

LA IMPORTANCIA DE SER MAESTRO O MAESTRA EN ÉSTA ÉPOCA

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RESUMEN

Ser maestro o maestra ha sido siempre una tarea compleja, exigente y socialmente infravalorada. Originalmente, el término “maestro” designaba a quienes poseían sabiduría y humanidad excepcionales. Sin embargo, a lo largo del siglo XX, esta figura perdió prestigio y fue reemplazada en muchos contextos por “profesor”. A pesar de ello, el título de maestro aún representa un ideal educativo cargado de compromiso y vocación. En un mundo cada vez más complejo – marcado

por la desigualdad, la digitalización y cambios políticos y sociales – se espera del profesorado que garantice la equidad sin recursos, que eduque en valores, que innove y reflexione colectivamente. Esta labor, muchas veces invisibilizada, ha sido incluso perseguida en contextos autoritarios. Aun así, la profesión sigue atrayendo a jóvenes con esperanza. Recordar a aquellos maestros sensibles, creativos y comprometidos es un acto de justicia y memoria: la raíz del futuro.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Docencia, compromiso, transformación.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION IN THE PRESENT ERA

ABSTRACT

The teaching profession has long been associated with wisdom, responsibility, and social commitment. Historically, the term “teacher” signified someone of great knowledge and humanity, entrusted with educating others. Over the 20th century, this title lost prestige, replaced by “professor,” and accompanied by growing social and institutional challenges. Today, teachers face complex demands: they must ensure equity without sufficient resources, adapt to digital changes, embrace

curricular reforms, and address increasing student diversity. Despite the contradictions and pressures, many remain motivated by a sense of purpose. The profession demands collaboration, reflection, and ethical commitment. Teachers have often been voices of resistance and defenders of freedom. Honoring them means recognizing their past struggles and reimagining education as a collective, transformative endeavor for the future.

KEYWORDS: Teaching, commitment, transformation.

1 BE A TEACHER, BE A TEACHER

We're talking about schoolteachers. Society granted the title of teacher to people who achieved a supreme degree, a wisdom greater than that of others, and who were capable of transmitting it to others. Even today, in many countries, addressing someone as teacher is an honor bestowed only on people considered, due to their intelligence and humanity, to bring us new paths and new wisdom. And hence, schoolteacher. During the 20th century, the concept of "teacher" gradually lost this characteristic of wisdom and not only has it continued to enjoy low social prestige, but its name has also been lost; thus, since the last third of the century, we have spoken more often of professor and teacher. However, its use has never been lost, nor its vindication, and, just as rivers always return to their calm, today we continue to claim the title of schoolteacher as a symbol of a profession entrusted with an ambitious and difficult task: to educate the children of others, as tradition says, with the necessary wisdom and patience.

Being a teacher has always been a laborious and difficult task. In fact, teaching well is a difficult task. Although in the collective imagination, there is an idea that it is a simple job because it involves working with children or adolescents, with many holidays and vacations, and easy to do. It is true that educating children, and more recently, adolescents, has always been a complex task. Anyone who enters a classroom will see that facing the challenges is not a piece of cake; rather, it is a laborious task, one of increasing complexity, and also a patient endeavor, if done well. Patience is ultimately required to accept and address the diversity found in a classroom – diversity in terms of previous experiences and expectations, desires and projections, feelings and abilities. And, throughout this century, society has become more complex, and therefore, the work of teachers has also taken on even greater challenges of complexity (and sometimes, perplexity due to rules and regulations).

The radical and dizzying change in scientific, social, and educational structures, the rise in poverty, the pandemic, the accelerated evolution of society in its structures, the digital context, the different ways of organizing family life, the long-standing economic underfunding of education, and the inevitable shift in the current ways of thinking, feeling, and acting of new generations have changed the role of educational institutions and the functions of teachers. And they are required to promote equity without resources, which implies ensuring that everyone has access to the same opportunities, taking into account individual differences and the specific challenges they face. Unlike equality, which treats everyone equally, equity recognizes and addresses existing inequalities to achieve fair results. But how? Today, faced with this panorama, teachers navigate many crossroads, some of them pleasant, sometimes hostile.

But now we must add other issues that reinforce this complexity and perplexity we were discussing. We are referring to changes linked to the macro context and the evolution of values and social conceptions. We would also have to talk about changes in the classroom context, with all the ramifications and curricular and methodological changes they entail, and finally, important and constant changes in the political and administrative context. As a consequence, the demands

placed on teachers are increasing, perhaps also in part due to the gradual loss of responsibility by families in education and socialization, which has been forgotten. These demands, in addition to being numerous, are also sometimes contradictory. Teachers must ensure the acquisition of knowledge without neglecting values and attitudes. Now, suddenly, and without much explanation, competencies are now the structuring axis of the curriculum, of teacher planning, and intervention. And, in reality, we still don't know if the new curricula represent a profound change or another way of describing what was already happening.

It is also important for teachers to learn methods and strategies consistent with new teaching approaches, to possess interpersonal skills to interact with students, families, and colleagues (an increasing number of them). They must also possess the desire and sufficient skills to master the most advanced information and communication technologies, and the art of integrating them into the curriculum and classrooms without disruption or turning them into an occasional, anecdotal appendage. Educational reforms continue to follow the ebb and flow of ideologies, leaving teachers on the sidelines, barely considering how to operate in the classroom and without rigorously addressing the issue of teacher professionalization and their initial and ongoing training.

The teaching profession leads to an invisible daily routine because it requires a difficult balance between experiencing the reality of what surrounds us and incorporating it into our daily lessons; remembering the past, because children reconstruct their own intelligence based on what they were raised on; and projecting into the future with the intention that new generations can create a better world. And this complexity applies to all teachers, from those with young children whose roles are closer to life-supporting, to those with older students whose roles are to prepare them for everyday or professional life. All experience the stress of transitioning from the old role of "school teacher" to the new roles required by society, which sometimes involve significant external demands.

But despite this increasing complexity, it remains a job that inspires many young people. However, there are also circumstances that make many teachers want to leave the profession.

Teacher teams have long been breaking with the traditional professional culture that has been passed down to the profession. A professional culture tainted by many elements that has created communication barriers between a group of people who work side by side, still separated by structural and mental barriers that need to be eliminated. And an endemic culture that has placed excessive value on professional status, academic content, personal improvisation, and basic empiricism, which impacts the professional aspect. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a moral and professional rearmament to improve the educational process of innovation and training, promote processes of collective reflection, and assume collective institutional commitments, combating a work biased toward individual merit, promotion, or competitiveness.

The teaching community needs to participate jointly in innovation and training processes linked to the institution's overall projects to assume greater leadership in their work. This leadership must emerge from debate and the construction of collective foundations to move

toward a more collaborative culture. And this is the importance of those who work in teaching. Knowing how to respect and motivate them so they can build alternatives.

Like all professions dedicated to the expansion of culture and the development of intelligence, and therefore of freedom, teachers are not a uniform group, where everyone does and thinks the same. But as a group, they have gone through very difficult stages in their shared journey. The act of teaching generates a certain way of seeing social reality, of reflecting and encouraging others to reflect on what is happening, and for this reason, many teachers have been persecuted during the 20th century, punished, humiliated, and even exiled and killed for defending their ideas or for teaching them to others who thought differently. And, as expected, they have seen their schools closed. We recall in this regard that the 20th century was the cruelest in all of human history, when there were the most wars, large and small, and when torture was most sophisticated. And one of the groups that has suffered this cruelty has been teachers as defenders of culture and freedom.

But it hasn't always been this way. Like any group, not all teachers in all eras have behaved the same way. The very task of teaching—thinking and teaching how to think—leads to the acceptance of diverse ideas, but throughout history, many teachers have not. Every moment, every historical era, has had its own way of viewing the work of a teacher (traditional, revolutionary, religious, conservative, authoritarian, propagandist, etc.). The components of the teaching profession have always been the same (school, children, notebooks, homework, classrooms, blackboard, etc.), but not the scale of values we use to set priorities. This has varied throughout history. In short, eras shape men and women, and also the way we view education and teaching.

We do remember, however, other teachers, who esteemed us because they esteemed their profession (even though most teachers hid their feelings); teachers who made an effort to speak the punished language, who found ways to circumvent prohibitions, who organized outings to show us the world outside the classroom walls, who produced newspapers with small printing presses, who organized class assemblies to listen and teach how to listen; or simply teachers who tried to make long, tedious winter afternoons more pleasant and who knew that a word spoken at the right moment was worth more than an entire treatise on pedagogy. It is the memory of the school teacher (first or second grade), an educator who possesses educational sensitivity (and often a large dose of idealism) and who seeks new ways to better educate children. The best tribute we can offer them is to remember them. Memory is the root of the future .

2 TEACHING PROFESSION AND SOCIAL IMAGE: MUCH WORK TO BE DONE.

Being a teacher isn't just about physically showing up at school, teaching lessons, and assigning homework. When we were children, we thought of teachers as strict, serious people. We didn't imagine them to be like our parents (unless they were also teachers). We didn't realize they could have a "normal" life like our families.

And of course they did have a complex life. Beyond the stage and the blackboard, many teachers worked for culture and for the people. In many towns and city neighborhoods, where life

is more intimate, these teachers are well remembered. There have been times when many teachers practiced their profession all day and part of the night, and for the entire population in their surroundings. For these teachers, their profession was their life. There have been times when, for many teachers, political and social awareness combined with a commitment to teaching.

Nor must we forget the long, dark night of dictatorships in many countries. They introduced into the classroom a concept of the teacher that was bland, authoritarian, conservative, steeped in religious and ideological fundamentalism, where resignation and punishment were the order of the day in schools. But many teachers also resisted, both in the educational and social and political fields, and sought the most precious treasure of education: freedom. They believed, like so many teachers, that being a teacher is more than just teaching children; that they had to engage with the environment and with people, carrying out political and social work with the population. Although circumstances have changed today, the conception of the teacher as a social agent of the territory not only remains valid, but has also grown considerably. One of the most important roles of the 21st century is that of the teacher as an important catalyst for culture and community.

Although everyone is aware that teachers do not have a monopoly on knowledge and that today's society shares its educational role with very powerful agents (television, environment, family, networks, Internet, etc.), many teachers continue, outside of their specific work, participating in NGOs, doing cooperation work, collaborating in neighborhood and teacher associations, participating in summer and winter schools of the Pedagogical Renewal Movements and many other pedagogical, cultural and training activities.

Aside from salary issues, teachers have always earned the respect of many parents who sought help or advice. Being a teacher has always been, socially, a profession worthy of respect from the people, but perhaps not so much from those who govern and make the laws.

And one of the most important changes has been their training. From a limited, non-university-level initial training, where one entered as a child and graduated as a teenager, and where the teacher knew "a little more than the children" to an initial training that changed throughout the 20th century, becoming a university-based initial teacher training program, with studies appropriate to the socio- psychological and pedagogical knowledge that advanced so much during the last century. Despite all this, not all of the demands made regarding initial training over the last fifteen years have been achieved.

Little remains of the training that permeated the professional lives of thousands of teachers at the end of the 20th century. At that time, a significant number of teachers turned to training seeking answers, ideas, and suggestions that, in the form of recipe books, would help them deal with the incessant problems that arose in the classroom. However, on many occasions, these suggestions, the product of academic research or regulations, only helped teachers comply with a series of formal requirements and, in essence, reproduce a teaching approach reconstructed from the outside. Educational problems continued to persist, and teacher disbelief in training increased rapidly. This has led to a profound transformation of training models and methodologies. We are now giving way to training based on individual and group reflection, peer exchange, processes of

inquiry and cooperative research, the formation of global interactive networks and professional learning communities, dialogue, observation, and storytelling. However, there is still a long way to go.

3 OLD AND NEW EDUCATIONAL FUNCTIONS: TOWARDS THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

The roles of school teachers, and even those of students, have changed over time. Just like the world around us. From the old roles of instructing children in the four basics and learning to read and write, we have moved on to a more comprehensive, complete education that encompasses all aspects of children's lives: physical, intellectual, social, and so on. Teachers are no longer those people who taught the basics to gain access to culture with a single textbook for all subjects. Instead, they have become education professionals, where social issues are very important. The social reality within educational institutions reflects the conflicts experienced today in the family, in relationships, in the professional world, in the mainstream media, in political systems, etc., and teachers take on new educational roles and the challenge of staying up-to-date on developments in the scientific and social fields.

Schools are changing, and teachers must keep pace. It's possible that, in the long run, many of the things taught in schools over time can be learned outside the walls of a classroom. We cannot face the future without teaching and learning the complexity of being a citizen and the diverse sensibilities in which it is embodied: democratic, social, supportive, egalitarian, intercultural, and environmental, and this will be learned in school. And it's possible that the task of teaching, in some places, will be carried out amidst endemic poverty, or with children who, because they were born in a certain place, are condemned to social exclusion. It's no longer possible for education alone to combat social exclusion in a world where many children are at risk of being excluded from the social system. Teachers need other socializing bodies to get involved, help them, and spread the same message. Therefore, one of the new roles of teachers is to work side by side with the community. And in this society, many important aspects will remain that can only be learned in schools, including how to be a citizen who respects himself and others, whoever they may be, and also his environment. Respect and tolerance will be important to develop in children, and school teachers will once again play a fundamental role in this world that is being built day by day.

These are changes that have impacted the profession. Working from isolated classrooms, we have gradually shifted to team teaching. Today, one cannot be a teacher without teamwork. Relational and participatory models are essential in the teaching profession. Teaching today demands collaborative work, which is essential to improve the educational work of teachers, the organization of educational institutions, and student learning. Today, a shared sense of avoiding one of the great evils of teaching is gaining strength: isolation, cellular functioning, or "school cellularism", where members of the educational community adopt behaviors and work habits that prioritize individualism, a lack of solidarity, exaggerated or misunderstood autonomy, and privacy.

Above all, there has been a shift to a reflection on the ethical, relational, collegial, attitudinal, and emotional aspects of teachers, which go beyond the purely technical and “objective” aspects that predominated for almost the entire century. These are increasingly essential topics in today’s schools and in the new role of teachers.

The teaching profession is taking on a more relational, culturally-contextual, and communal character, where interaction between colleagues and all those connected to the community becomes more important. The 21st century is shaping a new way of teaching, as teachers must actively and critically participate in their context and transmit to future citizens’ values and forms of behavior that are democratic, egalitarian, and respectful of cultural and social diversity, the environment, and so on.

We are no longer in the last third of the 20th century, where so much progress was made. We are in the 21st century. These are different times for education, the teaching profession, and training. Today, education focuses on developing analytical and comprehension skills, solving real-life problems, personal development, fostering critical thinking, etc., and neglects instruction in knowledge. The relationship between teacher and student has also changed; now, the student ceases to be a mere recipient and becomes an active part of the teaching-learning process. The teacher is no longer the “know-it-all” but the guide who accompanies and learns alongside the students. There are still teachers who boast about their own work, without knowing for sure whether their students have learned, and whether they have done so well and in a meaningful, lasting way. There is a growing need to work to attract students’ attention, to awaken their desire to learn, to read, to study; and motivate them to seek out what is necessary and important to continue learning, growing, and evolving.

In this century, it seems as if something is missing to regain momentum. We must advance further in the realm of ideas and political practices to understand what a teaching profession and training based on freedom, citizenship, and democracy mean. The teaching profession must break with the way of thinking that leads to analyzing progress and education in a linear way, preventing the integration of other ways of teaching, learning, organizing, seeing other social identities, other professions, other cultural expressions, and listening to each other and other voices, marginalized or not.

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