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CONTRASTIVE APPROACHES TO THE DYNAMIC NATURE OF THE TEACHER'S DEFINITION FROM THE DIACHRONIC PERSPECTIVE: THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES

Abstract. The teaching profession, based on the dichotomous relationship between the teacher and the student, is a profession that raises numerous questions and controversies. However, over the last 100 years, the teacher's position and roles have been changing like in a kaleidoscope, causing numerous teachers to leave this job and resulting in an educational crisis that may be disastrous soon. To comprehend what the crisis means, it is vital to explore how approaches to the teacher's definition have changed over the last 100 years, or more. This paper, based on qualitative but theoretical research, aims to reveal the complexity of the teacher's definition from the diachronic perspective. Based on an extensive literature review, the author makes it clear that the definition has undergone a plethora of changes, ranging from "someone conducting classes" to "someone possessing an individual immune system".

Keywords: teachers; definition; diachronic; century

KONTRASTYWNE PODEJŚCIE DO DYNAMICZNEJ NATURY DEFINICJI NAUCZYCIELA Z PERSPEKTYWY DIACHRONICZNEJ: XX I XXI WIEK

Abstrakt. Profesja nauczyciela, oparta na dychotomicznej relacji między nauczycielem a uczniem, jest zawodem budzącym liczne pytania i kontrowersje. Jednak na przestrzeni ostatnich 100 lat pozycja nauczyciela oraz pełnione przez niego role zmieniały się niczym w kalejdoskopie, co spowodowało, że coraz więcej nauczycieli rezygnowało i rezygnuje z pracy w zawodzie. Skutkiem tego jest poważny kryzys edukacyjny, który w przyszłości może mieć katastrofalne konsekwencje. Dlatego aby zrozumieć, czym tak naprawdę jest kryzys edukacji, kluczowe wydaje się zgłębienie różnych podejść do definicji nauczyciela, a także zmian, jakie zaszły w tym zakresie na przestrzeni ostatnich stu lat lub więcej. Niniejsza praca, oparta na badaniach jakościowych o charakterze teoretycznym, ma na celu ukazanie złożoności ewolucji definicji nauczyciela z perspektywy

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diachronicznej. W oparciu o szeroki przegląd literatury autor dąży do uświadomienia odbiorcom, że definicja nauczyciela ulegała licznym przeobrażeniom – od osoby prowadzącej zajęcia, po kogoś, kto posiada „indywidualny system odpornościowy”.

Słowa kluczowe: nauczyciele; definicja; diachronia; wiek

INTRODUCTION

Since working in a contemporary school environment, often dominated by technologies, AI, or multimedia tools, among others, is constantly becoming more and more complex and multitasking, fewer and fewer young people decide to become teachers, which most often results in schools struggling to find anyone willing to teach the young generations. Furthermore, it is also easy to observe that, throughout the years, more and more is being expected in terms of what the teacher needs to do to work effectively and meet the needs of the highly dynamic school environment. As a result, professional definitions of the teacher suggest what it means to be a modern-era educator and give me an opportunity to create a metaphorical representation of various features contained in the definitions developed and then modified and improved over the years.

This paper provides a contrastive insight into the dynamic concept of the teacher to reveal how this definition has changed over the last 100 years or more. Furthermore, this it conceptualizes the complexity of the profession by the constantly emerging trends, expectations and demands of the contemporary educational context included in the definitions presented in this paper. Therefore, my extended overview will help the reader to comprehend how complex this profession has become, and what it means to be a contemporary teacher in a technology and AI-driven school environment.

1. THE 20TH-CENTURY PERSPECTIVE

To start with, according to Parry (2003) and Dennison (2013), the word "teacher" first appeared in the 14th century, and it stems from the Middle English word *techen*, which also derives from the Old English word *tæcan* 'to show or instruct', or simply 'to teach'.

In the early 20th century, i.e., in the 1920s, the definition of the teacher focused on the so-called student-centred approach, as emphasised by William

H. Kilpatrick (Encyclopedia, n.d., *The 1920s education*), who maintained the importance of facilitating discussions among the students in the classroom and thus serving the role of a central authority whose main task is to observe the course of actions and modify it, giving the students as much autonomy as possible. Furthermore, the interwar period, as defined by the University of Pittsburgh (n.d.), expanded the above-mentioned definition and highlighted the teacher's characteristics defined as curriculum facilitators and researchers, as well as those members of society, as suggested by Encyclopedia.com (n.d., *The 1920s education*), that deal with diverse student populations and thus need to address their numerous, often fluctuating needs that must be enriched by civil and moral values to grow as fully aware citizens. However, as described by the California Federation of Teachers (n.d., *1920s: The condition of the teachers*), instilling these values might have been a complicated task in the 1920s since the teacher's profession was still characterized by a low social status, i.e., underestimated, socially stigmatised, and usually done in poor working conditions. Finally, according to Samuelsson (2023), a 1920s teacher aimed to focus on bringing social values to the classroom and maintaining discipline so that the teaching process might continue.

In the 1930s and 1940s, i.e., the pre- and then World War II period, the teachers were responsible for developing students' critical thinking skills and providing them with the experiential approach rather than making them learn theoretical issues only, as pinpointed by Grinberg (2002). Furthermore, the progressive movement education became popular, and the teachers were responsible for standardising the curricula available then (Encyclopaedia.com, n.d., *The 1930s education; The 1940s education*), as well as shaping students' personalities and attitudes in terms of moral values and humbleness (Lawn, 1987).

In the 1950s and 1960s, i.e., in the post-war period, the teacher's expectations were more focused on students' process of memorization of new knowledge, whereas the teacher itself was recognised as a person possessing all the necessary knowledge to work effectively with the young minds (DeWint et al., n.d.). Additionally, DeWint et al. (n.d.) claim that teachers aimed to create a certain kind of intellectual freedom in the classroom, and thus they were responsible for creating an environment that simply fostered students' thinking and intellectual development. Therefore, the holistic approach became truly popular, and the students were supposed to develop not only psychologically but also socially to expand their individual developmental paths. In the 1960s, in the USA, for instance, the 1961 Fisher Act was

issued, which, according to the California Federation of Teachers (n.d., *1960s: Teacher power*), made it obligatory for all teachers to possess specific academic credentials (at least a bachelor's degree) to teach a particular subject. Finally, Sundkvist (2012) claims that in the 1960s, the teacher was defined as a person responsible for maintaining the right order in the classroom, which means that the role of discipline was stressed, most often understood as the teacher being responsible for initiating discussions on the issues of family dynamics and corporal punishment to provoke information-exchange debates.

In the 1970s and 1980s, researchers pinpointed the importance of the teacher's continuous development and defined this person as an entity that needs to develop to adapt to the changing reality and innovative educational paradigms that may appear at any time as a result of particular events, etc. (Evans, 2002). However, some of the definitions were still related to the previous decade, as the one provided by the National Institute of Education (1978), when the teacher was defined as someone whose task was to develop their own skills and knowledge to work effectively with the students. These factors, i.e., academic degrees, expertise, knowledge, etc., also determined one's professionalism and established a strong position in the society at that time. In the late 1970s, as highlighted by McLaughlin and Marsh (1978), the teacher was also defined in terms of the concept of efficacy, i.e., how much the teacher could affect their students and thus raise their degree of awareness in the classroom to increase individual performance. However, the teacher's beliefs in their own abilities were also maintained here since the students' overall success was partly based on this aspect. This concept was further maintained in the 1980s by Gibson and Dembo (1984), who still believed that the teacher's efficacy affected students' final outcomes of learning and, as such, ought to be maintained at a high level for a long period of time. Additionally, Clifford (1975) and Cuban (1984) maintained that the teacher was a person whose position in education was strategic, i.e., central in the entire schooling process, and thus considered pivotal in the humanistic process and potential school reforms. Furthermore, Gillis (1977) defined the teacher as an actor adopting a systematic role, whose major tasks were to teach and to learn in a simultaneous way. Finally, in the late 1980s, Wright (1987) defined the teacher as someone whose major goal in the classroom was to enhance the learning experience through the creation of a conducive environment.

In the 1990s, the trends in how the teacher was defined did not really change in a very significant way; they mostly focused on the development of what had already been done or suggested by previous researchers. O'Neill

(1991) added that the teacher's main aim was to make new knowledge transfer functional, that is, to provide a thorough explanation of the target language concepts and then apply them in a plethora of contexts. Furthermore, Ur (1991) pinpointed the necessity of the teacher's focus on the entire learning process rather than its separate constituents. Therefore, a student's task was to create individual and collective hypotheses about the target language and then verify them through educational opportunities to develop individual language systems that might be highly relevant and applicable in the future. Ur's (1991) definition is similar to Douglas-Brown's (2000) description, who adds that the teacher is also a guide whose responsibilities range from instructing to evaluating students' progress in a stimulating environment. Additionally, Hargreaves (1994) claimed that the teacher was supposed to facilitate their students' progress in any area that they need to develop, and it was the teacher's responsibility to adapt to the students' needs by responding to them as effectively as possible. Finally, Harmer's (1998) definition towards the end of the 20th century described the teacher as an entity that performed specific tasks in the classroom (preparing, keeping records, being reliable) and thus developed mutual relationships to achieve the intended learning outcomes, whereas Senge (2000) maintained that the teacher was an expert responsible for the process of preparing students for future challenges, most often understood as providing students with the knowledge and skills that make them capable of identifying and naming possible obstacles, and, as such, building skills that enable students to handle challenges in an effective way. Finally, it is also worth mentioning Evans's (2008) description of the late 20th-century teacher, who described one as a person whose professional attitude and the overall concept of professionalism was based on the idea of how the teacher responded to and met the educational standards imposed by the governmental institutions, as well as how the teacher behaved in a professional environment, which should reflect the accepted norms, both social and educational.

The number of definitions, and therefore understandings of the teaching profession in the 1990s and 2000s, brought a true revival of interest in becoming a teacher, and thus multiple definitions were developed, which often reflected the current moods, tastes, trends, or even interests of numerous professionals searching for their identities. Therefore, other definitions included Carter's (1990) and Pajares's (1992) ideas that the teacher was a professional whose task was to focus on the development of the so-called instructional activities that aimed to promote students' development in a variety of educational dimensions, as well as an individual who, thanks to their education and

constant development, possessed knowledge about the true processes taking place when teaching, and thus knew exactly what classroom practices contributed to the facilitation of student-student and other types of interaction. Finally, Tobin and Fraser (1990), Lampert (1990), Popkewitz (1991), Posamentier (1992), or Hord (1997), respectively, they all stressed the importance of the teacher implementing proper management strategies, engaging reflective practices, analysing students' progress and outcomes of learning, becoming agents of changes and satisfying students' changing social and educational needs, creating stimulating and enhancing learning environments, or collaborating with other teachers to advance individual skills, approaches and students' achievements.

2. THE 21ST-CENTURY MODERN APPROACH

The 21st century brought substantial changes in how researchers began to define the teacher. The new wave of researchers, as well as innovative trends and objectives in teacher training and education, contributed to a growing interest in the ways teaching was approached, and the teachers themselves began to be approached and considered within the educational framework, thus contributing to new definitions, understandings, and features attributed to contemporary educators. As a result, in 2001, Harmer described the teacher within the framework of a class leader who plays eight essential roles (controller, organiser, assessor, prompter, resource, tutor, participant, observer), all of them concomitantly during the classes with students. Crookes and Chaudron (2001) added that the teacher was also a decision-maker, whose major aim was to modulate and, eventually, modify the entire teaching and learning process in the long run through the choice of proper methods, techniques, etc. A similar definition was introduced by Komorowska (2002), who defined the teacher as a multitasker. Furthermore, Figarski (2003) described the teacher within the teacher–student dichotomy, i.e., interdependent entities, which was further developed by Zawadzka (2004) and Wiśniewska (2009), who added that the teacher was a constant researcher evaluating the best practices and thus implementing innovative and more effective solutions to enhance the teaching-learning process within the above-mentioned dichotomy. Furthermore, Lewicka (2007) defined the teacher as a core component of the glottodidactic process, however, she put primary emphasis on the student, whose role was indispensable. Also in 2007, Douglas-Brown reflected on the

teacher's constant development and need to raise individual qualifications to meet the current needs of the educational setting. In 2008, Williamson and Clevenger-Bright presented a similar approach to the teacher's definition, however, they also maintained the necessity to develop students' language knowledge and competence as a priority.

In 2009, Werbińska stressed the role of the teacher's personal values, which means that, to some extent, the teacher was someone who might be considered a role model for other professions in terms of relatively stable and solid systems of values that make teachers a more trustworthy group of people. This also corresponded with Lugenge's (2015) viewpoint, who maintained that the teacher was a person whose aim was to promote learning to focus on the importance of the teaching profession itself, thus bringing a fresh look on it and maintaining the teaching continuum. Similar views were expressed by Sanders (2022) and Suartana et al. (2023), however, they all stressed additional elements such as developing attitudes and values when working as a teacher.

Some of the most revolutionary definitions came in the 2010s, when Hiver and Dornyei (2017) compared the teacher to a metaphorical owner of an immunological system, which constitutes an individual, experience and knowledge-based system of fully conscious reactions and automatic responses based on all the situations and events that the teacher has experienced since the beginning of the teaching career. These enable the teacher to react and behave appropriately to the situation happening at a particular moment later in the future. In 2018, Dornyei developed the above-discussed phenomenon and added that the teacher was the driving force within the transformational movement responsible for generating an attractive vision for students, as far as foreign language learning is concerned. This definition seems to be related to what is truly happening in education in the 21st century, since the student's positive attitude is one of the prerequisites for many teachers to stay motivated and willing to put even more effort in other actions in the future. Additionally, Mercer et al. (2018) stated that self-esteem seems to be an issue that might be decisive in this profession since the teacher's positive feelings maintained for a long time guarantee reciprocal effectiveness in a continuous way. These views correspond with Marlina et al.'s (2021) ideas, who maintained that the teacher's pivotal roles in the classroom are proofreaders, motivators, demonstrators, innovators, facilitators, counsellors, and managers, all of them being vital when organising an effective class with students. These roles might be easily contrasted with Harmer's (2001) famous set of roles adopted in the classroom, and thus considered a response to the changing times, trends,

needs, etc. Furthermore, it is also worth contrasting these roles with Świątek's (2023) approach, who pinpointed the necessity of the teacher becoming an administrator, mediator, promoter, psycho-pedagogue/diagnostician, coordinator, motivator, implementor, and researcher/practitioner, which basically means that the teacher is a person whose task is to have a global understanding of the teaching process as well as, at least to some extent, to make predictions and immediately apply solutions that work best to facilitate knowledge absorption and thus react before any complications evolve. Therefore, the above-mentioned descriptions of teacher roles reveal how complex the teacher's definition has become nowadays due to the intricate nature and changing reality in this particular profession, which is also subject to constant changes as a result of its dynamic character.

In 2019, several other definitions were presented, which further developed one's understanding of the teacher's position. Therefore, Dornyei and Muir (2019) defined the teacher within the three leadership styles they described, i.e., autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. Each of them describes how much independence can a student be given in the classroom, and thus autocratic teachers define and control all actions in the classroom, democratic ones allow students to participate in the decision-making process on a 50/50 basis, whereas laissez-faire teachers let students take full control over the course of actions in the classroom, which means that the teacher is supposed to remain an observer rather than an active participant. Muir et al. (2019) also maintain that the teacher is a role model, whose behaviour and motivational patterns ought to become a source of inspiration for students as well as shape individual personalities to develop effectively. That is why Thomas and Thorpe (2019) claimed that the teacher's great responsibility is to develop students' higher order thinking skills.

One of the most interesting and therefore pivotal definitions of the teacher comes from Pedaste et al. (2019), who claim that the teacher is an entity whose responsibility is to follow current trends to comprehend what it means to teach and thus adopt the roles that are expected from society, based on current needs, changing trends, evolving concepts, changing qualities, as well as what happens both inside and outside the classroom. Therefore, this definition implies that teacher roles, engagement, or qualities may simply change as a response to the most current situation, regulations or expectations imposed by external institutions, legal entities, or simply the environment the teacher works in. A similar view was presented by Putri et al. (2019), who claim that the teacher's major responsibility is providing students with knowledge, regardless of their

backgrounds, knowledge, or experience. This also means that the teacher needs to be flexible and adjust to the changing conditions and trends. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning three definitions that relate to a similar idea. First of all, Aquino et al. (2021) claim that the teacher is a person whose attitude, knowledge, skills, etc., most commonly referred to as foreign language pedagogy, have been shaped through systematisation of all the experiences that the teacher has collected. That is why Agnafors et al. (2021) maintain that the teacher is a person who is socially accepted and trusted in terms of delivering education and shaping young minds and their viewpoints. Apart from that, possessing a diploma in the educational sector resembles the teacher's legal aspect of trust (understood as formally awarded and officially recognised qualifications to become a teacher, which also, in a metaphorical sense, certify individual social credibility to work with students and allow to be granted common trust) granted by the local educational authorities, whose opinion-making power is clear and often decides about one's future in this profession. Finally, based on the above-mentioned trust, Barrot et al. (2021) pinpoint the importance of the teacher's recognition skills, which is related to one's identification of a student's learning difficulties both in and out of the classroom, as well as their sources, in order to enhance the teaching process and apply methods and techniques that clearly facilitate knowledge absorption. Similar views were presented by Suwarno (2017), who claims that becoming a teacher might be compared to maintaining students' development in the so-called in- and out-of-school context, as well as Harahap and Suwarno (2022), who went even further and stated that the teacher ought to be recognised as someone who determines their students' direction of development, shapes them, as well as reflects the process of systematicity and continuum in learning and developing life-long skills and values. Finally, Zamroni (2017) maintains that the teacher is a medium of instruction responsible for instilling major religious, cultural and scientific values in students. In other words, the teacher is supposed to create an ambience that is free of stress in order for their students to make progress by releasing their maximum creativity within the accepted and commonly allowed educational norms.

In 2020, Mercer and Dornyei stressed the importance of the teacher's professional attitude aimed to maintain students' engagement and motivation, which are necessary to activate understanding and therefore meaningful learning. Furthermore, at this point, it is also worth mentioning two corresponding viewpoints which extend the above-mentioned idea, i.e., Bartholomay's (2022) and Chen's et al. (2022), who claim that the teacher is responsible for

much more than the learning process itself, and thus pinpoint the necessity of a holistic approach, which then corresponds with the engagement of the student's mind, body, and spirit to make learning more meaningful and thus effective. Holistic approach also contributes to the fact that learning becomes "complete", and all the necessary senses and means of communication are properly activated to participate in the entire process as a full person rather than only "to some extent". This also corresponds with an earlier view presented by Oakes et al. (2018), who maintain that the teacher needs to be a "complete" entity for their students since they become an integral and also pivotal part of their lives by shaping individual attitudes, viewpoints and beliefs, thus promoting individual growth and development.

As far as more evolving definitions are concerned, Junaidi and Rosadi (2022) claim that the teacher is like a metaphor of the educational system because they are qualified academic experts, whose expertise allows them to become "agents of learning", and whose health, both spiritual and physical, enables them to make learning goals, established by the national curriculum, become real. Additionally, this definition corresponds with Pandey and Sharma's (2022) approach, who claim that the teacher's expertise is something that truly activates students' potential and enables them to reach their own goals. Therefore, the teacher's dedication aims to facilitate students' actions and to activate those pieces of knowledge and skills that might have been hidden, limited, or simply hindered for a long time before any proper methodology or approach activated the necessity to apply them in a real context.

3. FINAL REFLECTION

The above-mentioned definitions and descriptions of who the teacher is according to numerous researchers and linguists (and still more of them could be added, potentially endlessly) reveal the true complexity of the teaching profession as well as expectations that appear when one decides to become a teacher. Furthermore, the contrasts revealed by the analysis presented in this paper, especially when considered in terms of the 20th and 21st centuries show that the changing trends in education and growing needs contribute to the so-called constant extension of the teacher's definition and soon may bring even further modifications in what society expect from educators. However, it is still worth noticing that even at the beginning of the 20th century, becoming

a teacher meant something more than only delivering knowledge and observing how students progress.

In other words, at the beginning, teachers were mostly viewed as facilitators centred on morals, history, civics, and discipline. By the mid-19th century, teachers were expected to promote critical thinking, standardization, and professionally contribute to curriculum development, which began to be recognized after the war. In the 1970s and 1980s, these roles transformed with emphasis on overall development, effectiveness, and teachers' strategic importance. In the 21st century, the definition became broader and included instructional, managerial, and more technology driven roles, including AI. Teachers have shifted to serve as leaders, decision makers, and role models while meeting the changing educational needs, upholding important values, and promoting skills that endure over time, which reinforces teachers' attitudes, their holistic learning frameworks, and their impact on student development within and outside the classroom.

All the definitions presented in this paper reveal that the teaching profession has always been a trustworthy one from which social expectations, despite low salaries and enormous administrative paperwork, has always been at a relatively high level. Therefore, when it comes to the future of the teaching profession, there is a strong likelihood that the teachers themselves will commit to even more duties and responsibilities, and more and more aspects will be included in the teacher's definition. One of the possible developmental paths, often described as an unanswered question as well as a mystery in the teaching profession as well as the educational process itself is the extent to which the implementation of artificial intelligence will truly take place. This may clearly impact the teacher's job and its various components. However, for now, AI does not seem to pose a serious threat for teachers since teaching and therefore working with young, often rebellious minds, requires sophisticated skills and interaction, which may only be done by someone who is capable of revealing numerous emotions, such as empathy, affection, sympathy, etc., often necessary to cooperate effectively with people, which seems to be something that AI-supported entities will not yet be able to imitate for a long period of time.

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