our present-day society are confronted by circumstances that limit their effectiveness and often oblige them to do their work badly. Moreover, these same circumstances expose them to public criticism by people who are criticising the present from conceptions of their own education. Consequently, the public believe it is the teachers who are directly responsible for the present state of affairs and for the failings of present-day teaching. From the early 1980s, the expressions 'teacher stress' and 'teacher burnout' became common in pedagogical literature. The expressions are an attempt to define simply a range of attitudes observed at that time between teachers who, to a greater or lesser degree, were worried, tired or exhausted by their experiences in the classroom (Esteve, 1986). They found that the job they knew so well, in which they were so capable, had changed out of all recognition. The new problems in teaching are born of technical, social and moral changes and to resolve it will need new standards of pre-service and in-service training to cope with the new demands of schools.

We may find the point of inflection at the beginning of the 1980s. Wolfgang Mitter (1985) mentions 'a phase of disenchantment' that he considers to be the central factor in the practice of teaching within western educational systems. Observers are now noting this phenomena in the former eastern and central European ex-socialist states. The observations of many other authors coincide with that of Mitter (Blase, 1982; Barton & Walker, 1984; Hamon & Rotman, 1984).

In fact, the term 'teacher burnout' did not become the focus of many research studies later published in the international journals of educational sciences until the 1980s. The last few years have seen increased concern about this subject so that now

there are many references in the main databases of education. The expression 'Teacher burnout' refers inclusively to the permanent negative effects on the personality of teachers as the result of the psychosocial conditions produced by rapid social change when it directly affects the environment in which the teacher works.

Indicators of Change in the Educational System: new challenges for the future

We may find at least 12 basic indicators that characterise educational change over the last 20 years. The first nine refer mainly to the creation of new social concepts about education; some of these strongly influence the situation of teachers in the classroom and refer to the social context in which teaching is carried out. The last three relate clearly to changes within the classroom, although classrooms are never completely impermeable to external influences.

The New Responsibilities Demanded of Teachers

The increased demand put on the teachers' role is a historical fact. Teachers are continually asked to assume more and more responsibilities. At the present time, teachers cannot insist that their tasks are limited only to developing the cognitive skills of their pupils. In addition to knowing their subjects well, today teachers are expected to facilitate learning, be an efficient educator and organise work groups. Teachers must also teach, care for the psychological equilibrium of the pupils, help their social integration and attend to their sexual education. We ask them to do intercultural education, education for health, prevention of drugs taking. Often, they have to care for a pair of pupils with special needs who are integrated into the class and who need very specific attention.

However, in spite of the fact that our societies insist that teachers adopt these new roles, the formal pre-service training of teachers remains unchanged in many countries, and teachers are unprepared to face the challenge of the new demands of classroom life: they go into the classroom unaware of the hard reality awaiting them. It is not surprising therefore that they meet with reality ('reality shock'), when they are thrown directly from, say, laboratory research into inorganic chemistry, or from preparing their graduate theses on literary or historical themes, into a tumultuous class of underprivileged children in a socially deprived area (Esteve, 1997). Pre-service training has certainly changed in England and Wales to take account of these factors. France tried to take account by setting up the *Instituts Universitaires de Formation des Maîtres*, but the report made by *Le Monde de l'éducation* in November 1999 argues the success of the reform (Baumard, 1999).

This considerable increase in the teachers' taskload and responsibilities has already produced confusion and controversy about the training teachers need to better fit them for the complex professional tasks and wide-ranging responsibilities with which they are now officially charged (Esteve *et al.*, 1995).

Cox and Heames (1999) defend the thesis that today one of the most important of the teachers' social skills is the ability to manage the pressures in teaching. They argue that future teacher-training courses must prepare the students to manage situations of classroom conflict.

Social Agencies Outside the School Inhibit their Former Educational Responsibilities

During the last 20 years, while the authorities have charged teachers with more educational responsibilities, outside the school, many agents of education who in the past made important contributions to the social, moral, and civic education of young people have limited considerably their former valuable activities (Stotsky, 1999). The most important among these are families. This is largely due to the historical fact that many more mothers now work outside the home. Parents have much less time to spend with their children. The rise in the number of divorces and of single-parent families also contributes to the neglect of many children's emotional, moral and civic education. Consequently, today's parents have much less influence on their children. Schools report more emotional disturbances, more anti-social behaviour, so that the teaching of basic human relations and moral values formerly carried out by parents and relatives must now to be undertaken by the teachers. There is an increasing tendency for parents, and the general public, to believe that all aspects of education should be dealt with at school, even the teaching of those human, emotional and moral values, because the children are not being taught at home (Durning, 1999).

The Mass-media Offer other Interesting Possibilities for Learning to Young People

Powerful mass information media offer other possibilities of access to knowledge to children and young people. All these media, but especially television and the internet, have revealed enormous power to influence for good or bad. The communication skills of the professional newsreader have raised the standards of young viewers. Pupils now expect their teachers to communicate their subject with the same effectiveness and charm as their favourite programme presenter. Tired teachers who speak with backs towards their pupils while writing on the blackboard compare badly with them. In this way, teachers are being forced to modify their role as communicators of information. Each day it is becoming more common to introduce audiovisual material into classes, either as special educational TV programmes or as pre-recorded videos; and the new compact-disc interactive computer technology can be of enormous help in improving teaching effectiveness and obtaining pupil participation. Teachers who hope to remain the only classroom source of oral information have already lost the battle. A good television presentation can motivate children much better than most 'chalk and talk' presentations by the teacher. Teachers, in consequence, must now take up the challenge of integrating effectively this powerful source of attractive information into their material (Geertz, 1999).

Different Educational Models in the Multicultural Society

During the last 20 years, the general public's former agreement about the educational objectives of schools and about the values they should inspire in their pupils has evaporated (Chauchat, 1999). The former consensus was never about details; there was a common understanding about what values should be imparted by teachers to the young of the community. In this way, education managed to establish certain core values to be reflected in school life and to be transmitted by the teachers. These values arose from an essentially convergent socialisation process; that is to say, it was a unification process that integrated all children into the dominant culture. This

is the melting-pot model that was developed in the United States by John Dewey (1916).

At the present time, we find ourselves facing a veritable divergent socialisation process: we live in a pluralist society in which different social groups, with powerful communication media at their service, are defending opposed educational models, and each model gives priority to different values (Stotsky, 1999). Modern education has accepted the democratic concept of a multicultural and multilingual society. This means that our educational system has to change its teaching materials and to diversify its teaching programmes (Abdallah-Preteuille & Porcher, 1996).

The schooling of the whole population of children involves taking into our classrooms children from widely different cultural and linguistic communities. These children from different cultures often display different sensitivities and social unease because their education at home gives them different value judgements so that they interpret some situations and classroom information differently from the other children. At times, these disparate interpretations provoke different emotions between the different groups of children in a class. It is not surprising, therefore, that teachers are disconcerted, particularly those who labour in bilingual communities, in socially deprived areas with populations that have a large percentage of immigrants (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997).

It is not accidental that the 'Chador War' in France occurred mainly in the schools. It explains one of the logical difficulties that confront our teachers in today's schools. If they teach equality of the female, they will be accused by the parents of Moslem culture of trying to impose the dominant culture. Should they, on the other hand, respect the Moslem culture and its traditions, they will surely be accused by feminists of conditioning the girls to accept their subordinate role in a male-dominated culture.

This situation cannot continue; all teachers must reflect deeply to present effectively their educational values and objectives. The convergent socialisation process that supported the unifying character of pupil activities has been swept aside by a torrent of divergent socialisation that forces teachers to expand and diversify their teaching activities. This is not only caused by the immigration phenomena, but also by the fact that several diverse minority groups in different subcultures have vigorously asserted their identities. Take a look into any secondary classroom in the socially deprived areas or in a big city and you will find members of the most varied urban tribes: rockers, punks, raptas, grunges, new-romantics, skinheads It is important that the teacher knows the difference between mods and heavies because more than the different dress and hairstyles adopted by these groups, there is a concept of a way of life that is based on a philosophy and a set of value judgements about the society.

The fact that for the first time in our history, over the last 20 years, we have achieved a compulsory education for the entire child population has done away with the former advantage of uniformity of pupil when access to secondary education was limited. These days, many teachers need to examine their own attitudes to teaching in order to positively accept the presence in their classes of children whose early education was received in divergent systems of socialisation. Faced with this diversity of pupil background, teachers are forced to diversify their teaching methods. It is no exaggeration to state that the task of the primary school teacher in socially deprived areas is more that of a child-welfare assistant than of a conventional schoolteacher.

New Controversies and Contradictions in Teaching

In the last 20 years, largely due to the breakdown of the former consensus about education, teachers have met with many contradictory situations in their work because of the precarious equilibrium produced by their attempts to satisfy different educational and social models. In this way, they will always find themselves confronted by those who prefer other educational models. It is not surprising, therefore, that in staff-rooms teachers criticise each other or confess themselves perplexed because they feel trapped in educational situations different from those with which they normally associate themselves (Leithwood *et al.*, 1999).

The problem worsens when the teachers themselves have not made a clear decision about the type of teaching they want to carry out, without having had an opportunity to define the educational values that they consider most important, those that they wish to encourage and those which they would prefer to be openly against. At least the teachers who have outlined their idea of education, although they might be criticised, have the safeguard that they know well what they try to do. Usually the effort required to define objectively the desired educational models provides teachers with an idea to effectively defend their choice of values and teaching methods against external critics.

Now, in the described context of the accelerated social change, contradictions accumulate continually in our educational system. For the first time in history, society is not asking educators to prepare new generations for the present needs of society, but rather to prepare them for the challenge of meeting the needs of a future, not yet existent society.

The Change of Social Worth of Education

During the last 20 years, the orientation of the educational system changed from one that aimed to select and educate an elite of highly able children, to one which aims to teach the entire population of children and adolescents within the age of compulsory schooling.

This more diversified system must be very flexible because it aims to offer all children equal opportunities to qualify and progress through the different educational levels according to their individual abilities. However, at the same time, the social worth of education has declined, especially in the eyes of the pupils' parents, because while 20 years ago an academic qualification assured social status and economic reward according to the level attained, now the extension of academic qualifications cannot assure social status. Nevertheless, other selection mechanisms remain, principally those of influence of family social contacts.

In this way, pupils, teachers and parents need to change their expectations of the new system of education. Obviously, it is absurd in a comprehensive education system to keep the objectives of a system designed to educate an elite. For this reason, teachers were obliged to change and become more flexible. It would be unrealistic these days to expect collective achievement similar to that produced by educational systems orientated primarily to create an elite (Esteve *et al.*, 1995).

Social Judgement against the Teacher and the General Criticism of the Educational System

Largely because of the circumstances outlined in the previous paragraph, the degree

of social support of the educational system by the community and parents has deteriorated. The new educational system has disappointed parents with regard to the future of their children; it has also failed to achieve the expected equality or social progress that was promised 20 years ago for the children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Most of our societies, some communication media, and even some governments, concluded simply that it was the teachers who were directly responsible for the many omissions, failures and imperfections that have emerged in our educational systems.

As both Patrice Ranjard (1984) in France, and Martin Cole (1985; Cole & Walker, 1989) in England observe, the outstanding social characteristic of our time in western Europe is society's collective negative value judgement of teachers that has made teachers the scapegoats of the educational system: completely responsible for all that is wrong with it. The general lack of support and social recognition of the teachers' work is more and more obvious.

Ranjard (1984) summarises the contents of his interesting essay, '*Les enseignants persécutés*', by stating that when teachers speak about their work, they feel themselves being attacked and that, collectively, they live with real feelings of persecution. This feeling, says Ranjard, is not without foundation because 'the educators are pursued by the evolution of a society that has imposed profound changes on their profession'. Society, in general, has reduced its expectations and support for teachers.

Martin Cole (1985) speaks about what he calls, the 'social judgement against teachers' in an article that bears the appropriate title 'A crisis of identity: teachers in times of political and economical change'. As example, he cites Margaret Thatcher as saying on British television that underlying the vandalism perpetrated by British fans during the Heysel Stadium football riots was the general abandonment of traditional values of British education by the British educational system and its teachers.

At the present time, the public value judgement of teachers and their work is largely negative. If individual teachers work to introduce quality into their teaching, if they work extra hours, it is rare that this dedication to duty is recognised or valued. Nevertheless, when there is a teaching failure, possibly through circumstances beyond their control, teachers are blamed immediately and directly for the failure and all its consequences. If children do well, the parents believe that their children are good students: if children do badly, then the cause is bad teaching.

The Social Status of the Teacher in a Materialistic Society

In these years, the social attitudes toward teachers have changed. Not many years ago, primary school teachers, and particularly secondary school teachers with university degrees, had high cultural and social status. Their knowledge and their work was widely recognised and respected. However, society today tends to rank social status in terms of earnings. Knowledge, selfless dedication and vocation count for little now. Many parents consider that those who choose to be teachers are displaying their inability to 'make better of themselves' or to do something else that pays more. Teachers' feelings about their salaries are a key component of their collective identity crisis (Esteve *et al.*, 1995).

Twenty years ago, particularly in rural areas, teachers were very respected people. Secondary school teachers were often highly respected, men and women of letters or

of science, admired personages and prime movers of the cultural life of their cities. In other words, they were socially worthy persons. Nowadays, fewer people place much value on culture or knowledge or self-sacrifice in the service of work with children, or silent dedication to laborious scientific research. Today, most people dedicate themselves to the pursuit of power and riches. To such minds, teachers are people who lack the ability to earn more. When teachers take on board and internalise this materialistic mentality, they soon leave teaching to seek more remunerative occupations. It is not surprising that teacher demoralisation spreads in the more developed countries like France, Germany, Great Britain and Sweden where recruitment of young teachers of certain specialities becomes difficult (Adams & Tulasiewicz, 1995). The authorities must pay attention and improve the morale of teachers before they consider new equipment and buildings.

The Pressing Need to Improve Curriculum Contents

The rapid advance of the sciences during the last 20 years continues even more rapidly today and this, with the changes in the social and technological needs of our present society, demands urgently that we look again at the content of our educational curricula.

It is not just a matter of bringing teachers up to date in specialist subjects so that the knowledge content of courses is updated. The problem goes deeper. To master the content of any subject in depth, particularly scientific subjects, is extremely difficult, and teachers, at times, feel vulnerable and insecure when they know that advances and new concepts are being made every day. Even worse, they feel that the importance of their subjects may be reconsidered and their job cancelled because pupils will soon need to learn new subjects, more appropriate for the fast-approaching new society. For example, in the 1970s, in Spanish education, French was the principal second language. Today the pressing demand is for English, and teachers of French have difficulty finding pupils. Latin and Greek have nearly disappeared.

The introduction of new subjects, like economics and computer studies, in response to strong social demand, requires reconsideration of the content of the curriculum. This is just one of the many pressing social demands that the designers of western education systems must take into account in planning the reforms of their curricula.

Some teachers oppose change because they are unwilling to abandon old subjects that they have been teaching for years, to laboriously prepare new ones that did not exist when they received their professional training. Others distrust the changes of curriculum and believe that behind the rejection of French, Latin and Greek lurks a policy that aims to abandon humanities and to relegate our educational system into a submissive servant of powerful economic and technical interests.

In-service teacher training programmes must ensure that all teachers understand the objectives of curricular reforms and why certain curriculum components must be changed (Esteve, 1997).

The Mismatch between the Needs of the Schools and Available Resources

In spite of the fact that the overcrowding of schools has led to an enormous increase in the teachers' responsibilities, they have not received new resources to

help them meet these associated new obligations; they work under increasingly difficult conditions. Today, quality teaching, where it is found, owes more to the extraordinary dedication of excellent teachers rather than to their having optimum working conditions to help them with their heavy taskload.

Many of these teachers complain openly about the absurd situation in which educational authorities call for methodological renewal, yet at the same time deprive the teachers of the means to carry out the reforms. This frustrating situation inhibits the enthusiasm of the teachers and they become sceptical of educational authorities. They are aware of the additional effort required by the projected reforms and they ask if they are to receive adequate funds to meet their objective of improved teaching quality.

Of course, if our society agrees to increase the national financial resources awarded to education it will demand more accountability and evidence of improved teaching quality. This is reasonable to avoid wasteful use of the money invested in increased human and material resources that the new reforms will need. At the present time, some human resources are being wasted by a certain amount of teacher absenteeism attributed to illness produced by stress and exhaustion (Esteve, 1989a,b).

Authority and Discipline in the Classroom and School

The profound social changes have affected the relations between teachers and pupils. Twenty years ago, the teacher had all the privileges and authority, the pupil had only duties and could suffer all kinds of humiliation. This was manifestly unjust, but equally unjust is the situation in which pupils verbally, physically, or psychologically attack the teachers or their fellow pupils when the arbitration mechanisms designed to correct injustice do not function. Human relations in educational centres have changed; today there is more conflict. Many teachers and staff collectives have not yet found satisfactory ways to organise a peaceful social environment that offers respect to everyone: staff and pupils (Douet, 1987).

The escalation of violence in teaching institutions is daily news in the United States, but the 1981 Organisation International du Travail (OIT) report refers to studies that mention increases in classroom violence from other countries like Israel, the United Kingdom, France and Sweden. In the academic year 1996–97 the French Minister of Education, François Bayrou, set up new strong orders against violence in schools.

In reality, the occasional violence in educational institutions, located in economically and socially depressed areas, particularly those of big cities, reflects the social climate, the tensions and violence of those areas. Psychologically, however, the problem appears to be amplified fivefold. Fear leads to exaggeration and, in turn, this engenders insecurity, so that many teachers who have never suffered from violent incidents, and probably never will, feel more or less vulnerable and unsafe. This affects their self-confidence, makes them nervous and reduces their teaching effectiveness.

According to the research made in the University of Malaga by Melero (1993), the attacks on teachers occur more frequently in secondary than in primary education: the proportion is five to one. Violence is generally caused by males and more often against male than female teachers: the ratio is three to one. Sociological statistics reveal that violence is distributed unequally. It reaches 15% in schools within the large city or urban areas, but in the less densely populated urban areas it is only 6%, and in rural areas it is around 4%. The problem is significantly worse in institutions with an

excessively large number of pupils. This suggests that the impersonal nature of the large institutions contributes to deterioration in interpersonal relations and the feelings of self-esteem of the pupils. Their frustration may be expressed as violence directed towards inanimate objects (vandalism) or towards a teacher.

Kallen and Colton (1980), in their report for UNESCO, associated the increase of classroom conflict with the increase of compulsory education. They advance the idea that institutional violence against pupils who are obliged to attend daily at an educational centre until 16 or 18 years of age, increases the frustration of these students to a level where they must externalise it.

In this context, we should now give thought to the fact that the age of compulsory education is to be increased, according to the projected reforms of most European countries. This will require extra effort from teachers, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas with the highest indices of pupil failure.

The Overload of the Teacher

In the last two decades the work of the teacher has fragmented. Some teachers find themselves teaching badly because they cannot attend to all the extra tasks in the time available. In addition to their classroom work, they must attend to different administrative tasks. They must allocate time for planning, pupil evaluations and their in-service teacher training. They must counsel and orientate the students, attend to visiting parents, organise extracurricular activities for the pupils, attend staff meetings and other different types of meetings—to discuss coordination, to discuss cycles and levels—and then perhaps they have to attend to the security of buildings and materials, supervise dining-rooms and pupil recreation periods.

Different published research works indicate that teachers lack sufficient time to attend to their responsibilities and this frustrating overload causes exhaustion (Helsby, 1999).

The observation common to all these works is that teachers are overloaded and this obliges teachers to fragment their work. The need to attend to so many things during their working day limits the attention and effort that they can give to each task, and inevitably quality suffers (Woods *et al.*, 1997).

Fragmentation of the work of teachers and the associated decline of quality are characteristics of the educational system today, and they occur in spite of the fact that this is supposed to be the age of specialisation in which specialisation is seen to be fundamental for quality education. In Spain, we do not have sufficient specialist teachers of, for example, foreign languages, physics, mathematics, physical education, music, and art. As a result of bureaucratic problems involved in filling the vacant teaching posts in our secondary schools, too often, for example, language graduates find themselves teaching philosophy, or mathematicians take charge of chemistry classes. In France, it is difficult to find specialist teachers, in secondary education, of mathematics, physics and chemistry. In the Netherlands, the parliament discussed, in October 1999, a week of 4 days in all schools, because they didn't have enough teachers for 5 days of activity.

Conclusion

The 12 indicators described above illustrate the nature of the principal changes in our educational system. They also indicate the principal problems that remain to be

resolved by the new projects of educational reform in Europe, and particularly by the pre-service and in-service teacher training. Societies change, and we need to remodel our programs of teachers' training, preparing new teachers to confront the challenges of the future. The argument presented raises relevant issues to discuss, with different answers in each country of Europe; perhaps we can learn from the problems and solutions presented in order to understand better the transformation of the teachers' role and the subsequent need to transform the teachers training.

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