

Educational Reform

Pre-Service Training

UNESCO's World education report tells us that, in 1995, there were more than 53 million people teaching throughout the world, of whom half were at the primary level and one-third at the secondary. Since that time, everything suggests that this number has continued to grow. This is, first, because education is still developing in some countries where access to education has been limited and, secondly, because the demand for lifelong education is on the increase, linked to advances in social development. However, beyond this quantitative growth, we are at present witnessing a calling into question of the teacher's role.

The teacher's new role

After a long period during which teachers had been relegated to an inferior role, not only from the point of view of their working conditions, but also from that of teaching itself, we are today observing a significant upward re-evaluation of their function and their role. Numerous presentations have stressed the fact that teachers are not only dispensers of knowledge but also act as guides who lead the pupils to discover, organize and manage information. To achieve this, they must be able to relate easily to the pupils. In the role of partner, teachers help them to seek out, organize and arrange their knowledge. Of course, they must promote the acquisition of basic skills — mastery of reading, writing and arithmetic. But they must also make young people aware of their surroundings and encourage harmony between the school and the community. They must be agents who transmit culture and knowledge, and assist pupils in realizing that they belong to the world community by encouraging, for example, the development of creative attitudes and a critical approach.

To achieve these tasks, teachers should constantly pay attention to their personal development, and particularly to their knowledge and teaching skills. They should also be aware of the values and attitudes on which the smooth functioning of human society depends, and play an active role in community and social life. They should also know how to advise pupils individually and possess a range of teaching techniques suitable for different situations. Nowadays, when the school is no longer reserved for a limited number of privileged children, teachers must be able to turn their attention to a school population which is very

varied from the intellectual, cultural and social points of view.

It is true that much is asked of the teacher. 'Too much' say some of those who cannot see how the majority of countries — and not only developing countries where the teaching profession is badly paid and sometimes dangerous — can possibly introduce such measures. It is for this reason that a global analysis of the question should be conducted, beginning with the recruitment and pre-service training of teachers.

Who chooses the teaching profession today ?

The answer prevailing in most regions of the world is that the teaching profession does not attract the most talented young people and it constitutes, in many cases, a transitory activity in the process of searching for a more prestigious employment.

The importance and the dimensions of this phenomenon are not the same everywhere. However, there is a general consensus about recognizing the existence of the problem and the necessity of tackling it urgently. The teachers who will be active for at least the first part of the twenty-first century are those young people who are now in teacher training institutes. Consequently, it is now that one must act if one wants to guarantee good quality education for the next century. The regional documents prepared as a basis for the debates at the forth-fifth session of the International Conference on Education (Geneva, 1996) provide warning signals which must be heeded. They all agree in stating that teaching is an activity that is not particularly attractive from the perspective of social status: "Not many people want to be teachers. Brighter students and high achievers opt for others professions" (Africa); "Despite the fact that many attempts have been made, only a small number of academically able students want to become teachers" (Asia-Pacific); "The Arab teachers still do not enjoy adequate socio-economic status which attracts qualified people to the teaching profession" (Arab States). Incentives to attract talented young people to the teaching profession can be very varied and may depend on each cultural, economic and social context. However, it must be remembered that, for many years, specialists in this field have recommended paying attention not only to the intellectual qualifications of future teachers but also to the characteris-

tics of their personalities.

If the role of teacher is to achieve a true professional status, it will be necessary to be more demanding as far as recruitment and training are concerned.

The matter of teacher training

The second step, after the choice of career, is pre-service training. In this phase, all diagnoses indicate that the most significant problem lies in the important gulf between training and the actual demands of carrying out the job in an efficient and innovative manner. Teacher-training programmes are usually remote from the actual problems encountered in the teaching of socially disadvantaged pupils, such as multi-level or multi-cultural classes, teaching in marginal areas, the teaching of writing, reading and arithmetic, resolving conflicts, etc. The pedagogical methods taught in initial training often do not correspond either to the principles that teachers are supposed to apply in their work; more importance is attributed to purely academic training instead of observation and innovative practices; priority is given to personal training rather than to teamwork, and there is more emphasis on purely cognitive aspects than on affective ones.

The customary recommendation in the 1950s and 1960s was to raise the initial training of teachers to the level of higher education. Many countries created higher pedagogical universities or teacher-training institutes. Although this is necessary, experience has shown that this measure is in no way sufficient. A mere increase in the number of years of teacher training does not result in an increase in the quality of training for the profession. In many cases, passing from training in the traditional middle-level teachers' college to training in their education has led to a decline in the ability to teach. Specific training to teach reading and writing or arithmetic has tended to disappear and dilute itself in general preparation for literature or mathematics. According to some surveys carried out in developed countries, a significant percentage of new primary or secondary teachers think that they have not been well prepared to teach reading or to function in marginal social areas. They are not satisfied either with the training offered by universities or higher teacher-training institutes and, inversely, look more favourably upon the train-

ing provided to their colleagues who graduated from teachers' colleges.

What is the answer ?

The International Conference on Education noted that a successful review of the teaching profession depends upon an overall policy, of which one of the principal elements would be raising the image of the profession among young students, and particularly among the most able of them. Since the profession is not particularly attractive from the point of view of its social status, salary and career perspectives, there is a need to offer incentive measures to those likely to choose a teaching career and to encourage qualified people working in other professions to convert themselves into teachers.

Since it is necessary to develop the ability of self-examination among teachers and to renew their training continuously, pre-service training should pay more attention to what we call today learning to learn. Pre-service training should also be more closely related to the actual needs and problems of the school. The setting up of workshops for the exchange of ideas and discussions is therefore most desirable, as much between colleagues as with people working in other professions, especially experienced teachers and researchers working in their particularly fields of interest. Such exchanges would also avoid pre-service training from becoming rapidly overtaken by events.

It is easy to see that the situation is not clear. This is particularly true given the actual situation prevailing in developing countries: the consequences of structural adjustment policies; the rise in poverty; the continued existence of malnutrition and under-nourishment; the extraordinary growth of urbanization; as well as the circumstances existing in industrialized countries: an increase in migratory movements; unemployment; and the effects of introducing new technologies in production and management systems.

It is evident that this fundamental reform of the teaching profession, involving higher quality pre-service training for its participants, will not be a short-term undertaking. However, if the objectives are not readily achieved, they do have the merit of channelling the educational professions towards veritable projects of social cohesion giving new enthusiasm to those thinking of making it their career.

(UNESCO Educational Press)