

# HOW TO GUARANTEE QUALITY IN EDUCATION

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## **Abstract**

*Quality has become a key word. Self-assessments and peer reviews, quality management and student polls have become ubiquitous. With all these bustling activities the main element in education, the personal quality of the teacher somehow got lost. If we want to discuss real quality in education, we must first ask what the teacher's position is. This paper is going to discuss what conditions the teacher must fulfill in order to be a good teacher: what are his demands on himself, what he must demand from the students? The society also part of this: What must a teacher expect from society in order to be a good teacher? The answers are, briefly: the teacher must be very exacting towards him/herself; he must constantly improve his personal and scientific qualifications. The teacher must not be soft towards his/her students. Society must provide him freedom, independence and respect. Yet these are only the prerequisites of quality in education.*

**Key words:** *quality in teaching, personal development, demands on teachers, demands on students, demands on society.*

## **Quality in education**

“I have been nourished with science since my childhood; and because I was told that through science one could acquire knowledge clear and sure of all that can be useful in one's life, my wish to learn was extremely strong. Yet, when I finished the whole course of studies at the end of which one is normally accepted among the learned ones I changed my mind completely because I was embarrassed by so many a doubt and error that I could not help feeling that all the profit of my effort resulted in the discovery of my ignorance. However, I had attended one of the most famous schools in Europe of which I could rightly presume that the most learned men wherever were teaching there. I had learned like all the other ones had learned, too; and I even read all the books that covered the most remote and curious sciences I could find because I did not feel satisfied by what we were taught. With this, I knew what judgments the others made of me; and I understood that they did not think me inferior to them although some of them were already considered to become the successors of those who were teaching us. Then, our century appeared so flourishing to me, so rich in excellent spirits, more than any of the previous ones. This gave me the liberty to judge all the others and to think that there was no teaching (doctrine) in the world that responded to what one had made me look for.” (Descartes 1966, 35f, translation by author)

This short paragraph contains all that can be said about quality in education. In the first part of his *Discours de la méthode* the famous French philosopher looks back to the years he spent in one of the best schools available in his time in France. There, he was taught by excellent teachers. He obviously had all the learning aids at hand that his time could provide (namely a rich library), so all the requirements a school can offer in order to be excellent were given.

Descartes then discusses all the disciplines he studied: from languages, literature, eloquence up to sciences and mathematics. He comes to the conclusion that they all had their severe drawbacks. “What I liked best was mathematics” he concludes “because of the certainty and evidence of their reasoning, but I had not remarked their true application. I believed that they were just for the mechanical arts and wondered that one had not constructed other things on them although their foundations were so firm and so solid.” (Descartes 1966, 37, translation by author)

Descartes then goes on to describe how he decided not to accept any doctrine but to give himself to a hidden personal research in order to discover the rock on which he later could build his understanding of the world on – *the* understanding of the world, as he believed.

This part of his *Discours* illustrates what good education should lead to: Education should not just make fit for a profession, a job, but aim at emancipation. The basis provided by education should help everybody to find a way of pursuing his/her own life. One needs not aim as high as Descartes; hardly anybody could do this. It is not the goal of education to ‘produce’ philosophers; the aim is to set people free.

Thus, in a few lines, we have a description of all that is necessary to guarantee quality of formal education together with a short hint at what education generally should lead to. The key thoughts appear in the ‘correct’ order:

1. *The basis*: There must be a consensus in society as to what education should aim at. “I was told that through science...” Descartes’ education is based on the conviction that science is the true way to certainties and good behavior in life.
2. *The teachers*: He attends an excellent school with outstanding teaching staff.
3. *The teaching environment*: He has all the teaching aids at hand that are available in his time of living.
4. *The student*: He is not just told to learn but brings along a lively interest that makes him invest in enhancing his knowledge through private efforts.
5. *The goal*: The student must be provided with the means necessary to lead a good life.

This paper shall not expand about the first element although it has become a problem over these last years: With the Bologna initiative the overall situation in Europe has changed in a direction that is not beyond questioning. Bologna is nothing less than a revolution in our educational environment, maybe something like the English Glorious Revolution of 1688, something tacitly accepted. But there is resistance, and there are discussions (Liessmann, 2008; Ruprecht, 2008; Graf, 2005). A new consensus about what we aim at must be found in the near future.

This paper shall not expand on teaching aids either. Modern technology has changed the surface of the educational process. A lot of things are much easier to handle than some years ago. The possibilities of communicating with one’s students by ICT have grown and are still developing. The use of modern means bring the world into the classroom, many a thing can be done elegantly and quickly that were not possible only a few years ago. This development is not just positive. It also has its drawbacks. A major one lies in its very advantage: To have all at hand in about no time may lead to a behavior that favors what is interesting rather than what is essential. Edutainment is one of the possibilities encouraged by all the modern means; they may also hide the human being behind artificial effects. The direct confrontation between teacher and learner might get lost if the percentage of indirect communication in teaching is too high. I remember to have observed students doing physical experiments much in the style Galileo Galilei did them in the 17th century. This was at a famous university, and it was sound: Trying things out, measuring effects with simple means has a more direct educational impact than being told or observing them on a presented screen (of course,

using the computer has the same effect.). We must not overlook the fact that IC technology opens the way to ‘easy solutions’ that stand in the way of confrontation. If you can take the answer to problems just out of the net, you have not really learned anything.

Still, it is clear that modern teaching in Europe must be up to date. The description of the technical prerequisites for teaching given in the accreditation criteria of IGIP ([www.igip.org](http://www.igip.org)) may serve as a good example.

The fourth point: The personal interest of the student is possibly less evident in our days. Curiosity and interest are elements no teaching can do without. Interest and curiosity are natural features of humankind. It is an important task in every educational process to stimulate and to satisfy it. Yet, in reality, the task often appears rather to avoid destroying it. In modern life, the manifold ways to influence people – from earplugs to live billboards – threaten to kill interest. Modern people might feel compelled to develop strategies in order to shut themselves up from the constant flow of information that tries to deviate their attention from what is essential. Formal teaching was considered essential just for a small elite for a long time. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century universal schooling slowly became a principle against which there was a lot of resistance. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century formal education became widely accepted as important, and the countries that pushed it most could bask in the profits. There is a direct relation between the overall (formal) educational effort and the economic success of a country. Yet, towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century another development set in. It came from two directions.

- In the west at least, there appeared something like saturation. Education was no longer universally accepted as the way to success.
- The flooding of society with visual and audible information and the seduction of the computer in many ways drew people away from the classical ways of formal education.

Nowadays, teachers often must ‘seduce’ their pupils to learn. The profession has developed into a very difficult one. Fortunately, the teaching staff of universities retains some of its old authority, but fresh and new efforts must be made from time to time to assess the situation – this is one of the reasons for the publication of this book.

Thus, this paper will center on the second point for quality in formal education, on the teacher.

The teacher is the first and last condition as far as quality in education goes. Of course, he is not in the center of the educational process. He is just one actor among an open number of other ones like the parents, the siblings, the friends and foes, nature, and the environment much shaped by human beings in our days. The teacher is restricted to his/her role (considering all the educational forces) in school, and this role is smaller than one likes to think.

From a general viewpoint, the center of every educational process is the child or the young person. This is not to be discussed here. If we want to discuss quality in formal (i.e. school) education, we must look at the situation of the teacher. His situation shall be the purpose of this paper, namely the teacher on tertiary level.

What are the conditions the teachers must fulfill in order to *be* good teachers?

What are the conditions the society must fulfill in order to *have* good teachers?

Over the last years, there has been a lot of talk about a new element in the world of formal education: Quality management. There is more than mere talk: A lot of time has been spent to devise questionnaires on all levels, auditing firms have been established, and a lot of money is spent for accreditation, peer reviews and other enterprises to secure the quality of schools and with it the quality of education. Inside the schools, student polls to verify the qualification of the teachers have become popular like public elections of the “teacher of the year” as infotainer.

All these costly schemes certainly can verify whether some given standards are respected or not. Yet *real* quality is beyond their reach because quality is an ephemeral phenomenon. Quality is something like music. It is only there when it is played. In teaching, quality only occurs while the teaching process goes on. As in music, some conditions must be fulfilled in order to make quality possible. These we are going to discuss.

Teaching is an art. Art is hard work. Like a musician, a teacher must have an educational basis proper for the level he will teach at. An educational basis does not just mean some scientific and formal training obtained as a prerequisite for the level of future teaching. This is only half of what a teacher must bring along. The other half is his personality as the result of his upbringing and his personal development. A teacher is not just a dispenser of knowledge: He is a person who has to confront his/her students as persons of equal rights.

Anybody with just some experience with adult education may have had the possibility to observe that teachers with just some knowledge of a topic reach the students ('teach') better and sometimes even more successfully than others who really know their topic in depth. This has something to do with the fact that the teacher first is a person and only then an instructor. It also has something to do with the assurance you may have if you do not really know a topic. In this case, you can talk with a lot of conviction, tell the students how things are, and satisfy their need for recipes. It is a normal wish of students to learn things, to see 'how things are' instead of looking for insight. Average students appear to feel thankful to be taught something they can learn and later reproduce. There are things that can be conveyed in such a direct matter. In primary school the alphabet or the rules of calculus are such matters; on a higher level: in mathematics the formal solution of a quadratic equation; in language grammatical analysis. They occupy a central place at the beginning of formal education.

Facts to be learned do not disappear later: they occur on every level of education, yet, the point is not to learn these facts and to train their application, the point is to do something with them, to reach a level of understanding where one can do something with them. Applying a real world problem implies to establish a mathematical model, which is a very creative task. The solution of the problems might (beside other activities) involve the routine task to solve a quadratic equation. – In languages, you have not reached a satisfactory level if you can just read words and write dictations correctly. Understanding starts with the ability to write texts (of course simple ones at the beginning) and understand what you are reading. To do this you must possess some understanding beyond school. Without this, you will fail. So, external education (through one's environment and experience) must meet formal training in order to develop full understanding.

These reflections are no argument to promote teachers with unsatisfactory theoretical background, dispensers of factual knowledge. 'Outdoor experience' is not sufficient. The appeal of teachers with unsatisfactory theoretical background cannot last. If these 'teachers' would be exposed to their classes for a long time, the hollowness of their knowledge would appear rather quickly and their authority would crumble.

To have the appropriate theoretical background is a must. How to acquire it, is not the topic of this paper. Here, we start from the assumption that this background is given. We also take it for granted that a young teacher cannot have the same overview as an old and experienced one. When a young colleague starts teaching, he is just at the beginning of a long process of learning. Being young and of attractive personality makes him attractive to his (young) students, this makes good for what he may lack otherwise. It fills a gap. This is an old insight. Plato was the first one to state that personal attraction ( $\epsilon\rho\omicron\sigma$ ) was a major element in every teaching process. The attraction of the young teacher has something to do with his physical attractiveness. The older one must acquire another quality of  $\epsilon\rho\omicron\sigma$  by and by, something that is not just given to him by nature but comes as the result of his inner development, the elements of which are deeper insight, experience, and knowledge.

Given all this, the first prerequisite for quality in education is that the teacher must be exacting. This goes in two directions. The teacher must be exacting towards the students as well as towards himself/herself. Discipline, self-discipline is a central quality for every teacher.

#### *The demands on himself/herself*

*Docendi discitur* is an old insight: By teaching we are taught. Teaching is a learning process. This is an experience, everybody can make: As soon as we are forced to explain something, we get a deeper understanding of it (if we had a clear enough idea of the matter) and sometimes can reach new insights. But this is not the whole story. For a teacher, the effect of teaching must go beyond this

basic fact. The teacher must be very exacting towards himself indeed. His/her teaching must push him forward; he must widen the boundaries of his knowledge and insight all the time. This must be one of the teacher's main concerns; only thus he/she can assure the quality of his/her teaching.

*Ohne Forschung keine Lehre* was the topic of the farewell lecture of a Berne University Professor of economy in the late nineties. There is no teaching without research. This motto would do to explain what teaching beyond simple explaining means. Teaching is always related to research.

Can this be true? Yes, but only on condition that we do not interpret it too strictly. "There is no ... " is a very apodictic statement. It is so sharp that it cannot be upheld: Exceptions can be found easily. There are teachers, even on tertiary level, that are so gifted as teachers that they just want to concentrate on teaching. Some even do not feel at ease with formal research. They must not be pressed. For them, another Platonic principle must be applied: Men cannot live together without making concessions. One cannot force everybody to do formal research. The strict application of rules or principles induces difficulties that are contra-productive.

Secondly, the term *research* must not be understood in a very strict way. The motto's assumption is not only apodictic; it is also global. It does neither permit exceptions nor does it distinguish between levels of teaching. If we think of teaching on tertiary level, we may underwrite such an assumption as a principle within the reservations just made. But nobody will expect from a primary school teacher that he/she is doing any research. Even teachers on secondary level are normally not involved in any research. This compels us to look for a wider understanding of *research*.

Research, generally speaking, is a way of obtaining knowledge and insight. Normally we think of it as something systematical needing a lot of material and human resources as well as a lot of time. This is true for modern scientific research in domains like physics, chemistry or medicine. To understand the principle well, we must accept that this understanding is too narrow. Research is not restricted to this. Research is not just a certain kind of scientific effort. And then, even scientific research may need much less. In the field of humanities, research often needs much more less staff, apparatus, and capital than in fields like physics, astronomy and others: As the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1927-1998) put it when he started his research on system theory: He did not need any laboratory or grant, he said, he only needed a desk, paper, books, and time to do his research - and, of course, his own head.

You may even need no desk, no paper, and no books for doing research if you try to understand yourself.

Understanding oneself may be the most important kind of research. To do it, it may be sufficient to meet the outside world consciously, to confront it, to confront people, to work together with them, and then also to retire into oneself once in a while. The result of all that effort is to find out about oneself. This  $\gamma\nu\sigma\tau\iota\ \sigma\epsilon\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\nu$  is the final goal of every kind of research. In this case *research* could be translated into *the way to original thinking*.

This is something teaching really needs on all levels. Teaching cannot just be the repetition of given facts/insights: all teaching needs the active participation of the teacher's mind. A teacher must constantly question himself/herself, not just find ways and means to convey what he/she knows to the students, but also reflect his/her own position. This must come out of the teacher's personal situation. Years ago, a young colleague of mine asked me after an event of continuing education where I had stressed the point that a teacher should represent his own position: "Well, do you really think you can do this? Are we really allowed to teach things beyond what we have learned at university?" "Of course," I answered, "we even must do this. If we do not represent our own position based on what we have learned in school and university enhanced by what we have learned since, we cannot be successful in our task." She must have understood the message very well: Her teaching has got new momentum and she has been a very good teacher ever since. This was not my deed, I just gave her a hint. For her development she is personally responsible herself.

In his/her development, every teacher is also encouraged by the students. Every teacher is constantly challenged by his/her learners. Students, not only the adult ones, are human beings like the teacher. They have their expectations and their vision of the world, which is not identical with the one of the teacher. They have their rights and their interests. Conflicting views, conflicting interests are an everyday phenomenon in teaching. The educational process happens between human beings and needs constant rethinking.

Thus, the central condition for quality in formal education has been located: To be exacting towards oneself means that the teacher must be in a never-ending process of self-perfection on the scientific level as well as on the professional and personal one. On tertiary level part of this self-development often (but not always) happens in the form of formal research.

But even there we should not be too strict. Research does not always lead to tangible results, it even need not being very systematical. We must clearly distinguish between research that aims at a tangible result and a more general type of research. The first one nowadays is very specific and its *immediate* use for educational purposes is practically limited to the implication one can offer one's students into one's own research project, a thing one can hardly do beyond post graduate studies. This kind of research is somehow remote from the practice of everyday teaching. Still it has its effects on it: doing research is not just keeping oneself at the tip of a scientific development. It is also a way to develop one's mind, to get new knowledge and insight, to access new means and methods: something one might call the *formatting of the mind*. (Ruprecht, 2008) This aspect of research has a direct impact on one's teaching in general.

*Formatting of the mind* is also the link to the less strict understanding of research. Teaching, especially on tertiary level, requires constant general perfection. All the topics taught are unlimited and thus need constant attention. For some disciplines, this need for constant attention is very obvious because everyone sees how fast they develop. In our days, the classical paradigm for this is IC technology. IC technology moves very fast indeed, but the motion is rather on the surface, on the level of application. Everybody can be aware of that. The other scientific domains are not moving less; it is just not that obvious. While IC technology moves in one direction: always faster, more traditional ones move in several directions: always broader and deeper. Some of them, especially the technical sciences, leave things behind and are proud of it: "What we teach the students now will be obsolete in a few years" some professors underline with obvious pride. Other sciences (like the humanities) do not really know progress. There are shifts in interest, of course, yet what has been done once does not lose its value (if it ever had any) because of these shifts. It just disappears into the background, maybe to be looked at anew after some time. The field of research in humanities is widening all the time. The matter to be studied is constantly growing. To express it a little pointedly: A good author may not be able to make a living for himself but he nourishes a lot of scholars. Thus constant learning in one's own field of knowledge and even beyond it is a prerequisite of quality in education. With this, we do not advocate what has become popular as *lifelong learning* because in *lifelong learning* the stress is not on the traditional ways of self-perfection through constant informal research in one's own field, *lifelong learning* rather means the recycling of people with a basic training according to the changing needs of the economy. There, the initiative for personal perfection only comes second.

This includes that the basis of knowledge, insight and experience shall not be reduced to the actual topics a teacher teaches. The enhancement of personal perfection most important on the first level of formal education is also necessary on the second and tertiary level, the growth of knowledge inside and outside one's central topic most important on the tertiary level is also important on the first one. In order to cultivate this, teachers should live in an environment as stable as possible. They must have the freedom to develop themselves, a thing they cannot do if they are constantly harassed by external forces. School is a world in itself set apart from the external world: The pupils/students enter it from the side of their families, the teachers from society. So both, the world of the family and the world of society are only indirectly present in formal education. (Ruprecht, 1999a, 1999b)

Being exacting towards themselves teachers develop their authority. This authority does not derive from the position they have in the artificial world of school but from the way they master their topic(s) and themselves as well as from their openness towards their students. Authority also includes transparency. If a student does not understand a problem, the teacher must be ready in helping him at least up to a certain point. If a student does not understand a mark obtained, the teacher must be able and ready to explain to him, how he/she came to such and such a qualification. This is not a trivial task, especially in the so called 'soft sciences'.

The students are not clients of the teachers (as some educational 'authorities' believe, politicians in most cases) they are people needing to be challenged *and* assisted.

*The demands on the students*

Many a student has the impression that school is something like a ritual he or she must undergo. They are not wrong in this assumption. The fact that the world of schools is somehow secluded from reality implies this. The question is just how to understand 'ritual': Is it just something to pass through like so many rituals in daily life or is it something like a challenge like the *rites de passage* in African traditional societies, which bring the children to adulthood? These *rites de passage* are threatening the children, they consist of difficulties to overcome, harsh tests to undergo, and are often linked with mutilations of the body.

As the wrong idea of children/students being clients has exceeded the limits of theoretical discussion, as there is some saturation in many a society (school often is no more considered to be a way to undergo in order to succeed in life but something different like an institution to look after the children or to step in to provide the education the parents formerly considered their own domain), the conviction that school is just a ritual to be attended has become fairly widespread.

It is a *long rite de passage* however. School is not supposed to threaten the children or to interfere with their bodies but school plays an important role in introducing children/students into what society thinks necessary for them. They need basic skills, they need systematic knowledge and they need at least some understanding; all of it in this order. Acquiring skills is work, hard work for some, amassing knowledge is work as well, and reaching understanding demands a very personal effort because understanding cannot be taught, it just can be encouraged. Again, there is not more than a shift between the three stages of formal education. Skills are also taught on tertiary level, knowledge is the constant companion of any formal educational process, and understanding is not the privilege of tertiary level education.

Thus, the first thing school must provide is challenge. School, the teacher must make the children/students work. The teacher's basic task is to challenge the students.

To challenge them he must somehow reverse the normal order of formal education: He/she has acquired the skills (is still acquiring skills), he/she has the broad (and ever broadening) knowledge, and has drawn conclusions from it – he/she understands (is broadening/deepening understanding). Now, from the position of this understanding, this knowledge and these skills he/she must induce the children/students to seek their own development.

Understanding is a function of reflection and experience. Reflection needs knowledge, thus knowledge is the raw material of reflection. If we expand the simple knowledge of facts to the knowledge of means (know how) and then to the knowledge of reasons (know why) we are on the path of reflection. This is the path teachers must lead their pupils on up to the point where they can find their own ways. When they reach this point is largely up to them. Some do not require much more than basic education and then take things in their own hands. Others walk quite a long way on the path of theory (of formal education) before they dare to enter the world on their own. The length of the path does not say anything about success in life because success depends on a lot of other conditions. This is true like the other statement: There is no relation between the level of formal education one attains and the character one develops. Formal education is but one element in an individual's educational process and personal career.

As long as they are in the hands of their teachers, children/students must be challenged to learn, to think, and to understand. Thus, teaching must not be just one of these three things. Learning cannot just be taking in information and reproducing it on demand. Tests of knowledge are the simplest form of success control. Good tests should include more: They should also include reasoning and control of understanding. Again: The higher the level, the more the accent must be on understanding. Thus, tests should always contain calculable elements where the learner can show that he has at least some knowledge and then surprises that show his ability to handle unexpected problems on the basis of his knowledge.

A final remark: Challenging the learners does not mean threatening them. Severity, earnestness and humor, all three of them are important means of teaching. Severity marks the distance between the learner and the teachers, humor underlines that they are in the same boat.

## The side of the society

Again, we need not insist on the first condition: A good teacher needs a sound education and introduction to the level he/she is going to teach on. It is a natural interest of society to provide access to this, to provide the best education possible for its future teachers. But this cannot suffice. Society must not abandon its teachers as soon they leave the domain of their own formal education. They will represent society in their personal way and they must be integrated in it. What the teacher of any level needs throughout his/her career are freedom, independence, and respect.

### *Freedom*

Teachers are always members of a given society. They will reflect the values of that society, but they are not its serfs. Generally, teachers should be in line with these values, but being in line does not mean that one accepts every detail of a given set. Their task is neither to embody this society nor to follow all its demands. Any given society is something abstract. Nobody can really say what a society is or demands here and now. People of (political) authority may venture from time to time to define what society is or wants in respect to a given problem. Nobody can do more. Societies are too complex. They are constantly on the move shaped by all of their members. A living society has a lot of members that actively contribute to its development by acts and deeds.

The rules applied in a society are also constantly moving. A lot of them are just there out of tacit accord; and people not really aware of them unless challenged. Some of the rules are visible on the surface. This does not mean that they exempt from interpretation. Teachers, like any other member of the society must have a right of interpretation. Of course, there are limits, and many a rule will remain unchallenged for a long time. But for each rule there is a certain range of interpretation. Some even must be challenged altogether. If the right for interpretation denied to the members of a society, for instance because it does not allow any deviation from the official line, citizens can hardly be good citizens, and teachers can hardly be good teachers. They may be masters in didactics, yet this is not sufficient for being a good teacher.

To illustrate this, I may tell about a personal experience: As a young teacher I once taught history and political science at a gymnasium. One of my topics was the Swiss constitution. We read them in class and I commented it. The Swiss, always proud of their long-standing tradition of freedom, believe, that the constitution is there to protect this freedom above all. When we read the document, I just put my finger on the second paragraph where the goals of the Swiss confederation are described. The paragraph mentions security, independence, welfare, and, as the last element: freedom. I simply told the students to consider this. Some days later I was called to the school rector and asked: What are you teaching in this class? I did not understand the question at first. Then I was told that the parents of one of the students had inquired about the 'leftist' who was teaching their son. – The same state tolerated, at the same time, teachers active in the separatist movement that wanted the northern part of the canton to become independent, people who directly attacked the territorial integrity of the state. These opponents were not just tolerated by the government but also paid by it. They did not question the system.

Teachers must not be patronized. They need to be treated as adult and responsible persons able to perform the duties assigned to them. Of course, abuse is always possible and certain ways of control are necessary. The state as their employer has a right to supervise the activities of its teachers but only within certain limits. Freedom of teaching is a central value. Then, there is a permanent supervisor present: the classes the teachers teach. It is part of the challenge of the teaching profession that the teacher must prove himself/herself before the students in every lesson, in every situation. To be a teacher means to be exposed to a (critical) group of young people. In a rigid and authoritative situation as described in Heinrich Mann's *Professor Unrat* the situation between teacher and students may be very tense. (The novel later became world famous through the film *The Blue Angel* – there the character of the hero appears less clearly.) Unrat is a teacher of German language in a medium size town, he is unhappy because of his personal biographical failure (the society had left his upbringing much to himself) and he feels insecure in his position. This induces him to hate his students and to ruin as many of them as he can. He is a dreaded tyrant up to the moment, where



one of his students just disdains him. When he tries to ruin the student he stumbles over his own weakness and ruins himself.

The other extreme position a teacher may adopt, especially a young one, is to try to make friends with the students. It is similarly devastating.

Teachers must be able to live a situation between challenging and being challenged. This is one of the main difficulties in the life of a teacher, one that he/she may overcome best through competence (not: competences), through authority based on the elements described above. If there are problems, both sides must have the right to seek help, yet, basically, teaching is only possible if there is a certain kind of consensus between the teaching one and the taught ones.

Therefore, too, teachers need freedom. They cannot work successfully if they are constantly pressed by society. The demands of the program they must follow, the demand for constant perfection, and the challenge of the daily confrontation with the students are enough.

### *Independence*

Independence is, above all, the right to seek one's own way and to find one's own truth. It is a spiritual property above all, but it also has its material aspects.

You cannot be a good teacher if there is always somebody behind you to tell what you are to do and to threaten you in case you do not immediately follow suit. This statement does not contradict what was said above: One can (even must) be independent and in line with the values of a given society at the same time. Finding one's own way does not mean to cut oneself off the values of all the others but to have one's own view of them.

In order to be a good teacher, one must find one's personal way within the society. If you are totally in step with your environment you *may* become a good teacher, it is not very likely though. There must be something like a critical distance between you and the society you belong to because you cannot really understand the values of a society just from its inside. This distance must be tolerated. This right to have personal opinions must be granted to teachers in order to encourage good work.

If, as Stefan Zweig puts it in his biographical novel *Joseph Fouché* (where he describes how the fight for survival between Fouché and Robespierre started), if you 'feel the blue shade of the Guillotine behind every word you pronounce' there is no more independence and no more chance for quality in your teaching. But we may even go one step further: the personal independence can not only be threatened by the rigidity of the rules of a society and – within school – from the program you may have to follow. The German novelist Jurek Becker describes this situation in his novel *Schlaflose Tage* ('Sleepless Days') where the hero, feeling that he is not allowed to give his students what he ought to according to his own conscience decides to quit the job and becomes a bread delivery man in an industrial bakery.

In a repressive society the chances for good formal educational systems are limited. This is as well true for too permissive societies where independence might signify to be abandoned because nobody cares what you actually do. This understanding of independence is wrong, too. Teachers must be in touch with the values of the society and find their own way to translate them in their educational effort.

On the material side, teachers must have the means to live a decent living. Their income must grant them a certain freedom to pursue their goals; they need access to resources in the way their society can grant them. Normally, a teacher's choice of job does not lead to high social acceptance or to big material rewards. Teachers have an inclination for being idealists. In this, they should be encouraged, of course, but not at the expense of their material independence.

In former times, especially on the countryside (at least in Switzerland) teachers used to be small craftsmen who had some gift for simple intellectual occupations or retired soldiers that had seen something of the world. They were badly paid, yet their idealism made them work as decently as they could to convey a little knowledge to overcrowded classes of mostly not very motivated children. Only in the 19th century, the governments began to understand the importance of their role and thus the importance of decent education and pay for them. The monograph *Von Schulen in den Dörffern* ('About schools in the villages') (Hurni, 1986) illustrates this for a village near the Swiss

capital of Berne and shows how schoolhouses have developed over this period of time. Around 1900, schoolhouses in Germany and Switzerland became very stately and thus illustrate how the esteem for schools (and with them for teachers) had grown in the meantime. Teachers had become important people. The link between their material independence and the success of their effort is obvious. It is parallel to the link between the resources put into education and the economic success of their countries. England, 150 years ago, provided one third of the world's industrial production. Around 1900, Germany, who had done much more for education than England, had already outdistanced the British Empire in economy.

Nowadays, the independence of teachers is threatened. All the reforms that have taken place over the last years have destabilized the educational process. The social role of teachers has declined: They are no longer looked at as authorities. Many a father induced by his unexpected social success thinks to be able to advise teachers. The economy in many a country feels compelled to tell them what to teach. Some big companies would like to see schools transformed into enterprises and find support in the ranks of educational politicians. An ever-growing administration weighs heavily on the teachers, and pupils often lack interest for scholastic success.

All these elements are threatening the independence in formal education. They are not despicable in themselves: school must evolve constantly. With the shifts in society there must also be shifts in education. What was excellent some decades ago may be a little bit outlandish now.

There are dangers threatening formal education, and the number of teachers leaving their jobs for something 'better' is alarmingly high. On the surface, many a thing looks different from only a few years ago. Yet, the basic rules that govern the educational process have not really changed. This must be respected.

### *Respect*

The rich farmers in the Countryside of the canton of Berne (to stay with the above mentioned example) used to look down on the poor teachers. The teachers came handy for them when there was something to write from time to time, which shows, how little the farmers had learned in an institution they despised so much. The teachers were badly paid. Some even had to go from house to house to collect the shares each farmer had to contribute to their pay. This was in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The initiative to make schools better in Switzerland came from private citizens like Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), Jeremias Gotthelf (1797-1854), Philipp Emanuel von Fellenberg (1771-1844), and others whose names are no longer part of public consciousness. People like these pushed the governments to get moving, to provide formal education to primary teachers, to pay them decent salaries. Thus, the link between the population (at least part of it), the government, and the schools was established and the success of this alliance secured.

As a consequence, the triad of pastor, teacher and doctor was established as the representation of higher learning on the countryside. At the beginning, the pastors used to be supervisors for the teachers. The progress in educating the teachers slowly emancipated them from this supervision and they became central figures in rural life. (Higher education was restricted to towns.) Their central position came not only from the fact that they were teaching generations of rural people but also because they showed a lot of cultural initiative. In many a small community the teacher also served as the community clerk, as choir director, as the leader of the gymnastic or some other association and in a lot of other occupations. Some even organized and directed important musical works (like G. F. Handel's *Messiah*) in the village church and did not hesitate to invite famous soloists who actually came. Their strength was a solid formal education secured by special schools (Lehrerseminarien – 'teacher seminars') and openness to the world. They were able to play the role of bringers of culture John Steinbeck mentions in several of his works for American country teachers with the difference that they really had the knowledge and interest necessary to do it. This was the situation of teachers in Switzerland from about 1880 to 1960. Teachers were respected people in the villages. Secondary school teachers in big villages and small towns knew similar esteem; gymnasium teachers in towns were looked at as somebody really special, and university professors considered beyond the reach of common people. Then, slow decline set in.

In our situation, teachers have retired to the background. They are well educated and well paid,

they still have some reputation; they usually do not have any cause for complaining about their situation: but they might get a bit more appreciation. The pressure is high: The job of a teacher is more demanding than before, on any level.

Beside the problems mentioned above, one particular challenge is the fact that a teacher never really sees the effect of what he is doing. A student of mine put it like this a long time ago: He came to me to tell me that it would be my fault if he should fail his examination. When I asked him about passing it, he was a little surprised first and then concluded that in this case the merit would belong to him.

School, especially compulsory school, nowadays is taken for something granted if not a nuisance. Many a child undergoes it as an ordeal. Teachers, especially in the introductory classes make big efforts to render school attractive. The situation is much better on tertiary level because most of the students there come of their own accord. They are really motivated and complying if they feel that they can learn something. But it is not always possible to teach them just the things they believe necessary.

And then, there are all the people who claim that they had never learned anything in school...

A businessman has his figures at the end of the year, a craftsman his products, an artist his work. Teachers do not have anything they can show. They must be able to find satisfaction in their work. Therefore, a little appreciation from the outside once in a while might help encourage them. The student who told me many years after leaving school that I had opened a new world for him made me a nice compliment indeed.

Appreciation may come from a student, it may come from a colleague; it should come from the ones placed above him in hierarchy. It would be nice if it came from society.

## Conclusion

René Descartes attended one of the best schools existing in France in his time. The school educated a lot of very able men, but it 'produced' just one René Descartes. Had it not been for him the school and its alumni had long been forgotten.

Quality in education is a very complex matter that involves a host of elements. Society must know what it really wants from formal education, society also must provide the environment for formal education, it must, thirdly do everything to have good teachers. All this encourages good formal education, it cannot guarantee it though. There is no way to *guarantee* quality in education but there are many ways to *assure* it.

The central element among these ways is to look for well educated teachers. Then society must grant them independence and freedom and offer them some appreciation for their work.

The teachers, on their side, must be personalities with sound self-discipline, engaged to do the best they can by challenging themselves and their students. They must pursue lifelong research in order to know more, to know better, to understand more and to understand better. Throughout their life they must enhance their knowledge of the matter they teach and matters beyond their own field. They must enhance their insight into the world and into themselves.

If they fulfill these conditions, if society provides its own part of the contract, the conditions for quality in education are given.

More we cannot do.

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