

Function and role of the teacher

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Abstract:

The educational process is complex, involving a multitude of elements, and the teacher plays a decisive role in this process.

Giving a definition to the role of the teacher is a delicate task, as the term role requires an extensive analysis that goes beyond the scope of our study. In this context, we will focus on examining the teacher's function, though it too is affected by this complexity.

For this reason, we find it necessary to dedicate a section to clarifying the concept of the teacher's role, with the aim of removing any ambiguities. As is well known, the educational process is not, but one that continually evolves in response to changes in the scientific, cultural, political, and social spheres. The teacher's role, as an extension of this evolving field, must also adapt accordingly.

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1. In general education

In his analysis, Gilbert (1980) highlights this aspect: "It is undeniable that the teaching profession and its specific social mission are far from stable. In fact, the profession evolves, like many others, within a society that is itself in flux and subject, even during the calmest periods, to the push and pull between opposing groups" (p.9).

Teachers constantly have to adapt to more or less profound changes in ideologies, institutional structures, curricula, and assessment methods. However, while societal changes are evident, the education system as a whole is often characterized by inertia.

Rogers (1984) highlights the dissonance between the conservative role of the teacher and the external pressures stemming from changes in the surrounding world. For him, 'teaching or transmitting knowledge retains its meaning in an environment that does not change. This is why, for centuries, this function has not been called into question. But if there is one thing that is true about modern man, it is that he lives in an environment that is constantly changing' (p101). The role of the teacher has always been to preserve the values of the society in which he or she lives. However, in today's world, with the proliferation of diverse societies, there are no universal, or even widely recognised, value systems. Teachers are confronted with rapid and sometimes contradictory changes in ideologies, which generally lead to confusion and resistance to change. Examples of this abound in the literature. For example, Porcher (1974) states that 'teachers are legendarily unreceptive to proposed changes in pedagogy because the vast majority of them remain convinced that there is a universal value to pedagogy, independent of time and place' (p.23).

While there is now a pressing need to break away from outdated values that no longer align with the modern world, teachers continue to resist change, often resulting in a reliance on traditional methods. Consequently, tensions rise and numerous authors have offered recommendations. Louanchi (1987), for example, criticizes this approach: 'for too long,' she argues, 'the didactic function has been oversimplified, as a mere problem of transfer. The idea was to transfer knowledge from a full brain - the teacher's brain - into an empty brain - the pupil's brain' (p. 47). This vivid depiction bears a striking resemblance to the 'jug and pot' metaphor used by Rogers (1984) to describe the traditional teacher's role.

In the same vein, Lallez (1984) criticizes the teacher for having 'for a long time remained attached to this image: being the one who knows and who communicates his knowledge to those who do not; being the one who trains and teaches the rules to those who ignore them and abandon themselves to a totally anarchic spontaneity; being a scholar and a master, furnishing the mind and disciplining the intelligence' (p.450). Ferry (1974) recommends that 'in the classroom, the teacher no longer sees himself primarily as a transmitter of knowledge but increasingly as a facilitator. Giving pupils a voice, encouraging and supporting their process of appropriation, helping them to cooperate and to control themselves - all this is now an integral part of teachers' practice' (p.177).

What we are witnessing here is a shift from the function of 'transmission' to that of teacher leadership. From this perspective, Minder (1980) confirms, 'the educator will increasingly be called upon to leave his role as transmitter of knowledge and become an educational engineer, in other words, the person who organizes the contingencies of learning, the person who guides and controls the modification of behaviour' (p.10). Renouncing rigid imposition, eliminating comparative assessment of results, legitimising and reinforcing pupil autonomy: these seem to be the points of convergence for supporters of new methods. Reshaping the asymmetry of functions in terms of both knowledge and power between teachers and pupils: this is the dual perspective driving the innovative trend in teaching.

The advocates of the new school, and in particular those of non-directive teaching, see the teacher's participation in the classroom as contingent upon relinquishing their status as the holder of knowledge and the repository of power. Hannoun (1975, p.48) insists that 'the educator only has meaning insofar as he ends up becoming useless'. One of the essential aims of this school is to move towards the disappearance of the teacher's role in favor of self-management by the pupil.

More than just the transmission of knowledge, it appears from the various sources of information that the pedagogical relationship is gradually becoming central to the problem of pedagogy. Ardoino

(1971) is one of those who emphasize the importance of the human relationship: 'For us, the essential aspect of maturation lies in the establishment of the relationship, much more than in the effectiveness of the transmission of knowledge that generally accompanies it' (p. 407).

Minder (1980), on the other hand, views knowledge as a prerequisite for the educator's objectives. 'To ask questions about the child who is the subject of education and about the adult who is the goal of education—these are the two obligatory steps that every educator who is aware of his role must take and repeat regularly.

It is only after this double questioning that he will be able to choose his working methods and instruments' (p. 9).

Johnson and Bany (1985) emphasize the importance of the dynamics of interpersonal relationships within the classroom. They therefore focus their attention on communication and the assignment of tasks in order to transform pupils' behaviour. In their view, 'the teacher's role is to determine which tasks will lead to the desired changes' (p. 195). The teacher must then work to maintain the changed behaviour.

The imperatives of the curriculum often force the teacher to set aside objectives that are not directly relevant to the assessments required by administrative authorities. Abarca (1986) deplores the fact that 'the teacher, preoccupied as he is with content because the programme demands it—i.e. preoccupied with ensuring cognitive and psychomotor development—leaves the affective domain in the background' (p. 9).

Despite this rapid overview, we can see that the diversity of opinions sustains the confusion in which the teacher's role remains entangled. This contributes to the complexity of teaching, a complexity noted by the majority of those who have had to reflect on the subject. Notably, Birzea (1982), who believes that 'from the point of view of teaching, the teacher's role is more complicated; he is no longer simply a transmitter of knowledge, but he also defines objectives, establishes units of content, evaluates performance and corrects learning errors after each instructional exercise' (p.55).

2. In physical education

The physical education teacher is not immune to the influence of methodological and systematic approaches; the teaching of physical education has always been embedded and integrated into general education. As a result, physical education teaching as a profession is also subject to resistance to change.

In this regard, Marsenach (1982) emphasises the persistence of traditional teaching within the institution of physical education in France, despite the stated innovative intentions. She attributes this discrepancy to the limited impact of innovation on teacher training. As a result, teachers had no choice but to rely on traditional teaching, which, she describes as: 'a formalisation of a kind of spontaneous pedagogy: teaching what you know to others' (p.38).

Rauch (1978) addressing this subject, notes that 'without any procedure being put forward, the posture of the teacher is indicated from the outset: physical education is presented as a permanent adjustment of educational content intended to transform the child from a thoughtless and restless being into a component which, driven by the idea of effort and self-surpassing, will play its role with perfect regularity in a world motivated by the pursuit of progress.' (p.5).

Following in his footsteps, Carbonnel (1976) observes that teachers tend to focus their thinking 'on the what to do, represented by knowledge of the techniques of the different sports specializations, and at the very least, on the how to do it, what is commonly called pedagogy, i.e. all the teaching techniques, learning procedures and progressions conceived as an adaptation of know-how to the level of the pupil' (p.4).

However, theoretical concepts were generally in favour of so-called 'active' methods. Physical education teachers, like their colleagues in general education, wishing to take advantage of the positive effects of the new education, adopted the values associated with innovative ideas.

Baquet (1969) joins those who have valued the 'democratic' type of pedagogy, putting the theory of non-defectiveness and that of the traditional method back to back.

Between authoritarianism and laissez-faire, the proponents of this approach advocate for 'teacher-teacher' co-management in a democratic climate, with the pedagogical relationship based on mutual respect for the rights and duties of each of the protagonists. For them, '...rather than a pedagogy of interest, we need a pedagogy of decision and choice' (p.105).

Mosston (1966), who is rather rational, tends to favour the adoption of one teaching style or another depending on the requirements of the educational situation. His educational 'spectrum' is made up of eight styles, with the two extreme styles corresponding to the traditional command style and the non-directive creativity style. The first style focuses on the teacher and the subject, while the last emphasises the problem of identifying the problems to be solved by the child himself. Between these two styles, Mosston proposes six interim styles, recommending that the teacher opt for the style that corresponds to the educational context and the level of the pupil.

Similarly, Biddler (1966) distinguishes between teachers according to their ability to adopt several teaching strategies. He asserts that a teacher 'who can present, according to his purposes, a wide range of teaching styles is potentially capable of accomplishing much more than a teacher whose repertoire is relatively limited' (p.409).

Several models inspired by Mosston's theory (1966) have attempted to identify the different styles used by teachers (Grasha, 1994; Joyce, Weil and Showers, 1992; Mosston and Ashworth, 1990; Trigwell and Prosser, 1996). These authors mention the importance, for the teacher, of being able to use the style that best suits a specific learning situation. This implies that the teacher must be able to use several styles throughout his or her career.

Winnykamen (1991) also supports this view, stating that 'the teacher's role involves different dimensions of "transmission", "construction" and "relationship". The teaching function, in both its transmission/construction and relational dimensions, is part of an interactive process...'. (p.7).

The physical education teacher is therefore called upon to consider the school context in its broadest sense. They need to adapt at different levels of their teaching. These few reflections already make it possible to note the complexity of the role of the physical education teacher, since it calls upon both his or her ability to conceive and transmit knowledge and his or her ability to adapt to different levels of teaching. This complexity is exacerbated by the ambiguity of the teacher's role when confronted with the mismatch between the objectives that they themselves set for their teaching and those implicitly assigned by the school institution. This aspect is highlighted by research carried out on the status of the physical education teacher under the direction of Thomas (1983).

Despite the diversity of conceptions, there are nonetheless significant attempts to converge towards the teacher's function as a modifier of the student behaviour. 'Every teacher worthy of the name wishes to communicate, to transmit something, and ultimately, to modify the behaviour of the pupils entrusted to him/her' (Florence, 1986, p.138).

The objectives pursued by the physical education teacher are many: apart from the obvious physical ones, they are also cognitive, physiological, psycho-motor and even social. To achieve these aims, they have at their disposal means that have a highly positive valence compared with their colleagues in general education: physical activity.

To combat its marginalisation, physical education recognises the aims of global education as its own, with a clear desire to assimilate while at the same time asserting the specificity of these resources.

The wide range of general objectives assigned to this subject coincides with the wide range of teaching roles. These include :

- **The cognitive objective.** To enable the pupil to reflect on the subject taught in the A.P.S. through a relationship of knowledge relating to the content of the know-how. By consciously integrating knowledge, the pupil effectively participates in his own training.
- **The motor objective.** Teachers must also look after their pupils' motor development, covering their needs in terms of hygiene, strength training, flexibility, bodily expression and coordination. In short, all areas involving the body.
- **The social objective.** The third objective is social. It involves social integration, i.e. a combination of the search for self-assertion as an original individual (different from others) and the regulation of one's actions on those of others.

To achieve this threefold objective, teachers are advised to adopt an attitude halfway between 'authoritarianism' and 'laissez-faire'; two pitfalls to be avoided, with the democratic attitude the preferred option.

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