How teachers' work is changing:
aims, competences and professional identity

Research literature into teacher's work (in compulsory education) focuses by and large on curriculum reforms, massive decentralisation of the education system and sometimes-contradictory orders issued to those involved in education, especially teachers. They are asked, at one and the same time, to be more autonomous and to work more together, while continuing to respect well-defined core competences. In addition, the aim of the teaching profession is not only to **instruct** (*the action of communicating a set of theoretical or practical knowledge related to teaching or studies*), but also "to **educate**" (*the art of training someone, especially a child, by developing his/her physical, intellectual and moral qualities so as to enable him/her to tackle the personal and social dimensions of life with a sufficiently fulfilled personality*).

In 2006, the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission published a draft entitled *Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications*, in which it is stated that teachers play a crucial role in supporting the learning experience of young people and adult learners and that they should be able to work effectively with information, technology and knowledge *"with their fellow human beings – learners, colleagues and other partners in education", and "work with and in society - at local, regional, national, European and broader global levels".*

It is difficult to draw up a typology for research work, as the subjects of study – educational reforms – have an impact on the (de)construction of the professional identity of teacher, on their relationships with others and on representations which interact in classroom management, etc. Most observations, representations and stumbling blocks analysed are quasi-universal. The works given as reference can be considered as (significant) examples of current trends in research into teachers.

Starting out from recent developments, convergent reforms and competences expected by educational politicians, we refer to analyses which deal with the difficulties of adapting to changes prescribed by the societal or political environment, in which professional identity, the relationship with knowledge, classroom management, etc. are tackled.

The just transmission of a discipline to pupils runs up against contexts in which the teacher must change stance, competences and representations. In his work, the teacher finds himself torn between regulation, rationalisation and the success of his pupils, in a society for which school is no longer "the sanctuary of knowledge", but which nevertheless expects great things of it.

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Changes in teachers' work

Whether in England, Scotland, Belgium, Canada, the United States or France, the context in which teachers work has changed. This change has arisen through an accumulation of reforms, the latest of which have taken on a marked trend, and by transformations in society and in culture.

In their introduction to *La profession d'enseignant aujourd'hui*, M. Tardif and C. Lessard (2005) list all the components of this change: a degradation in quality (work has become more complex and more intense) without any corresponding gain in quantitative terms (organisation of time and pay); systems decentralised with performance indicators set up that turn the education system into a commodity; new constraints relating to the professionalisation of teaching, to the use of ITCs inside and outside school and to the dispersion of knowledge; damage done to professional ethics in the face of social inequalities and the distress that they lead to.

In Belgium, the educational researchers' convention and the GIRSEF (Inter-faculty group for research into educational and training systems) bear witness to the questions being asked about the teaching profession. One of the workshops of the 2004 convention bore the title "The teaching profession: why do people choose it, why do they leave, why do they stay, why do they come back to it?" which gives a good idea of the scale of the questions being asked. The twelve papers given in this workshop dealt with initial training, how new teachers feel, why people are not choosing teaching as a profession any more, working conditions and problems of identity (CCE, 2004). Within the GIRSEF, C. Maroy (2005) proposed a summary of the literature in French and in English, showing the paradoxes of the profession, between unchanging aspects (classroom organisation, for example) and ones that are being questioned (working conditions, identity, classroom management, etc.) and of which the bywords could be "intensification", "complexification" and "diversification".

It is possible to graduate the impact of reforms and pressures. The initial impact of educational policies is obviously on the education system: educational policies are more and more marked by the school sector's becoming a commodity, by economic criteria of efficiency, or by parentocracy (Brown, 1990). In contrast, teachers are locally adopting a filtering strategy to cope with injunctions, whether implicit or otherwise, which some could consider as a form of resistance or force of inertia. The recommendations are in opposition to the strength of the feeling of competence, self-esteem and the awareness that teachers have of their job and how to do it (well). The other means of filtering injunctions at school level involves the collective aspect of the profession of teacher within the teaching team. In the first case, the teacher handles the stress alone; in the second he can rely on collective work to lessen the stress caused by imposed changes (Ballet, Kelchtermans & Loughran, 2006).

Society's expectations

The way in which the teacher's work and educational policies are changing is interdependent on changes in society. Now society is in constant turmoil *"between the global and the local, […] tradition and modernity, […] long term and short term, […] spiritual and material, […] competition and equal opportunity, […] development of knowledge and man's ability to assimilate"* (Cornu, 2002).
School is an emanation of society. Political and economic authorities make requests of it. School is asked to have a different role: for example to take on health education or road safety education. Is this role due to the *"passing on of responsibility from family to teacher or to new needs that have appeared as society has evolved?"* (Andrey-Berclaz, 2002). The democratisation, or "mass-production" of education implies integrating pupils from abroad, support for pupils in difficulty, and an end to the differences between boys and girls. The avowed mission of public-sector schooling (common core, equal opportunity) is to provide all children with as demanding as possible a minimum cultural level to allow them to take their place in a society that has become very competitive.

For J.-P. Pourtois & H. Desmet (2003), the global reorganisation of society is the outcome of unavoidable phenomena. Society is increasingly multi-cultural. The adult-child relationship is now more to do with negotiation and seeking compromise than with master-pupil and parent-child authority; and yet *"adults today cannot afford to abandon, in the name of the principle of individual freedom, the necessary educational limitations, since these are liable to contain young people's impulses and anxieties"*. This tension requires adults to show flexibility in their educational behaviour. The new society accepts the present at face value: *"post-modernity is no longer looking for an ideal to be found in the future since the future has become too uncertain"*; the "extimate" has taken over from the intimate; in a more and more individualistic society young people need recognition from outside. Finally, other visible phenomena are condemned by the media: the expansion of virtual life, especially for teenagers, and everyday rudeness that has become more and more frequent.

What is the conclusion of this "reorganisation"? Adults (and, *a fortiori*, teachers) see their educational tasks getting increasingly complex, torn as they are between a communicational type education which goes hand in hand with the imposition of rules and limits, a child-centred (personalisation) and society-centred (socialisation) education, and finally an education which incites the child to be autonomous while respecting a certain amount of dependence (affective and material). In more concrete terms, the teacher must still inculcate knowledge, culture, tools, concepts and processes; but at the same time the school is no longer the only place where knowledge can be acquired: information and communication technologies are shaking up knowledge and access to knowledge; the teacher is no longer the one who knows and who passes on his knowledge to those who do not know, but is becoming a guide or tutor, who accompanies the pupil on the path to knowledge. All these competences are now carved in the stone of official recommendations.

The teacher's competences

M. Tardif and C. Lessard have always maintained that the professionality required by the texts presupposes that teachers should be *"actively involved in an individual and collective process to analyse and develop their competences"* (Lenoir, 2007).

While everyone may be in agreement with this postulate, where does this leave recent educational policies? In 2001, to accompany the reform begun in 1997, the Quebec education ministry published a guide on *La formation à l'enseignement* (Training to teach) which, after presenting the notions professionality and professionalisation (Bourdoncle), goes on to list the 12 professional competences of the teacher (Martinet, Raymond & Gauthier, 2001).

These competences involve:
— the cultural approach to teaching: defining fundamental benchmarks and the lines along which the knowledge contained in his/her discipline will become intelligible for the pupil, stepping back and taking a critical look at the discipline being taught, establishing relationships between the second culture element prescribed and the pupils' first culture; transforming the classroom into an open forum for culture; taking a critical look at one's own origins, cultural practices and social role;
— command of the language of teaching (use, communicate, respect, correct, argue);
— designing and test-driving learning situations appropriate for the pupils and the competences being developed: reviewing the teachers' relationships to academic knowledge, the contents of the disciplines, the pupils' knowledge; choosing appropriate learning strategies, including cooperative work;
— assessing progress: reports, evaluation tools, communication with pupils and parents, collaboration with the teaching staff;
— organising and running the class as a group: having clear requirements and getting pupils involved in the running of the class.

In a working paper of the Academy for educational development, E. Leu (2005) also formulates some "basic skills" for quality learning, another way of classifying universally-expected professional competences: awareness of the young learner, appropriate and varied methodologies, teaching content; understanding of the curriculum and its goals; skill in communicating, enthusiasm in learning, sensitivity to others, skill in working with others, devotion, etc.

To this catalogue of competences can be added competences that can be developed during in-service training: the teacher must be a thinking practitioner, knowledgeable, a technician who is professional in all he does, a craftsman who can see the "big picture" and able to draw up "teaching recipes" or professional schemes, involved socially and quite simply a person, who can communicate, control his emotions and commit to working more than a nine-to-five day (Houpert 2005).

To sum up, the teacher must excel in his or her discipline, master it and dominate it, put it into practice and, in a word, love it. He must also be in command of the processes by which knowledge is passed on: teaching and learning. He must know what it means to be a child or young person learning; know how to manage a class, be familiar with the school, the education system and the big issues of education. As a specialist of the discipline or disciplines he teaches, he must be aware of the epistemology and the didactics of these; he must also be a psychologist, a sociologist and a philosopher; he must master the tools and techniques of teaching.

The following quote from B. Cornu (2002) tones down somewhat the scope of the teacher's responsibility: "*The teacher's competence is a collective and a progressive competence. Within a school, it is expected that the teachers as a team possess these competences; they cannot be expected of each individual teacher. And a teacher cannot, as soon as he enters the profession, be expected to possess all the competences he will require for the whole of his career: he will need to train throughout his career, continue to learn, keep his appetite for knowledge and his intellectual curiosity that he has no hope of inculcating in his pupils if he does not possess it himself*".

Efficient, quality teachers?

Does this list of competences answer the question "what makes a good teacher?" that is being asked at all levels of society - parents, media, the political sphere, etc. – and clearly repeated in official texts, in the attempt to find highly qualified, or quality teachers? But what does highly qualified mean?
Research work oscillates between analysis of official sources, analysis of what teachers say and observation of what happens in the field.

Starting from a review of the literature on what makes quality education, E. Leu (2005) shows recent trends pointed up by research work. A number of countries suffer from a dearth of teachers. Educational policy-makers should fight against this dearth while attempting to train quality teachers. Their problem is to define what is economically and socially acceptable "professionality". In addition, the decentralisation process of education systems leads to a decentralisation of the management and assessment of teachers, but also gives them greater responsibility for the success of their pupils.

Once again, it is at local level that quality is defined: at school and community level. This obvious statement has not been taken into account by educational policy makers. The quality of learning is above all due to the interaction between teachers and classroom processes. For this interaction to work, teachers must be able to understand the reforms that they have to apply and they must benefit from support to help them become familiar with alternative, efficient practices.

E. Leu offers two contrasting views of the teacher: one who has lost all sense of responsibility and who merely applies instructions; and a professional teacher who is efficient provided he is working in a trusting and supportive climate. This is also what I. Menter (2005) expresses in an article comparing the modernisation of teaching in England and Scotland, asking whether teachers are encouraged to be creative or whether they are "created" by the national political context. The cultural and sociological approaches to his work bring him to the conclusion that: "*teachers are certainly created but it does seem they have the possibility to be creative!*".

One of the major principles stated in the latest reforms in the United States, and also featuring in the recommendations of the OECD and UNESCO, is to train quality teachers whose efficiency can be assessed. The way in which teachers" work is changing in the USA is certainly a source of concern and it doubtless makes teachers even more sensitive to the notions "efficiency", "merit-based remuneration" and "professional competences assessment".

In the United States

For A. Amrein-Beardsley (2006), the notion as dealt with in *No child left behind act* is too restricted: the quality of a teacher is based on his academic qualifications (first degree), his professional knowledge and their evaluation, his experience, his ability to teach using both traditional and innovatory techniques. Research has shown the link between these teacher characteristics and pupils' progress: when, at what level of teaching, for which disciplines and in what type of context does the level of knowledge or qualification have an impact on learning? Some wonder about the situation of young ("lower quality") teachers, assigned as a matter of course to underprivileged urban areas. This is a problem that is not only an American one.

But these data on their own do not explain what characterises a quality teacher. A higher qualification and a better salary can be considerable incentives for teachers to attempt to get "better".

The options chosen in the USA are relatively different from one State to another. L. Darling-Hammond (2000) has compared institutional studies, case studies, results and resources allocated by the State; she calculated the effects on pupils' results in mathematics and reading, of variables such as teacher qualification level (three variables), pupil poverty level, class size, and pupils' command of the language in which the lesson is being given. The role of the teachers turns out to be significant. The author recommends that the States be vigilant concerning working conditions, salary, qualification and teacher commitment to what they are teaching: a teacher who masters contents, has the means to implement them and is informed about the prescribed curricula will be all the more efficient as a result.

To fully grasp the qualitative approach of the teacher and of the job market as they appear in the United States, reading the review *The future of children* dealing with the topic "Excellence in the classroom" (2007) will be of great help. The many analyses that are made here deal with some of the problem issues encountered in the literature in French (working

conditions, recruitment, remuneration; motivation, the effect on pupils' learning, content of training and teacher qualification), in the special context of the "commoditization" of schooling (teacher's job market, merit-based salary, etc.).

Here are some choice extracts, taken out of context: "*The authors conclude that overall salary increases for teachers would be both expensive and ineffective. The best way to improve the quality of instruction would be to lower barriers to becoming a teacher, such as certification, and to link compensation and career advancement more closely with teachers' ability to raise student performance*". "It should be possible to make progress gradually in developing incentives that motivate the desired teaching behaviours and that will be perceived by teachers as fair and accurate."

Towards globalised efficiency?

To improve the quality of education, the efficiency of the teacher must be increased. "*Efficient teachers are those who achieve the goals which they have set themselves or which they have set for them by others*" (Anderson, 2004). A corollary of this definition is that efficient teachers must possess the knowledge and the skills needed to attain the goals, and must be able to use that knowledge and those skills appropriately if these goals are to be achieved.

This issue is at the centre of the latest publications of the OECD and Unesco. It is in this latter context that L. Anderson has analysed what could increase teachers' efficiency. This does not involve simply reiterating the characteristics outlined above, but actually taking into consideration the real context of this greater efficiency: defining standardised units of learning, envisioning a class culture and environment, encouraging communication between teachers and pupils, considering the pupil from the standpoint of his learning and the way one lesson follows another, and supporting and assisting teachers in coping with change. For each of these approaches, L. Anderson defines recommendations for teachers and decision-makers.

Which approach should we choose?

Is efficiency a meaningful concept in the field of teaching? The term "efficiency" takes on such an evaluative connotation that it may be difficult to characterise it. Efficiency cannot, and must not, be measured solely in terms of pupils' results –what results, anyway? - and it cannot be reduced to the constituent parts that make up the teacher and what he does. P. Bressoux (2007) brings in the notions of explicit teaching (see B. Bernstein on the notion of implicit/ explicit), structured teaching (and *School effectiveness research*) which may be efficient (mainly because these teaching styles enable the teacher to *feel* efficient, therefore motivated, therefore a quality performer) But the Pygmalion effect can work the other way: a dogmatic teacher who is stuck in the rut of social stereotypes will only exacerbate the differences between pupils. Here again, the competences and characteristics of an efficient teacher are something else and are dependant on many different contexts.

Teachers must reinvent a style of classroom management (give thought to their posture, manage stress, manage violence). Apart from what they do in class, they must also question what they do collectively, and new (or old) ways of working together.

Professional identity and changes

Research into teachers' work shows lack of motivation and exhaustion, the results of many forms of tension, pressure from inside and outside and a feeling that they are treated with less respect by families and, as a result, by their pupils. These are all aspects which illustrate how the teacher is questioning his perception of his professional identity.

The teacher and his professional identity

Researchers look at professional identity from different angles: some focus on teachers' professional identity formation; others focus was on the identification of characteristics of his professional identity; still others focus on how professional identity was (re)presented by teachers' stories (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004).

As B. Cattonar (2005) points out, teachers place the transmission of knowledge at the centre of their professional identity. But this approach finds its limits in schools of today: teachers are asked to carry out other tasks (socialising pupils and dealing with "out-of-school" problems).

For her thesis, B. Cattonar carried out, over a period of ten years, survey and analysis work into teacher narratives. 82 % of teachers think of themselves as educators whose role is to train human beings, but most refuse the "dirty work" of "teaching pupils to be polite". But over and above this vague dissatisfaction, related to the many tasks they are asked to perform, building up a picture of their professional identity is more complex, as teachers have difficulty in clearly grasping their relationship with pupils.

More confusedly, teachers might feel uneasy about the fact that: "*the effort they have to make is even greater because the injunction to individualise teaching forces them into closer proximity with their pupils, and leads them to give them special treatment; this goes against inherited public-spiritedness, whose main value is equality, and it is upon this basis that the teaching profession has been built up*" (Lantheaume, 2006).

When teachers are asked about their identity, two different stances can be observed. The first, centred on "teaching and training pupils" is that adopted by teachers who are satisfied with their job and who have a positive perception of the pupils they work with. The second, centred on "socialising pupils and teaching them", is the view of teachers who tend to be dissatisfied and who perceive their pupils as being "difficult" (Cattonar, 2002).

As an example we quote two articles by researchers at the University of Quebec in Montreal:
- The first deals with another dimension of identity construction: that of identification with others: in addition to influences of origin (identification with someone in the family who is/was a teacher, or with one of one's own former teachers), the authors note the mention of relations with training (initial training: influencing by its content or inadequacies; in-service training: changing how teachers work, sharing, support) and re-appropriating theoretical knowledge (related to teaching methods, it shows the model chosen by the teacher) (Anadon *et al.*, 2001).
- The second article proposes a model for constructing a professional identity, calling on sociological dimensions as well as psychological ones. The representation of the self as a person is related to the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values, competences, goals, projects and aspirations that the person recognises in himself or attributes to himself. The second

type of representation making up this model is that of the relationship that the teacher has with the teaching profession. This involves the relationship with work (pedagogical, didactic and discipline knowledge), the relationship with responsibilities (towards society, the reflexivityof his educational work), the relationship with learners (an affective and also an intellectual relationship: guiding the pupil in building knowledge), the relationship with colleagues and the teaching body, and finally the relationship with the school as a social institution (taking part in an educational project) (Gohier *et al.*, 2001).

The approach to a professional identity for teachers cannot fail to take into account the weight of their social identity: constituting the habitus, the strategies of their university paths, choice of job, cultural and family influence, etc.

Now the social representation of the teacher has been modified as a result of its massification. I. Lelis (2001) suggests that it is possible to work on the identity of a teacher as a person, the dimension of school organisation, and the profession from a collective perspective. What he has to say applies to the situation in Brazil, where authorities and the university discredit teachers, accusing them of being passive, negligent and technically incompetent, but the idea of a collective construction of the social identity of teachers, taken into account by educational policies, may be generalised.

❑ **Voir aussi**

- Cattonar Branka (2001). « Les identités professionnelles enseignantes : Ébauche d'un cadre d'analyse ». *Cahier de recherche du GIRSEF*, n° 10, p. 1-35.
- Alves Garcia Maria Manuel, Moreira Hypolito Alvaro & Santos Vieira Jarbas (2005). « As identidades docentes como fabricacao da docencia ». *Educação e Pesquisa*, vol. 31, n° 1, p. 45-56.

For an overview of research cross-referencing teachers' professional development, identity problems, stress, professionnalism and changes in progress:

- Beijaard Douwe, Meijer Paulien C., Morine-Dershimer Greta & Tillema Harm (dir.) (2005). *Teacher professional development in changing conditions*. Dordrecht : Springer.

The de(professionalised) teacher?

The teacher should, then, put on several identities as prescribed by the institution that recruited him. In his summary of teachers' work, Ch. Maroy (2005) underlines the vividness of prescribed work, whether this be in comparative studies of Eurydice, those of the OCDE or through work carried out in different European countries.

Researchers into education define the professional teacher as a *"practitioner who has acquired through long studies the status and the capacity to perform, in complex situations and autonomously, non-routine intellectual acts for which he accepts individual responsibility; these acts are appropriate to the objectives being pursued and to ethical requirements".* The teacher's autonomy is probably only an illusion, since it is greatly restricted by procedures, standards and competences that have been decided upon elsewhere (Maroy & Cattonar, 2002).

This professionalisation/de-professionalisation, coupled with injunctions towards autonomy/control is fairly well illustrated in two studies from China. A comparative study was carried out by M. Lai & L. Lo (2007) into two groups of teachers in Hong Kong and Shanghai. The first were favourable to reform proposals if they felt they were beneficial for students' learning; the second had no choice but to adapt to the State's requirements. While Hong Kong teachers admitted to a certain amount of autonomy in what they do, both groups felt "confined": one by the emerging schooling market, the other by State monitoring.

But in addition to this monitoring by the Chinese State, educational structures are being decentralised. J. Wong (2006), using data gathered from seven schools in Guangdong Province, speaks of "deskilling" and "reskilling" as being the consequences of an environment that is controlled or autonomous respectively.

About resistance to change

After agreeing that the teacher should behave with his pupils like a professional chameleon – psychologist, educator, parent, policeman, sexologist, confidant, etc. - M. Tardif & C. Lessard (2000) then underline the fact that this same teacher will not find standards or benchmarks either in society or in the school institution with which he might legitimize his acts and decisions.

Could this lack of back-up explain the resistance to reforms that teachers are accused of? While teachers do not attempt to analyse possible resistance to change, some researchers do it for them.

This can be done pretty brutally, as for example L. Anderson (2004), who, still on the lookout for efficiency, observes three reasons for this resistance to change: teachers do not see the need for change; they have neither the knowledge nor the means to change; they are convinced that changing will not do any good.

To tone down Anderson's statement, we should note that he does not consider teachers as stubborn conservatives, but locates the problem more from the standpoint of the teachers' representations. So they must become aware of what they do in class (analyse practices), become aware that their practices can change and that they can make use of hitherto unexploited knowledge. They must also become aware of the influence they have on the life and learning of their pupils, in order to accept that pupils' difficulties cannot just be put down to outside factors, but also that they as teachers have the ability to favourably influence their learning.

Finally, this awareness is not enough to overcome teachers' fragility in terms of conceptual knowledge (mastering scientific concepts to clarify what they say), procedural knowledge (knowing how to pass on knowledge). To answer these attacks, the content of initial training, the content of course books and teaching tools, and that of in-service training should be taken into consideration.

It is difficult to dissociate teachers' attitudes when faced with change from their professional culture: how they see their job and their professional identity. This approach was examined in a symposium, during the yearly conference of the AERA (American Educational Research Association) in April 2007. Not all the papers are available, but the preparatory document shows, via accounts given by teachers on both sides of the Atlantic, the issues arising between imposed restructuring (evolution) and professional culture (anchoring) in terms of teaching conditions, knowledge, competences and expertise.

It can also be observed that a teacher, who was initially in favour of a particular reform because it corresponded to his beliefs and standards, ultimately adopts a negative attitude to a reform, or even finds it repugnant if it has led to what he feels to be unacceptable working conditions (Kelchtermans, 2005).

For those involved, the description and experience of work often perceived as being "prevented" or impossible to "do properly" prevail. (Hélou & Lantheaume, 2005). The feeling of a "misuse" of qualifications, experience and personal qualities accompanies it, as is the unpleasant feeling that their public life is permanently spilling over into their private life, creating the impression that they "can't cope" and the concomitant feeling of being gradually worn out. (Lantheaume, 2006).

❑ **See also**
- Letor C. & Mangez É. (into print). « Tensions autour de la notion de compétence : une pédagogie invisible dans un contexte d'objectivation des résultats ». In V. Dupriez, J.-F. Orianne et M. Verhoeven (dir.). *De l'école au marché du travail: l'égalité des chances en question*. Paris : PUF. (Coll. Éducation et Société).
- Carlier D. (2007). « Pourquoi les enseignants sont-ils en froid avec les réformes pédagogiques ? ». *AlterEduc*, n° 139.

Teachers, knowledge and curricula

The notion of professionalisation implies the acquisition of professional competences during initial training and/or on a lifelong basis. It also implies the acquisition, the adoption and mastery of knowledge: professional know-how for the teacher and knowledge to be passed on to the pupils.

Programmes and curricula

Teachers should be allowed their say concerning the programmes and new competences they are called upon to teach: such is the obvious finding that emerges from research into teachers' work from the standpoint of educational policies and reforms. It is a question of either involving teachers in preparing curricula, or clearly explaining what is required of them and why. It is just as certain that the teachers are thrown off balance.

The changes in educational policies regarding the curriculum are marked by the vision of each of the States, but overall teachers have moved from a teacher-centred situation ("chalk and talk"), the purpose of which was to get pupils to memorise knowledge, to a "pedagogical revival" situation, which places the pupil at the centre.
But this does not solve the question of content: what should pupils learn, and how and why should they learn it?

Even if competent teachers (see the list of competences above) show themselves to be flexible, adapt to change and to local needs, and anticipate coming trends, it is no less true that the indicator commonly used to show the relevance of a curriculum is the extent to which children are prepared to integrate into their environment and, ultimately, onto the job market. Now this approach is a contestable one, as it restricts the options available to the pupils (vocational training / general education / pre-vocational education), encourages discrimination in favour of school elites and perpetuates social stratification.

M. Demeuse, C. Strauven & X. Roegiers (2006) suggest *"avenues of research for curriculum development not to be just a political and administrative exercise in style which makes no sense for those involved".*

Amongst the competences that pupils must acquire in the common core are those to do with culture. A survey carried out among Quebec teachers reveals that their understanding of what culture means is diversified and bipolar: teachers reject any elitist conception and give preference to the immediate culture surrounding the pupil and an open-minded attitude to the world which bear witness of the desire to make culture accessible to all; but in contrast, the ways in which they take on board this cultural dimension have more to do with conveying contents than teaching strategies; with support for learning than with elements of the programme. (Saint-Jacques *et al.*, 2002).

The teacher and professional knowledge

The activity of the teacher requires different forms of knowledge to be mobilised: academic knowledge, knowledge about curricula and knowledge about education (Deauvieau, 2004):
- academic, or learned knowledge, refers to school disciplines and scientific knowledge;
- knowledge about curricula deals with appropriating teaching programmes and official instructions (mediation, reconstruction).

These two types of knowledge are dependent upon the way of teaching and the magisterial posture of the teacher. But there is another important dimension: that of being able to manage school interaction and teaching processes. This is what J. Deauvieau refers to as knowledge about education.
Without going back over the list of competences mentioned above, these forms of knowledge often intersect with the professional competences expected from teacher training, especially from in-service training. So D. Houpert (2005) gives, as one of the competences that can be built up in in-service training, those of the knowledgeable teacher (one who mobilises scientific knowledge, masters didactics and transverse forms of knowledge).

In a paper on the topic "heterogeneity and equality", Dupriez & Cornet (2003) recommend training teachers in, and making them aware of cultural diversity in the way they relate to knowledge and to school, and then pursuing with teachers and teacher trainers research into the diversity of relationships to knowledge and to the most effective teaching strategies with pupils from underprivileged backgrounds.

These approaches, related to the curriculum and to different forms of knowledge, need obviously to be put into perspective with aspects that have to do with the competences or teacher-pupil relationships mentioned above. J.-F. Marcel (2006) suggests envisioning the social object that professional competences are from the standpoint of the teacher's professional development. In this context, Marcel has studied the mobilisation of professional knowledge in teaching practices: construction, identification, dissemination and capitalisation of knowledge.

This viewpoint very quickly leads to a question about the notion of "collective": in the present context of knowledge circulation, can the teacher unilaterally build up his professional knowledge and get a grasp of his relationship with the pupil if collective work seems to him to be imposed?

But there is nothing new about restrictions. As P. Meirieu says, each teacher experiences on a daily basis the tension between the imagined educatability of each of his pupils and the freedom that he runs up against. Why should this be so? Because classroom organisation and programmes have always provided the rigid shell into which teachers and learners have had to fit. Because the teacher's determination to pass on knowledge runs up against the individual freedom of those who are first and foremost children and teenagers before being pupils. Because the teacher has to compromise between how he sees democracy and what others involved in the educational system may impose upon him.

Teacher and pupil

The teacher is no longer at the centre of the class and the pupil is no longer passive: the priority now is for learner-centred learning (the days of the teacher having a powerful influence over his class are over).

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards heterogeneity

According to P. Stadler, the fact that teachers as a body are culturally more and more homogeneous and classes are culturally more and more heterogeneous is leading to a widening of the gulf that separates teacher from pupil. Learners are immersed in very different family environments from each other, such that their identity and relations with school are also very specific. For teachers, this implies the need to recognise these specific features and adapt what they do to the many different contexts to which their learners belong (Pourtois & Desmet, 2003).

If a teacher is told that his pupils are good, he will be more motivated: *"a teacher who has an extremely fighting spirit as regards the problem of inequality, who is convinced that it is possible to implement a positive teaching strategy with weak pupils and in a weak class, risks (sic!) bringing about a positive result and being effective. The question is not the way the pupils are grouped together as such, but both the teacher's attitude and the pedagogical quality that is developed in teachers' judgements of their pupils"* (Crahay, in CEF, 2003).

To cope with heterogeneity, teachers must be as heterogeneous as the system they are managing. They must take on board the fact that knowledge can be tackled and built up in different ways. P. Meirieu underlines the difficulty of getting teachers to speak about what they do in class: how to "*make them realise that they each have different ways of teaching*", "*that they are themselves conveyors of the heterogeneity of the teaching team in front of that of their pupils*" (Meirieu, in CEF, 2003).

The analysis of how French primary and secondary teachers see things in 2005-2006, shows overall agreement. Two thirds of primary and secondary teachers put down "major learning difficulties" to the pupil's environment. Almost 45 % believe that, apart from after-school tutoring (to help pupils who have fallen behind, who fail to grasp the basics, or have difficulties in understanding), the biggest need is to regain self-esteem (fight against agitation and apathy). Finally, confronted with their pupils' learning difficulties, they can change what they do (47% in primary schools and 34% in secondary schools), how they relate to the pupil (32% in secondary schools and 18% in primary schools), but some are relatively pessimistic (12% in primary schools and 14% in secondary schools) and 10% claim they have not changed either what they do or how they relate to their pupils (Do, in DEPP, 2007).

Democracy, ethics and ethnicity

Without wishing to condemn any particular group of teachers, it might be interesting to use a study carried out by an Argentinian researcher into the xenophobia of teachers in Argentina, Peru and Uruguay (Tenti Fanfani, 2003) to examine teachers' views and attitudes, in the classroom or in their relationships with pupils, and the types of discriminations these can lead to. E. Tenti Fanfani suggests that teachers be better prepared for multiculturalism (through a training programme), for more widespread education in public-spiritedness, for an overhaul of teaching resources (unequivocal content of course books), and for the fight against exclusion from knowledge (drawing up success strategies for all) and against discrimination within the school (in what happens every day, the fight against violence and the introduction of school councils). Some of his proposals have been written into official texts or practices. Does this mean that discrimination or lack of understanding have really disappeared?

An analysis by V. Franchi (2004) shows that they have not. His work is based on research and action carried out on the subject of school violence in Lyon in priority education schools. The questions asked dealt with what was said about violence in the school and what they find offensive in their professional practice. Discussions dealt with how those responsible evolve and are identified, the typology of violence and the poor reputation of the school. Teachers are fatalistic about the institution, their colleagues and their pupils (comments repeated in the staffroom). From the standpoint of teacher practices and classroom management or teaching, teachers were critical of the composition and the dynamics of the class groups (too heterogeneous), of violence between pupils (conflict management), of the violence felt in the relationship with pupils, of the feeling of having less control and less professional efficiency, of the "difficulty of working to help pupils progress" and finally of the fact of working in an ethnically-influenced social and cultural context.

Bu does this work context lead to discriminatory practices? Schools which deal with a large proportion of children from immigrant backgrounds are more attentive to the special needs of these pupils. Any discrimination would be more likely to involve adopting practices tending towards cultural assimilation (abandoning the cultural heritage: instruction is acculturation) and the need for teachers to adapt to the cultural diversity of their pupils, for which they are not prepared.

For V. Franchi, having to adapt in this way may throw the teacher's professional identity off balance and lead to ethnicisation and a discourse on otherness which will enable the teacher to throw off feelings of guilt with regard to his inability to change the social and educational reality.

An American point of view, based on research into pupils with learning difficulties, could reconcile the notion of the efficient teacher and the "culturally aware" teacher (McKinney, Flenner, Frazie & Abrams, 2006). These four researchers have taken the characteristics of this efficient and responsible teacher as listed by Banks & Haberman, from an article on the needs of underprivileged pupils:

− This teacher must be aware of the complex nature of ethnicity and the stages of cultural identity and how it works, have democratic values and attitudes, a clear pluralist ideology, be familiar with studies on ethnicity (incorporate multiculturism into the curriculum) and an aptitude for understanding the multi-ethnic viewpoints of his pupils (Banks, 2001);

- The teacher must constantly pursue strategies so all children can meet with success; he must take responsibility for this, must put ideas into practice; he must develop a better rapport with the pupils; he must make allowances for the demands of bureaucracy; he must accept that he is fallible (know how to recognize his mistakes); he must endure the challenges and crises of urban settings; he must have organisational competences; he must believe that success is met by hard work and not just by ability; he must respect pupils' autonomy and individual differences; he must give preference to active rather than direct teaching; he must make pupils feel welcome and "educatable" (Haberman, 2005).

In the literature about the teacher's stance in relation to his pupils, the question is sometimes asked about the tension arising between the teacher's culture and the pupil's culture. In brief, the teacher comes from a privileged, or middle-class background, and is trained to teach in a way that reproduces his own values. When he is confronted with pupils from underprivileged classes, he is greatly at a loss to cope. How can this gap be erased? E. & C. Mangez (2007) have attempted to find answers to the question: "pedagogy: is it all to do with social class?". Should pupils in difficulty be offered "visible", structured pedagogy that consists of applying programmes, and hiding nothing from the pupils, but that may be detrimental to the pupils' desire to learn; or "invisible pedagogy, the aims of which the pupil is unaware of, but which moves forward by objectives or successive tasks, which is more motivating but which might mean that he has a hard time being objective about knowledge? In the absence of a clear-cut answer to these questions, the authors deduce that the different approaches (sociology or educational sciences) "invite a rigorous, analytical, interdisciplinary approach, and not a standardised one, to pedagogy".

❑ **See also**
- Lebrun Nicole (2006). « Représentations de la notion de démocratie chez des groupes de futurs enseignants du primaire ». *Canadian Journal of Education*, vol. 29, n° 3, p. 635-649.
- Gauthier Clermont, Mellouki M'hammed & Simard Denis *et al.* (2004). *Interventions pédagogiques efficaces et réussite scolaire des élèves provenant de milieux défavorisés. Une revue de littérature*. Laval : Chaire de recherche du Canada en formation à l'enseignement.
- Banks J.A. (2001). *Cultural Diversity and Education*. Boston : Allyn and Bacon.
- Haberman M. (2005). *Star teachers: The ideology and best practice of effective teachers of diverse children and youth in poverty*. The Haberman Educational Foundation.

The teacher and the class

Classroom organisation, which greatly structures the teacher's work, giving him independence and plenty of room to manoeuvre, runs up against educational policies that aim to install a new professional model (mixed-ability teaching, remedial work, team work, etc.), which is somewhat in contradiction with the simple and stable arrangement of the class group (Maroy, 2005).

Recent research into classroom management approaches the teacher's work from different angles. This is research into the teacher's stance (corporal and verbal) and pedagogy (individualised, mixed-ability, frontal). But the cause for concern for many teachers is problems of attention, motivation and discipline.

For a brief presentation of the theoretical and methodological approaches to human activity applied to teaching, the summary by S. Casalfiore (2000) can be consulted. In this, she enumerates the various on human rationality:
- some postulate that human rationality is powerful and able to represent the word without bias, objectively and in totality;
- others consider that human rationality is by its nature limited. Perceptive and cognitive systems are not developed enough for man to be able to directly and fully understand a world that is too complex; they lead individuals to mediatise their understanding of the world by building and using truncated mental representations;
- still others encore base their argument on a poor if not inexistent individual and de-contextualised rationality:there exists a social rationality that is emerging from, and operating in human interactions.

With this latter approach, the social and material context of the teaching activity becomes a subject for research in its own right, and the analysis of the discourse is "an underlying process of the teaching activity". It is from this standpoint that S. Casalfiore introduces the notions of action and situated cognition (limited rationality and rationality situated in interaction). The teacher's activity in the classroom can be conceived of as a dynamic system of actions that emerge from contact with the material and social environment of the class". *"The situation, as a space in which meaning is elaborated, is built up by the individual through his action. The activity and the situation are, then, elaborated mutually"*.

C. Gauthier (1997) has attempted to build up a knowledge base for teaching activities from research work. Teacher's behaviour can be categorised according to their work in the classroom, the time dimension of their activity (before, during and after the action) and the function of these different kinds of behaviour determine from two dimensions: classroom management and subject management.
These kinds of behaviour take into account contextual constraints and contingencies: explicit constraints ordered by the educational authority (programmes, evaluations), organisation rules defined on an *a priori* basis (place, time), environmental contingencies related to the establishment (premises, teaching materials) and to the school population (class size, amount of homogeneity).
This environmental contingencies are said to be "legitimate" constraints related to educational aims, but also to the special interactive nature of the class context (how pupils put up resistance to the teacher's proposals, for example) (Tardif, Lessard & Dubet, 1999).

For S. Casalfiore, the principle of a situated teacher activity makes it possible to put forward the hypothesis that the effective activity of teachers is structured more by operational objectives, defined according to local circumstances than by goals that have been fixed in advance. If we add the idea that the teacher's activity in the classroom is a contribution to a collective activity and that the teacher's activity undergoes transformation as he acquire experience, then it is not possible to construct an ideal professional identity model. But the research questions posed by this model show the need for a rigorous understanding of the class system.

❑ **See also**

- Casalfiore Stefania ([2002]). « Les petits conflits quotidiens dans les classes de l'enseignement secondaire : 1. nature et sens des transgressions sociales à l'origine des conflits dans la dyade enseignant-élève ». *Cahier de recherche du Girsef*, n° 16.
- Casalfiore Stefania ([2003]). « Les petits conflits quotidiens dans les classes de l'enseignement secondaire : 2. Nature des stratégies de résolution ». *Cahier de recherche du Girsef*, n° 20.
- Casalfiore Stefania ([2003]). « Les petits conflits quotidiens dans les classes de l'enseignement secondaire : 3. Conception de l'autorité chez les élèves ». *Cahier de recherche du Girsef*, n° 21.

The example of doing a school year over again

An example of the hiatus between politicians and teachers, between research results and the teachers' stance with regard to pupils can be seen in the way teachers react to different policies regarding the fight against making pupils do a school year again.

Both in Belgium and in France it is known that many studies have shown that doing a school year again is an inefficient way of combating learning difficulties – it is even said to be counter-productive for primary school pupils. But teachers – or at least some of them – seem to be in favour of having pupils repeat a school year.

How can this situation be explained?

H. Draelants ([2006]) explains it by suggesting that doing a school year over again is used as a solution to immediate problems encountered by teachers, i.e.: "*managing the heterogeneity of the class, the need to sort the pupils within schools; the strategic and symbolic positioning of the school in relation to neighbouring schools; keeping order within the class; maintaining the teachers' professional autonomy*".

In France, T. Troncin ([2005]) has studied the phenomenon of repeating a school year at the end of the *cours préparatoire* (first year of primary school) from a sample of 3 600 children. In addition to analysing the effects on society, the family and on fairness in general), he presents the views of the different parties involved (parents, children and teachers). In his thesis, he attempts to establish whether there is any consensus about the justification of having pupils do a year again. To achieve this, he brought together the results of work on the subject which, while rather dated, does provide an international perspective.

The way teachers see the issue is as follows: "*Most teachers justify their decision by anticipating a positive outcome to the course later on, on pedagogical grounds; doing a year again is seen as an extra chance for pupils to master the required skills, fill gaps in their knowledge or consolidate those aspects that had led to them to fail the year the first time round, as an opportunity to get back confidence and reconcile them with learning. Doing a year again is not intended as a punishment but as a positive measure and an opportunity for those pupils who are judged able to take advantage of it*".

However, while doing a year again remains a measure that is frequently used to attempt to deal with pupils with learning difficulties, the file by DEPP (Direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance) ([2007]), shows that 83 % of teachers questioned in primary and secondary schools feel it is ineffective, preferring individualised after-school tutoring and personalised assistance.

What explanation can be given to cover such a contradiction between what people believe and what actually happens? "*Pedagogical action is not based only upon pedagogical arguments, and in many cases, pedagogical practices must be compromised in view of their signification and implications in a broader social environment*" (Dupriez & Cornet, [2003]).

The teacher outside the classroom

The social dimension of classroom management cannot be absolved from a collective one. The following paradox is to be witnessed today: teachers are aware that teamwork is necessary or useful, they declare that they do work as a team, or regret not being able to do so, but at the same time they put up resistance to any prescribed collaboration (one only needs to see how interdisciplinary approaches such as discovery learning are received in secondary schools).

The review *Recherche et formation* has devoted an issue to this topic ([2005]): "From educational reforms to teachers' practices". It compares viewpoints between France, England and Quebec, in primary or secondary education. In this issue A. Barrère underlines the semantic inflation arising around the collective work of teachers.

❑ **See also**

- Gaussel Marie ([2007]). « Leadership et changements éducatifs ». *Lettre d'information de la VST*, n° 24, p. 1-12.
- Marcel Jean-François & Piot Thierry (dir.) ([2005]). *Dans la classe, hors de la classe : L'évolution de l'espace professionnel des enseignants*. Lyon : Institut national de recherche pédagogique (INRP).

To go further… or elsewhere…

Analyses of practices

The aim of this letter was not to sum up research into teachers' practices. A [resource file] produced in February 2006 and a [thematic bibliography] will help to locate research and analysis dealing with these practices (a further file will be produced by the VST, in September 2007).

A recent symposium on "The effects of teachers' practices on pupils' learning" by the Pôle Centre-Est des IUFM, (centre for the Centre/East region of teacher training establishments) [2007] has shown that analysis of teachers' practices rarely included an analysis of their effects on learning.

In February 2007, the Quebec review *Formation et profession* published a special report entitled *Des pratiques d'enseignement en évolution* (Changing practices in teaching). In this, Yves Lenoir underlines the awareness of the importance of teachers' practices in teaching/learning processes: "*we cannot hope to improve and adapt school to tomorrow's society […] without first counting on the expertise and professional commitment of teachers*".

P. Maupant ([2007](#)) identifies three research models that analyse teachers' practices: practices as declared by teachers, the class situation or effective practices. In the first case, analyses are based on the analysis of discourse on practices (in the USA, a significant amount of work refers to "*narratives*" in schools in certain districts which deal with; stress, practices, collaboration); in the second, it is mainly a question of the master effect (with the risks that the teaching work be based on a prescriptivist conception, within a theoretical framework that P. Maupant has underlined the epistemological weakness of); the third model attempts to identify and understand the teacher's activity in terms of professional competences to be acquired. With the aim of being used for training, research of this type is concerned with updating a professional database.

The teacher's work cannot be viewed solely from the use made of knowledge and resources, with tools such as programmes and manuals or teaching methods. Decisions taken on a daily basis by teachers go (or should go) beyond the issue of learning. This may be the common ground between didactics and ergonomic psychology, as R. Goigoux suggests, but the problem will always be to take the class in hand, make the right mix of didactics, sociology and psychology and contextualise the teacher's work.

❑ **See also**

- Goigoux R. (2000). « Comprendre le travail enseignant pour mieux le transformer : les apports de la psychologie et de la didactique ». In DESCO. *L'analyse des besoins de formation des enseignants du premier degré*. Acts of the second national seminary on directing school education by the ministry of education. Paris : Ministère de l'Éducation nationale (diffusion CRDP de Versailles), p. 58-74.
- Rey Olivier ([2006](#)). « Qu'est-ce qu'une "bonne" recherche en éducation ? ». *Lettre d'information de la VST*, n° 18.

Teaching professionality and teacher training

This letter has skimmed over the problem issues of professionality, building and training for the teaching profession, but here too a previous *Lettre d'information de la VST* ([december 2005](#)) remains valid: it is accompanied by an updated [bibliography](#)

Finally, mention must be made of the annotated bibliography drawn up by I. Hextall, S. Gewirtz, A. Cribb & P. Mahony ([2007](#)), in the context of "Changing teacher roles, identities and professionalism", which includes a hundred or so texts published since January 2000.

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