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Despite the lack of positive image and credibility teachers claim to suffer from, teaching seems to enjoy much higher public recognition than thought, and practitioners are more appreciated than generally believed in the education field (CSE, 2004). From a vocation or profession with a negative image only a few decades ago, teaching is today generally considered a complex and very difficult profession.

Is it really so hard to teach at college? Complex? Definitely. Demanding? Absolutely. Why is it so complex? What exactly does to “work at college” mean a dozen or so years after college reform. Between vocation, art or profession, where can we position ourselves today?

This article¹ sketches a brief outline of the direction teaching is taking today, particularly in colleges, and provides an overview of certain changes affecting the profession. There are suggestions provided for transforming the road to professional accomplishment that some consider “a survival ordeal”.

¹ This article is an adaptation of the first part of a conference given on August 18, 2006, at Cégep de Trois-Rivières within the scope of a pedagogical day.

THE TEACHING PROFESSION TODAY

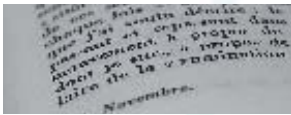
Several authors have shown the evolution of the teaching profession via characteristics used to classify an occupation (Gauthier, Desbiens and Martineau, 2003). At the turn of the 20th century, teachers were said to have “a vocation” for teaching: working as a teacher meant demonstrating exemplary moral standards and a high level of personal commitment in addition to mastering the required disciplinary knowledge and skills. A few years ago, some considered teaching like an art, for which all you needed was a natural talent and a good amount of intuition. Teaching was a matter of creativity and the abilities needed to succeed could not be passed on. For others, teaching could be assimilated more closely the craft of an artisan, a more-or-less technical profession: know-how, based on a set of prescriptions—tips and tricks of the trade—to adapt according to the circumstances, and which could be transmitted and learned. With the advance of educational sciences, various theories and models have been developed based on field experiments designed to initiate a fruitful dialogue between theorization and application. Teaching thus becomes more like an applied science.

All these facets are present in teaching. However, many agree the model that most accurately portrays the nature of teaching is that of a profession. If we examine the traits we use to classify occupations, we notice that teaching possesses all the characteristics attributed to a professional activity: complexity of interventions, importance of a specialized knowledge base, notion of rendering a service, singularity of situations to deal with, uncertainty as to decisions, presence of conflicting values, high level of responsibility, and broad autonomy. Nevertheless, we are dealing with a very special profession.

TEACHING AT COLLEGE...

Teaching is hard to define. Need proof? Just try finding a synonym! Pratte (2002) gives teaching several attributes. In her opinion we are dealing with a complex, interactive, reflective, professional, long term response, directed, situated, contingent, and rational act. This set of characteristics enables us to analyze the characteristics of the teaching function, but does not identify the specificity of teaching. Van der Maren (1996, p. 27) positions teaching more broadly within a “unique educational situation where an individual who is supposed to know, (would be) in regular contact with a group of individuals supposed to learn (whose presence is compulsory) for the purpose of teaching them a socially provided content”. The emphasis here is on the teaching relationship in the class and the role of knowledge transmission. Gohier (2005) also accentuates the relational aspect when she defines the specificity of teaching as a “relational activity with the student that is designed to favour the latter’s development”.

For a PERFORMA work group that examined the question, teaching is “helping to learn”. It means “creating conditions and situations that are likely to induce, support



and manage the learning process, [...] [it is] a process designed for the student to achieve the targeted training objectives in class” (Laliberté and Dorais 1998, p. 27).

These last definitions remain centered on interaction with students, that is, what takes place in class, a laboratory, an internship or even the teacher’s office. Yet teaching at college, particularly since the renewal, involves much more than giving courses and interacting with students. “Although the prescribed work never totally describes the work required to successfully complete a task” (Pratte, 2002, p. 21), we need only consult a teacher’s job description as outlined in the last collective agreements or take stock of how a college teacher spends his time during the week to realize that time in class is only part of the work expected. First there are, of course, activities directly related to teaching: planning, designing, dispensing the teaching, assessing, supervising. There are many activities ensuing from the necessary collaboration with other intervenors in the educational arena (departments, program teams, committees, etc.), other activities resulting from collective responsibilities, various professional services, for instance those required to organize and follow-up on internships and other pedagogical activities offered to students, activities that target the recognition and development of the profession, such as pedagogical, fundamental or technological research and, finally, ongoing professional development activities.

Authors have proposed various descriptions of a college teacher’s job. Besides the collective agreements, we could mention the *Conseil supérieur de l’éducation* (CSE), which has clearly demonstrated the importance and complexity of the new tasks incumbent on college teachers since the renewal, notably as concerns program development and assessment (CSE, 2000). To justify the relevance of its new ongoing professional senior programs, PERFORMA has summarized the new and traditional tasks incumbent on college teachers, by classifying them in three dimensions: two compulsory tasks: teaching and a contribution to program development and the educational community as a whole; and one optional task: research (PERFORMA, 2006).

Generally speaking we have identified the main tasks and related tasks involved in teaching at college. Teaching at college means contributing to the success of a post-secondary educational project: To begin with and primarily, in a privileged manner during regular and prolonged situations of direct interaction with students; and, secondly, via different related tasks during more or less regular and more or less prolonged interactive situations with other intervenors in the educational project. Most tasks of this second type—although less and less optional based on what we find in collective agreements—are chosen by the teachers, who are required to assume a large part of these tasks, based on their context and preferences. We have gone way beyond the fifteen or so hours of weekly courses!

All these professional tasks require complex mental operations characteristic of teachers that Pacquay, Altet, Charlier and Perrenoud (1996) describe as follows:

- Analyze complex situations in reference to several interpretative frameworks.
- Make a fast and thought-out choice of strategies adapted to objectives and ethical requirements.
- Select the most adequate means from a large wealth of knowledge, techniques and tools, and structure them in a system.
- Quickly adapt one’s projects in light of experience.

- Critically analyze one’s actions and their effects.
- Through this ongoing evaluation, continue learning throughout one’s career (quoted by the CSE, 2000, p. 37).

► ... A PROFESSION?

Many elements characterize a profession. It is an occupation requiring judgment and thoughtout action in uncertain, unique and complex situations. To accomplish this requires a solid baggage of theoretical and technical knowledge as well as practical and reflective abilities to possess the competencies needed to compose in “unspecified zones”.

The situations in question involve conflicts of values and ethnical aspects that are also part of a given social and cultural context (Harris, 1993).

[...] teaching at college, [...], involves much more than giving courses and interacting with students.

According to Mukamurera (2005), a profession is characterized by a high level of professional training directly related to the work to be done, which develops a competency to act with efficiency and effectiveness in a situation. Ongoing learning and the sharing of expertise are also part of the professional’s responsibilities. Gohier (2005) also mentions this notion of responsibility by relating it to social expectations (the individual is responsible for remaining competent and meeting these social expectations that he himself helps define) and ethical aspects (an integral part of an activity implying a relationship with another person) that are unavoidable in the profession.



These aspects definitely apply to teaching. According to Gohier (2005), teachers are professionals of education/learning. They are specialists in educational strategies. They render a public service. Their job is very complex since it requires the mastery of many types of knowledge (disciplinary, psychological, pedagogical, didactic, sociological and philosophical). It is the ability to “act in an emergency and decide in uncertainty” (Perrenoud, 1999). Teachers must exercise their profession by demonstrating an ethical sense, in a context of autonomy as well as individual and collective responsibility. This autonomy and these responsibilities vary based on teaching level. Those incumbent on the college teacher lie somewhere between what is expected of a high school teacher, who plays a less prominent role in program development and assessment for instance, and what is expected of a university professor, who is given a compulsory and explicit research mandate.

Despite the high-level competencies that are required, college teachers do not receive any initial compulsory training on how to proceed based on day-to-day reality. Training is based on the expertise of the content; such is the case at every post-secondary teaching establishment. It is interesting to note that teaching is surely the only profession where a novice in the field starts practicing after such a long association with professionals in the field which he has been able to observe throughout his own training. This phenomenon can be positive (observing positive and inspiring models, models to reject) or negative (solidly anchored

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mental representations that are not necessarily relevant in the current context). In addition to the absence (more often than not) of any specialized training on how to teach in a professional manner, teaching at college appears to be a truly complex profession, caught in the middle of sometimes irreconcilable tensions and at the centre of spiralling changes that are increasingly rapid and difficult to integrate.

▶ WHAT HAS CHANGED?

Most of the previous elements are not new. Teaching has always been complex. Adding to this complexity is the fact a teacher is confronted to many paradoxes or contradictions that must be solved daily. Many have called it an “impossible profession”. Our aim is to help the other person become more autonomous and free, but the person must meet our requirements and respect our rules! We want to act ethically, but how can we respect the “otherness” of someone that we seek to change, to transform? Is it realistic or does it go against nature to aim for one’s own disappearance, to work at becoming useless? The democratization of higher teaching results in social expectations that relate to universal access to higher education, success for all, and the opportunity for all who have succeeded thanks to this education, to have access to quality employment (Charlot, 2005). Are these goals compatible?

Teaching has always been caught in the middle of “tension vectors” (Baillat, 2005). On one hand, a teacher has his own values and concept of his mission. He has unique competencies and his own personality. On the other hand, he must compose with social expectations, controls, insufficient means, and pressures from all sides (economic requirements, students, society, leaders, peers, etc.) which are sometimes in opposition to his concepts and profound nature.

Like all other occupations, teaching has always been subjected to various changes. We sometimes get the impression however, that the changes affecting the profession today are harder to integrate. What are these changes that some find exciting, others find disgusting or terrifying and others remain indifferent to, perhaps because they feel unconcerned? Several researchers are investigating the social, economic and political contexts (purposes, imputability, rendering of accounts, labour market); others are studying student values and characteristics; others still are exploring new means such as technologies; we are experiencing an acceleration in the production of new knowledge; we are examining the accessibility of this new knowledge; we are surveying the public for a sense of the recognition for the teaching profession in society and public confidence in those who practice the profession (Tardif, Lessard and Mukamurera, 2001; Lessard and Tardif, 2001).

We can also consider changes to the teaching function from the perspective of the context in which it is practiced and the required competencies. According to Pinte (2004), teachers are torn between the traditional values and concepts of teaching (transmission, heritage, patroller, etc.) and the new requirements. There has also been a mutation of our relation to knowledge: In the 18th century, all constructed knowledge could be taught, assembled into an Encyclopaedia; it was considered something stable, true, that evolved slowly. Today, with the fast appearance and incessant renewal of knowledge and know-how, they become obsolete more rapidly. Pinte also mentions a new work culture where the accent is placed on the need to



learn more and more, to transmit knowledge and produce new knowledge as part of one's work. This leads to the importance of showing creativity, adaptability and an innovative spirit. He also mentions that the intellectual technologies derived from cyberspace amplify, externalize and modify a number of human functions such as memory, imagination, perception and reasoning, which raises a number of questions as to the way we dispense learning and, consequently, on the traditional ways of teaching.

The exponential growth of the latter and the fact that it rapidly becomes obsolete force us to make new choices in terms of teaching contents.

However, according to Baillat (2005), where we see the most change occurring, what is new, upsetting and hardest to assume is that current changes are affecting the deepest dimensions of a teacher's professional identity. The author brings to light four aspects that considerably disturb the image, that some consider idyllic, of the traditional teacher. First, he mentions changes in the **nature of interactions**. For instance, the use of technologies brings about new models that many find worrisome. At college we can also speak of interactions with new intervenors, as required by the program approach. Baillat also relates important modifications in the *relation to knowledge*. The exponential growth of the latter and the fact that it rapidly becomes obsolete force us to make new choices in terms of teaching contents. Since the teacher is no longer the exclusive possessor of knowledge, he no longer has the same credibility *a priori* and he must rethink the goals of the training he is providing. In addition, he must also be innovative in his way of teaching. How to help a group of people learn, who may have a less developed capacity to analyze a long text full of nuances and to reason in sequential fashion, but are experts in the art of reflecting globally and multitasking? (Belleau, 2001)

Up until recently, classes were relatively homogenous. Nowadays, **student diversity** seems more like the norm. Given this context, how can we treat everyone fairly? Should we be favouring a differentiation in interventions rather than the uniformity of rules? Also the passage from **individual and private teaching to a collective and public activity** has resulted in an in-depth modification of the traditional representation we have of the "teacher who does what he wants in class once the door is closed". Consequently, a teacher can feel dispossessed or that he is losing control of his practice. In addition to these four elements is the fact that the proposed changes may have been minimized or even negated because they could have been left at the classroom door. But if they have not already entered the classroom they soon will since the students are constructing themselves by integrating these mutations. Research has already shown that the prolonged use of technologies modifies human cognitive processes! (Pinte, 2004)

Several have voiced the concern that despite these assorted changes, in a number of classes, once the door is closed, most of the teaching is done just like it was a century ago. When we think of a teacher, the model that most often comes to mind today is that of the teacher in class with his group of students, his books and his blackboard. However, this is not the only possible representation. There have been others that still thrive in certain contexts. Take for example, tutorship—one teacher, one student, a study room at home—or learning a trade—an expert in the field, an apprentice, a practice environment. The traditional model—one teacher, a group of relatively homo-

genous students, a classroom—remains nonetheless the model most anchored in our concept of a teacher. However, new models of teachers are appearing on the horizon characterized at once by a diversification and a specialization of tasks. For example, a group of teachers and other intervenors are collectively in charge of a group of students and carry out their functions in flexible and diversified environments, sometimes individually, sometimes in groups or all together in the same place that can be quickly reconfigured. They assume new roles and they develop new modes of intervention. They are assigned new tasks that, a short time ago, were assigned to other categories of professionals (diversification). In other contexts, the sharing of tasks is no longer necessarily done like before, within the scope of on-line teaching for example, they become more specialized: we find course designers on one hand, and tutors on the other (specialization). For the time being, some believe that the classical model is no longer adequate, but there still is no pertinent, consistent and consensual model (Lessard and Tardif, 2001) to replace it. It seems nevertheless just a matter of time before the current system loses dominance!

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On a hopeful note, we should keep in mind that even during periods of upheaval, certain landmarks remain unchanged. If those invariants are to serve as guideposts for orienting one's professional development, operating somewhat like a compass, or rather a GPS system, it is on condition that we commit to an in-depth reflection on the



question to define and construct our own practice, which will hopefully find its professional accomplishment in the multiple daily tasks involved in college teaching. It is a daunting challenge, but is it not precisely what defines the complexity we need to master as a teaching professional? Here are six “universals of the teaching situation” identified by Charlot (2005, p. 364-367):

- 1) human beings can be educated;
- 2) learning requires an intellectual activity, a personal mobilization to learn;
- 3) the obligatory existence of something outside the person who is educating himself (culture, knowledge, values, other humans, etc);
- 4) the questionable character of the teacher who does not transmit “the” human heritage, but only part of it, in specific forms;
- 5) the triple process of humanization, socialization and singularization that constitutes education and which is sometimes hard to conciliate;
- 6) the context in which the teaching profession is practiced: in an establishment, under the control and gaze of hierarchical authorities and colleagues, with constraints of space, time and resources.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PATHS

The path leading to accomplishment can contain several stages. Whether you want to undertake your professional development² because you are new to the profession or because you want to

consolidate your acquisitions having already acquired a certain experience, different means are at your disposal. These methods are not new; teachers who had satisfying college teaching careers have employed them for more than thirty years. The observations of these committed colleagues and various educational writings can help you plan a professional development project over three stages that are not mutually exclusive and most likely overlap. They are the result of interviews with teachers who related their professional journey (Lauzon, 2002) or suggestions by practitioners (Grave, Tremblay and Ouellette, 2003). They have thus been tested and proven to be sources of professional development.

From the onset and throughout your career, make it a priority to develop your expertise and stay competent.

Taking into account the fact that most members of the college teaching staff integrate the profession without any initial teaching training, the first phase consists of developing, or for others, of actualizing their competencies, particularly those that relate to teaching.

This stage is also the opportunity to define one’s professional identity: Who am I as a college teacher? What do I know, what are my attitudes, values, behaviours, abilities, competencies, goals, projects, and aspirations?

In a recent study, based on an in-depth analysis of interviews with college teachers at various stages of their career, Lauzon (2002) was able to show that teachers learn to teach in three ways:

- a) By **teaching**: The author identifies two facets, the *action component*, by trial and error, through various teaching experiences, has made it possible to transpose, adapt, experiment systematically; and the *reflection component* that relates more to discovery, a reflection on one’s experience, the analysis of one’s practice.
- b) By **interactions**: *With students*, of course, which provides an opportunity to observe, listen, question, ask for feedback, and exchange; and *with colleagues*: we can learn from them by observing, listening, analyzing their material and we can learn with them by consulting them, asking for feedback, by analyzing together various practices and their impact, by debating ideas and concepts, by producing jointly.
- c) By **formal training**: Which can take the form of university courses, non-credited training, self-taught training or even research projects.

We should keep in mind that from a professional development perspective, the meaning of training goes beyond that of actualizing existing knowledge. It must encompass a dimension of permanent transformation of one’s professional stance in order to truly assimilate it to professional development (Baillat, 2005).

Following the occupational integration stage, broaden and diversify your expertise.

A professional is responsible for keeping his competencies up to date throughout his career. The activities in the previous stage are therefore relevant for broadening and diversifying one’s expertise in ongoing fashion, regardless of one’s experience.

² See the article by G. Nault, in this issue, for a presentation of the concepts of identity, professional competencies and development.



This stage can also entail a greater involvement in the establishment. Current challenges in college education offer a wealth of projects to carry out individually or collectively that can be a source of professional development. Among these: Integrating technologies in one's professional practice, designing and implementing action plans, particularly in the field of educational success, developing internationalization, and implementing alternating work-study programs. We must also consider coordination, supervision and collaboration activities in program assessment and revision projects, not to mention innovation and research. In addition to one's involvement in the establishment, other opportunities also present themselves, including the following: Participation in seminars, involvement in a professional association, commitment to a partnership project with various organizations, as well as membership in community of practitioners dedicated to taking charge of a group development project on a particular aspect of the profession. We could add the participation in various committees dealing with orientation, policies and decisions on a local, national or international level. These current challenges lend themselves well to the competencies developed by more seasoned teachers, but also provide the opportunity for them to learn new individual and collective competencies.

When accomplishments warrant it, have your expertise acknowledged and shared initially by colleagues in your establishment, but also by the education community as whole and society in general.

Each establishment has designated areas (if not why not assign some locals) for *free speech* to promote and debate one's ideas: lectures, debates, pedagogical cafés, scientific or professional articles, practical stories, workshop animation, etc. Along a similar line of thought, *the sharing of tools and approaches* is one way of living our pedagogy within the framework of structures such as departments, program teams and less formal discussion groups. *Coaching* colleagues through mentoring and team-teaching, tutoring, supervision and other methods favour the professional development of both parties. Last but not least, *animating training activities*, whether credited or not, proves to be an ideal place to have one's expertise acknowledged and shared by others.

CONCLUSION

No one can deny the existence of college pedagogy: we have been teaching at this level—unique in the world—for nearly 40 years. We have developed adapted practices as well as a number of systems and materials; and this development was the object of in-depth research and analysis. There is a publication dedicated to college pedagogy and an association that makes it possible, through its annual seminars, to share and discuss these practices and their impact, along with concepts relating to learning and teaching at college. In our opinion however, all this production and activities remain limited to a closed circle. College pedagogy should receive greater recognition on a national and international level. Its realizations could be analyzed by other experts and discussed with a view to validating and constructing knowledge relating to post-secondary learning and teaching. Activities like seminars, conferences, conventions, symposiums, educational publications, more particularly those dealing with the pedagogy of higher learning, which are not very popular with college-level intervenors, are areas that warrant greater attention.

Teaching at college is a complex and demanding profession that is undergoing many changes. In thirty years, work characteristics and, as we discussed, the most profound dimensions of the teacher's professional identity have changed appreciably. In such a context, is this career as appealing as before? I answer a resounding yes to this question, especially when we take the means to develop professionally. The means suggested to do this have shown they can nurture a feeling of self-accomplishment rather than nurture a feeling of self-survival. ●

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