



The Profession of Teacher from Intergenerational Education

Inés María Muñoz Galiano

University of Jaén (Spain)

imunoz@ujaen.es

1. Justification

This research work responds to a practical activity carried out by Teacher Training students at the University of Jaen within a wider interuniversity project on teaching innovation approved by the University of Granada.

The study aims to unite our experience related to intergenerational education and our professional field, university education. In order to do so, we intend to reconstruct the evolution of some of the contents of subjects such as General Didactics and School Organization from the experience of both active and retired teachers. Their experience helps us understand from the actual teaching practice the theoretical aspects of those subjects, as well as the complexity of the teaching profession.

The role of both old and young people, as active agents in the learning process, apart from being motivating, is coherent with our concept of education from a critical and ecological style.

According to this point of view, we initiate students into oral history so as to understand the meaning of educational processes, though it may not always be evident. We use oral sources with the intention to reconstruct and reflect on a past that settles our shared present. Many publications uphold the use of oral history in this sense.

2. Objectives

The purpose of this work is to reconstruct the teaching profession recovering values, traditions, facts, thoughts, representations and experiences by means of intergenerational communication between Teacher Training students and both active and retired professionals. For this reason, we specifically intend to:

- Encourage intergenerational interaction and overcome mutual stereotypes between generations.
- Initiate students into the use of different data collection and information analysis instruments and techniques (interviews, observation, content analysis, etc.).
- Develop the students' critical awareness and analysis ability.
- Understand the historical evolution of the teaching profession through the analysis of teaching techniques that were declining, predominant and emerging in each historical context.
- Analyse the facts and concepts considered to elaborate the teaching guide of subjects such as General Didactics and School Organization, with the intention of stating that they are not formal scientific constructs, but cultural categories with their own historicity.

3. Methodology

The qualitative methodology that was used falls into oral history, in order to reconstruct the reality that we intend to discover. With this aim, young Teacher Training students interviewed active and retired teachers during academic years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010.

We began our research by establishing the categories of study in relation to the subjects' course plans and designing a questionnaire that was completed during the second year. After selecting the informants, we proceeded with the interviews, which were transcribed and analysed by the students under the supervision of the professor in charge of the subject.

From the individual reports that were obtained, and according to an inductive criterion, a cross-sectional analysis in small groups was carried out, in order to identify common and disparate elements that belonged to the established categories of study and variables.

We agree with Bedmar and Montero when they state that "[la] investigación narrativa parte esencialmente de las necesidad de re-construir e integrar todos aquellos elementos del pasado que el sujeto considera relevantes para descubrir, entender y representar la situación actual y enfrentarse prospectivamente al futuro". In this sense, the method allows us to use in a descriptive, interpretative and reflexive way testimonies that describe experiences and precise moments of the existence, at the same time as it provides a meaning and purpose, which helps students analyse and understand history and current reality.

4. Sample

The choice of participants was done attending to two main premises, i.e., that they were sociologically diverse and representative. We looked for candidates who responded to a characteristic profile of the population to be studied: retired and active teaching professionals who had developed or were developing their careers either in Primary Education and Early Childhood Education (in Spanish, *educación infantil y primaria*), and who were willing to share their experience and perception of the school and the teaching profession. According to these criteria, each student selected a teacher within their environment.

The size of the sample (58 testimonies) was determined according to the pre-established objectives and premises, as well as the quality of the information that was obtained. Out of the 58 interviews, 30 correspond to



retired professionals aged 65-74, and 28 correspond to active professionals whose age ranges between 33 and 64 years old.

As for where the participants came from, approximately 50% of both the retired and active teachers who took part in the study came from rural environments, while the other 50% came from urban or semi-urban environments.

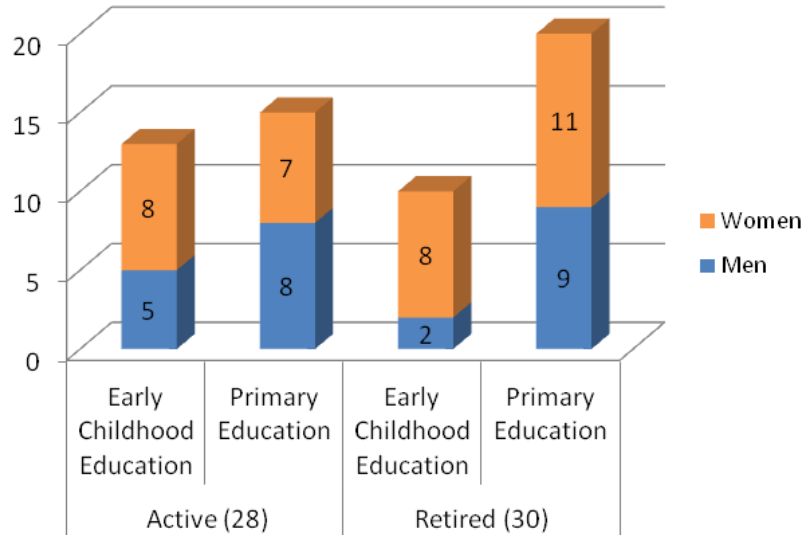


Figure 1. Sample distribution

5. Instruments

The information collection process was carried out by means of semi-structured, informal, conversational interviews. An interview guide, which was followed with an appropriate degree of flexibility, was planned including the following framework of themes: education, access to public service, labour market, schooling, family environment, family-school relations, the social image of the teacher, school timetables, school architecture and furniture, curriculum, types of schools, uniforms, didactic materials, extracurricular activities, methodology, discipline and exams.

The aim of this interview plan was to guide the conversation according to each interviewee and explore the meaning that each of them gave to these topics, in order to interpret the collected information afterwards.

After explaining the aim of the research and guaranteeing the interview conditions and that they would remain anonymous, participants were offered the possibility to modify or remove at the end of the interview any information they had given. Interviews usually took place at the interviewee's home, having previously fixed the date and time of the interview. The length of the interviews ranges from 50 to 80 minutes.

In most cases, the interviews were complemented with photographs or materials that the interviewees described in a reminiscence effort that enriched notably the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee.

6. Results

As it was set in the objectives of this research, it was possible to reconstruct some of the above mentioned topics: education, access to public service, labour market, schooling, family environment, family-school relations, the social image of the teacher, school timetables, school architecture and furniture, curriculum, types of schools, uniforms, didactic materials, extracurricular activities, methodology, discipline and exams. This was done by means of recovering values, traditions, facts, thoughts and experiences through the intergenerational communication processes that took place between Teacher Training students and both active and retired teachers.

In relation to the analysed categories, the students could observe the historical evolution of the school and the teaching profession. For instance, it was highlighted how Teacher Training has evolved: *"we didn't use to specialize in anything; instead, we all had some sort of universal knowledge that allowed us to work with students from all ages"*. Then a more specialized training was introduced, as a result of higher contact with reality (an aspect that was strongly demanded by the younger ones): *"just the university degree does not prepare you, much more experience is needed"*.

Another topic that was analysed, didactic resources, also shows a significant evolution as a consequence of the resources that are devoted to education. Until the mid-twentieth century *"the materials that were used had been created by the teacher himself"* and *"the most common ones were the blackboard, chalk and some notebooks"*, *"in the classrooms there were also some geometric figures, a globe, some maps, but not much more"*. From that moment on, *"there is more and more available material"*, *"apart from the books, there are lots of other resources, such as puzzles, interactive games, TV, computers..."*



Concerning school architecture and furniture, it can be emphasized how the older retired teachers did not consider it to be very important, as they do not determine the learning processes: *"There were all kinds of classrooms. I once was in one that was like a wide corridor, where there was only room for two desks, which were set in a row up to 40 students, and with the blackboard at one end. However, they all paid attention and did their work"*. Later, they began to become more relevant, to the point that they even determine the teacher's methodology and perception of the education: *"the classroom is large and it allows you to arrange the desks in a way that students can work in small groups"*, *"I used to sit them in pairs so that they could help each other"*. As far as the social image of the teacher was concerned, they all agreed that it has deteriorated progressively, especially due to the influence of the family: *"during my childhood, the teacher was the person that taught you everything, and at home they all talked about him with high respect"*. Also, during the evaluation of the activity, we could observe that the students now master the methodology that was used, as well as a change in the way the students perceived the old people in their comments about their experience with the participants.

7. Final remarks

The use of the interview as the main instrument of data collection by Teacher Training students has led to the construction of the teaching profession from values, traditions and experiences passed on by active and retired professionals, which, at the same time, has strengthened intergenerational relationships. This inter-generational interaction has facilitated contact between people who do not know that they need each other, since each of them can provide precisely what the other one requires.

Hence, the activity has enabled students to learn how to use different data collection and information analysis instruments and techniques, to develop their critical awareness and analysis ability and to understand the historical evolution of the school and the teaching profession through different professional procedures.

The reconstruction of their future profession has helped the students observe how the concepts, facts and topics included in the teaching guide of their university subjects are not formal scientific constructs, but cultural categories with their own historicity. Besides, it has raised admiration for a profession that does not have the social recognition that it deserves.

The results of this experience, which were very positive for both interviewers and interviewees, offer a model that could be implemented in other subjects, at the same time as it provides new lines of research: including different topics, specifying periods or topics of analysis, using larger samples, carrying out a longitudinal research and studying in depth the relationship between the most significant socio-demographic variables in education (environment and gender).

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