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## Teacher's Role in Educational Changes: Executor or Collaborator? The case of Greece

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*Abstract* - Nowadays, a demand is strongly expressed concerning education's modernization. Schools are required to 'change' and adapt to contemporary demands. Greek State promotes many changes, such as institutional, changes in the curriculum's content and structure and other innovations. Teachers are the persons asked to implement those changes. One aspect of educational changes concerns the methods used mostly by teachers in the implementation of educational changes. The main aim of the present study was to investigate the causes that according to teachers' opinion, many educational changes are annulled. A questionnaire was given to teachers who work in State Primary Schools in the city of Patras in the South West of Greece.

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The main aim of the present study was to investigate the causes that according to teachers' opinion, many educational changes are annulled. A questionnaire was given to teachers who work in State Primary Schools in the city of Patras in the South West of Greece.

The research findings showed that teachers did not implement educational changes in many cases, mainly because they have never been asked to give their opinion about the change. They believe that educational changes should be promoted after a dialogue within the community of education. Lastly, they consider that the most important qualifications that promoters of educational changes can have is experience from the school classroom' and adequate background studies.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

During last years, schools and their teachers have been invited to implement many educational changes and to adapt to contemporary social demands. The aim is schools to become more open and responsive to society's needs and therefore be more effective educational institutions. As for students, the aim is to be able to successfully integrate themselves in the new social reality around them and face the demands required of them in the labor market after their graduation.

Within that framework, an extensive dialogue has opened up regarding the qualifications and the personal characteristics of what constitutes a good-effective teacher. Nowadays, the public attitude and perspective towards teacher is one of the criticism and a demand of better education of their children

According to Perrenoud (1996), teachers' profession has reached a crucial crossroad. It is headed towards either proletarianization (mere executor of educational changes) or professionalism.

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According to Klaas van Veen, P. Sleegers, et al (2001), the notion of 'professionalism is shaped and constructed. That means it is changing with time. In this study, a 'professional' is considered a person participating in decision making. A 'professional' is a free person, independent and creative, able to choose. Thus, a 'professional' is personally responsible for what he/she does. Apple & Jungck (1992), mention that schools, teachers and programs are closely controlled more and more. Educational reformations have undermined teachers' professionalism, as well as the trust to their specific knowledge and abilities. They have contributed to teachers' low morale and have led them to a defense position (Ball, in Crozier, 1999). This is because they have no saying in the formation of educational policy, as far as their own mission is concerned (Whitty et al, in Crozier, 1999). According to Lareau (1989), teachers are considered to be semi-professionals.

Under those circumstances, teacher's role is changing. Since frequent changes hinder their work, this results in many cases in causing educators' fatigue, stress and discontentment (Tsiplitaris, 2002). According to Kanta (1998), the organizational and administrative structure plays an important role to educators' professional burnout. Blase & Anderson (in Hargreaves, 1998), report the prevalent emotions teachers experience when their administration is authoritarian; emotions such as anger, depression, agony, relinquishment.

As teachers or researchers who carry out an empirical research, we gained experience by being in the 'school ground'. Based on the observations and research, we concluded that there is a difference and a distance between the Ministry of Education's intentions and goals and the implementation of methods concerning the various educational changes that are promoted. In many cases, this has resulted in annulling those changes.

According to Milonas, Manassis & Papandreou (2001), teachers learn about different didactic/ educational or administrative matters. However they are not informed by the proper authority (principal, administrator, school counselor). They mostly learn about those matters by their colleagues to whom they resort to understand and solve the many problems that exist in schools and questions about them.

The present study focused on the analysis of all

the factors leading teachers to formally implement educational changes. This unfortunately has resulted in the annulment of Ministry's intentions.

#### a) *Educational Change*

"Educational Change", is considered to be the complex sum of Laws, Presidential Decrees, Circulars, Ministry Decisions that schools are asked to implement. Any improvement is considered to be a change. Regarding the notion "educational change" and its aspects, see Fullan & Steigelbauer, 1991; Yfanti, 2000.

#### b) *Teacher's Role*

Teacher's role is a sum of rights and obligations along with the method each person implements it (Milonas, 1993), within a field (Bourdieu, 1992, 1995). Furthermore, this role is defined by several rules and demands coming from 'different directions'.

Rules and demands that:

- are both required and imposed by the (School) Institution
- are imposed (or there is an attempt to be imposed) by people or teams so as to facilitate their own interests
- teacher himself as a Person chooses

#### Scheme I

#### c) *Aim of the study*

The main aim of the study was to investigate teachers' opinions about what themselves believe about the causes that the changes are asked to implement are often annulled and the formation of teacher's role. Therefore, we want to exhibit ways and means that teachers use to react to educational changes and in general, to institutional demands and pressures.

Because of the generalized social changes and advancements, the demands above are stronger and stronger. Specific demands simultaneously originate from many organizations/bodies or categories of interests. Either obvious or not, these demands are exerted on teacher's role in many ways. They originate from Education Chiefs, Scientists, Colleagues, Parents, Students, High School Teachers<sup>1</sup>, but from public opinion in general.

The Teacher is becoming a receiver of institutional demands and pressures. Despite his potential reactions or resistance, he/she 'responds' to the demands in many ways, mostly for survival

purposes. On the other hand, he/she believes in the illusion of his independence, when he/she closes the door of his classroom.

A teacher's role is less and less formed to be a professional's role.

#### d) *Research Questions*

In investigating those factors, a series of research questions were formulated. The main attempt was to answer some of the questions, especially those that could have measurable results, such as the following ones:

- Do teachers get accustomed to a specific working method?
- If the answer is yes, why does this happen?
- How do teachers implement educational changes in School?
- How is teacher's role formed or shaped?

#### e) *Hypothesis*

The hypothesis behind the above research questions, was as follows:

Teacher's role is formed/shaped to an executor and not a professional.

Investigating the above research questions, we expect teachers' answers to confirm this hypothesis.

## II. METHOD

Our research belongs in the area of Microsociology. We adopted an ethnomethodological approach of the research topic. We are interested in stating the meaning that the actors themselves give in their acts/deeds as givers or receivers of a message (Weber, 1987; Terlexis, 1999).

#### a) *Sample*

The population of our interest is Primary School Teachers. Teachers' sample that answered to the questionnaire was formed following the process below: Sampling area was chosen to be the Prefecture of Achaia, in South West of Greece. Based on the elements in 2001's census and their comparison with other prefectures, the Achaia prefecture is representative regarding education level and groups of professions of inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> Then, the sampling was restricted to the city of Patras, because the teachers working in its schools originate from different areas of Greece, not only from Patras.<sup>3</sup> Also, teachers in Patras have many re-education opportunities such as participating in programs of the University of Patras, seminars, Regional Re-education Center of Patras, etc. As expected, they would be interested in participating in the research. It is more than 1850 teachers, men and women, working in the Elementary Schools of Achaia Prefecture during the school year 2009-2010, based on the elements of Administration of Primary Education in Achaia Prefecture. In the city of Patras, work more than 950 teachers. Sample size examined was increased to 15% of the total sample so as the restrictions mentioned

<sup>1</sup> They usually accuse Elementary School Teachers that they send the students illiterate to high school

<sup>2</sup> Based on the elements of 2001 census, there are no essential differences in the distribution concerning education level and groups of professions among inhabitants of Achaia Prefecture as compared with the other Prefectures of Greece.

<sup>3</sup> Based on the elements, many teachers are hired in Achaia every year as permanent or substitute personnel. Many are asking for a displacement or disengagement to another area every year, thus it can be assumed that there is not an established teachers' behavior.

above to not influence the validity of the research.<sup>4</sup>

The sample originated after a random but systematic sampling. We finally gave 140 questionnaires and 115 of them were filled and returned to us, that is a percentage of 81%.

#### b) Instrument

A survey questionnaire was used as a data collection technique, a widely used instrument in social sciences, since a large amount of data is collected in a short period of time. The questionnaire's content was based on the research questions mentioned above.

A questionnaire as a method to collect teachers' answers was chosen in this study instead of an interview for another two reasons:

- while designing the research, we tried to interview some teachers. Then, based on these pilot interviews, we discovered that teachers were not available in recording their opinions, because they were afraid of what they would say. The effort to interview teachers was "a time-consuming, complex procedure that demanded psychological availability and endless argumentation" (Friderikou & Folerou, 1991:16)
- participating in previous researches with Professor Milonas' investigatory team, we knew that teachers prefer to answer to open-type questions because this makes easy for them to refer to whatever bothers them and they do not feel distrust. Xohelis (1984:48) was led to the same conclusions.

As far as validity was guaranteed, a pilot study was conducted to ensure that adequate time was given for the questionnaire's completion and that all teachers were capable of comprehending its items. The questionnaire was first given to 20 teachers. A content analysis (Weber, 1994) of teachers' answers was performed on the pilot questionnaire given. This analysis resulted in categorizing teachers' answers based on each question. It also resulted in improving the final

<sup>4</sup> There are many different opinions as to what considered a satisfying sample. Sample size (Kiriazis, 1999: 108-119, mostly 116-117) depends on financial resources, level of accuracy intended by the researchers, the cases that should be included in the subtotals. It also depends on the research's target and the nature of the examined population as well as by the number of variables the researchers would examine and use in a specific statistical analysis (Cohen & Manion, 1996:131).

<sup>5</sup>From the ones having completed basic level studies, in the Pedagogical Academy and afterwards finished "Didaskalio", "equalization" or both of them, 24% has 6-15 years of duty, 52% has 16-25 years and 20% of them had more than 26 years of duty. The findings were statistically significant  $\chi^2(28, N = 116) = 107,238$   $p = .000$ . It is obvious the strong interest of teachers with average number of years in duty/work.

<sup>6</sup>Based on Dimitrakakis & Maniatis' research (2003), it is noted that teachers' participation in mobility programs contributes to their formation of disposal at educational changes. They feel more responsible as professionals and ready to collaborate with other bodies/organizations, to overcome the public servant mentality.

questionnaire given. As a result of the pilot study, the revised questionnaire could identify teachers' opinions concerning this research. Questions were phrased in such way that there is no way the answers can be normatively/ideologically imposed.

The questionnaire consisted of 5 open-type questions and 2 close-type questions.

### III. RESULTS DISCUSSION

The results of this study will be presented below. Firstly, a reference to teachers' socio - demographic characteristics will be made and then, a presentation of teachers' answers to three questions of the questionnaire.

#### a) Teachers' descriptive characteristics

The questionnaire was filled by forty nine male (42%) and sixty six female (57%) teachers. Fifteen of them (13%) had completed 0-5 years of duty/work, forty (35%) 6-15 years, forty three (37%) 16-25 years and sixteen of them (14%) 26 years and above.

Concerning their studies, 83% of them were graduates of the Pedagogical Academy (2 years) and 17% were graduates of the Department of Primary Education (4 years). From those with studies in the Pedagogical academy (basic level), 37% of them had finished either a two years in service program called 'Didaskalio' or equalization programs or both of them and 16% another University School. One (1) had a PhD and four (4) postgraduate diploma/masters. Thus, it can be observed a constant effort of the teachers to educate themselves so as to adopt to the new data.<sup>5</sup>

According to their statement, participation to innovative actions had 64 teachers (55%)<sup>6</sup>; 41 of them (64%) were women. Thus, it is attested an increased women participation in such programs. The findings were statistically significant  $\chi^2(4, N = 116) = 12,894$   $p = .012$ .

#### b) Answers to the Questions

The first question addressed to teachers was "Do they agree that after some working years in school they get accustomed to a specific everyday working style and they don't want to adapt to new methods and techniques?"

##### i. Get accustomed to a everyday working style

Table I

Although it was somewhat expected, it is still surprising the fact that the crushing majority of teachers asked (74%) agreed with the opinion, that with time teachers get accustomed to their own teaching/working method and it is hard for them to change. Only 30 teachers (26%) stated that they disagree, that means they believe that they are open to changes. However, what are the causes that, according to teachers, can account for this fact?

Based on a content analysis of teachers' answers in the pilot questionnaire, six categories of factors/topics examined had arisen: easiness, security, deficient re-education, illusion of professionalism, different causes.

**Table II**

In total, 130 answers were received. Based on those, it results in the combination of three causes (habit as easiness or security or deficient re-education) are the most important reasons why the teachers get accustomed to a teaching/working method and it is hard to change.

To elaborate more:

*a. Category I : Easiness*

The main cause explaining why teachers do not easily change their working method is 'easiness' (35%). They feel comfortable with themselves in a situation and they do not want to change the existing 'status quo', because changes demand more effort and many teachers are not available or willing to spend time and effort to facilitate change. These are the expressions of the teachers themselves<sup>7</sup>:

- With time, educators get accustomed to a teaching/working method and do not change it easily, because they think that it is best for them. The already collected material they have facilitates time saving.
- People feel comfortable with what they know
- If we get accustomed to a style of life, it is easy to get accustomed to a working method
- Changes demand more effort and most teachers are not willing or available to do it
- Teachers accustomed to a teaching/working method are not open to changes. This is because they think change will add more teaching demands, such as more time from them to prepare and organize their teaching and that will upset them
- It is easier for someone to slot in (patch up) a situation than for them to get acquainted with new facts and teaching methods
- They get used to things and they find difficult to try something different
- It is difficult for someone to adapt to the new educational methods, to change teaching style/method and to update his knowledge
- The force of habit and the tendency to patch up things in work, make people to not change easily working style.
- Teachers get used to some things, methods, ways and experiences

- It is a human characteristic to resist to anything unknown and uncertain, when he has to take a leave of his habits
- Habit prevails
- The difficulty for people to get into new processes that need more effort and work
- Because it is easy for us

*b. Category II: Security*

Many of the teachers' answers mentioned this category (Security - 15%). Teachers responded that being accustomed to a teaching/working method facilitates them better, since they are afraid facing something new and unknown. For them, habit is always the best solution. These are some of the answers they wrote themselves:

- Habit is always the easy solution
- They feel secure when they know something well and since they have tried it many times with success
- Fear of the unknown
- They are afraid of something new
- Sometimes they feel insecure when facing changes
- People feel secure with a working method and in many cases, without examining whether the results of this method are positive or not
- Sometimes they feel insecurity towards changes. They are afraid that changes will not be successful or that will demand more time and effort
- Anything new scares people and effort and energy are required so as to be accepted
- Whatever I have learned is what I will do
- Change scares them because they believe that they will not reach the desired result and they will waste time
- Difficulty in (fear about) implementing new methods
- The use of the accustomed "route" creates a sense of security

*c. Category III : Deficient in service education*

Teachers' responses to those two categories have to be studied along with the deficient re-education they have received (23%). They are afraid of the changes and they want to follow the same working/teaching method they are accustomed to. These are the expressions of the teachers themselves:

- Deficiency of a substantial information and re-education concerning new teaching methods
- Non-existent information
- The responsible official bodies do not offer a proper information for educators to realize the need for change in their working/teaching methods
- A change demands that teachers will be informed beforehand about the new elements concerning its validity and educational worth
- Because nobody takes educators' proper re-education seriously

<sup>7</sup> The phrases mentioned above are indicative, typical of a series of answers. Phrases are not repeated, but they are mentioned exactly as stated by the teachers. Only spelling mistakes were corrected.

- There is not a continuous and sufficient re-education/upgrade of teachers' education regarding the new trends in pedagogy and didactics
- Many teachers' will to adopt new and more liberate teaching methods bumps into the absence of relevant skills and the organization along with the school schedule
- Deficiency of in service education and information
- More seminars and information about changes are required by the responsible bodies/organizations
- Because we are not often re-educated in contemporary educational programs
- Educators' information about new working styles is scarce and short in time. As a result, it does not bring the desired results
- Incomplete education and weakness in attending new teaching methods (seminars)
- Opportunities of in service education should be constant for the teacher so as to see properly and to improve himself
- The teacher evaluates his work's results in the end of school year. He aims to eliminate his weaknesses and deficiencies by applying a more ideal teaching style
- The educator uses his experience from his education in university, when he is in front of his students. Therefore, not many educators develop a behaviour different from the one of their teachers
- After years in work/service, other studies, seminars and re-education programs, teachers settle down to a working style and follow it closely
- Because they consider that their working style is effective for themselves and the children
- They have learned to work in this way, as it happens in other professional domains
- Another teaching style is more difficult to apply and the results are doubtful
- The knowledge-centered character of school is better accommodated by the established teaching methods – because the teacher feels deficient in knowledge to apply something new

d. *Category IV: Illusion of professionalism*

Teachers' practical/functional knowledge of school class matters teachers' 'loads' along with self-esteem are important. It also brings them to a position against the changes imposed by others.<sup>8</sup> According to them, these 'others' do not really know what happens in schools. Also, this practical knowledge of the classroom offers to teachers the illusion of professionalism, that they are the 'experts'. Expressions of the teachers themselves:

- In their opinion, they are improved through their experiences and that they follow a more effective teaching method
- It is difficult to change when you believe that your teaching/working method is the right one
- They organize their work and they collect material. The positive results of their work probably convince them that they should continue teaching as they have done in the past
- The secure feeling they get with their teaching/working method, confirms in their minds that they are teaching properly. Apart from this, they can improve the way they use their method, based on this experience
- The knowledge educators acquire during their studies and based on experience defines a 'safe' working model

<sup>8</sup> According to Perrenoud (1996), State's trust towards teachers is absent. The experts refer to teachers as 'they', while teachers do the same for those taking the decisions for change. Based on our experience, teachers require and desire their re-educators to come from their own field, because they want them to have a 'practical sense', that is, knowing the means to deal with school reality. Teachers' criticism about evaluation focuses at this point; 'what kind of qualifications and experiences from school classroom would our evaluator have'?

e. *Category V: Several Answers*

Finally, some teachers gave some different answers, as follows:

- there is no encouragement or offer of motives
- the fact that many times changes promoted without a beforehand design and have no result
- educational changes are cursorily promoted, thus educators do not agree with this
- they believe that nobody supports them
- They understand that their mission and offer are not appreciated by the state or the parents
- Educators' initiatives are not encouraged and their needs are not taken into consideration
- They are tired by so many and continuous changes (the one change follows the other)
- Educators' resistance towards the government regarding the privatization of education

Based on teachers' answers, educators experience feelings of exhaustion, bitterness and depreciation by the State's side. They believe that it lacks design and desultoriness dominates. Nobody ask them about the educational changes, thus, they feel that nobody supports them.

The question is "how this established way that teachers react to educational changes is manifested in fact".

c) *The implementation of Educational changes*

Having this in mind, teachers were asked whether they agree that many of the educational changes promoted by the Ministry (through Circulars, Presidential Decrees, Laws, etc.) are not in fact implemented to a high extent.

**Table III**

This was a close-type question. Teachers explicitly responded with the astounding 91% that they agree that many educational changes are not in fact implemented, at least as planned by the Ministry. Thus, they admit that have developed adverse reaction and invented strategies to not implement educational changes as specifically proposed by the Ministry, because of the reasons mentioned in the previous question (slotting in/patching up, security, bad re-education, illusion of professionalism). As a result, they implement changes the way they understand and interpret them to an extent that does not affecting them. Of course when implementing changes, they are mindful not to come to an apparent conflict with the Ministry.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

The findings proved clearly and explicitly the hypothesis stated in the beginning.

Teachers with time get used to a teaching/working method that does not require adverse demands on them or a great effort on their part to teach, and at the same time offers them security. The need to face daily the demands of successful teaching in schools, forces them to find practical ways to teach efficiently. This is basically established through experience and gives teachers a sense of professionalism (Milonas et al, 2001). According to Papakonstantinou (1984) there is a distance between teachers' re-education and their practice. This is also shown in the content of studies for Greek educators and in the need for this content to be more scientific. The aim is the 'pedagogical art' to be 'demystified' and free itself by the 'gravity' of 'experience'. Lamnias and Tsatsaroni (1999) examine the conditions for a change of school practices and concluded that the contradictory suggestions and the action of intermediate organizations/bodies (i.e. school counselors) enforce educators' resistance since they confuse them even more.

The result is to implement many educational changes with such ways that they particularly annul them. At the same time, it is highlighted the importance of the relevant autonomy of school institution.<sup>9</sup> Because they believe that their re-education is not substantial/crucial, they feel that the responsibility for this does not belong to them. It seems that re-education is not properly organized. Teachers' answers rate down the process along with the people responsible for their re-education. As a result, few changes become understood by teachers, as to how they will implement

them. Educators themselves emphasize the need for their re-education (Matsagouras, 2002:304). Mavrogiorgos (2003) thinks that re-education functions as a mechanism of ideological conformity and imposition of main educational choices. It aims to the ideological legalization of 'state' pedagogy and didactics.

It is clear that there exists a distance or a gap between Ministry's expectations and the implementation of school policy<sup>10</sup>. Also, unfortunately the trust and cooperation in the relationship between the school's administration and teachers is virtually absent in many educational institutions in Greece. Teacher's role is relegated to that of a mere executor, or facilitator, but not to a professional one. This is because he does not or is not allowed to participate in the decision-making concerning school, as it is done in many other countries.

The consequences are immediate and can be demoralizing for the teacher in the formation of his/her role. They also refer to his students, the educational policy and to the professional socialization and education of newly-appointed teachers. Same were the conclusions in Manassis' research (2000). Teachers who graduate from Departments of Primary Education mention a conflict between their studies and school reality. Thus they ask for a connection between their initial education and everyday practice. They often follow the methods shown by more experienced colleagues. However, one group of teachers supports the most the statement that 'teachers get accustomed to a teaching/working method with time'. It is the ones having completed in Pedagogical Academy (2 years study) and attended classes in 'Didaskalio' or equalizing seminars. It can be commented that those teachers escape from school routine by being in contact with the new scientific data. Thus, they become more caustic towards colleagues that do not participate in such re-education programs.

The Ministry of Education or the ones decides about educational policy should pay attention on the teachers' answers above. They reveal why many educational changes are not implemented in fact. Of high importance are teachers' remarks as the following ones: they do not want to spend time and effort, they feel secure following practical ways to face daily routine, they learned through their experience or their re-education is bad.

The findings of the present study also support our empirical knowledge about teachers; they do not easily accept another colleague in their class, either he is a director or a school counselor. They prefer to enclose themselves in the security of their school classroom.

<sup>9</sup>This notion refers to the everyday actions of teachers in a micro level that prevail legitimacy (what State-Administration wants them to do). According to Matsagouras (2002:237) 'the individual develops mechanisms and tends to resist to change'.

<sup>10</sup> In Greece, educational policy is often cancelled or leads to not expected or twisted results (Manesis, 2010, 2011)

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Table I

	Frequency	%
Teachers get accustomed to a working method		
Yes	85	74%
No	30	26%

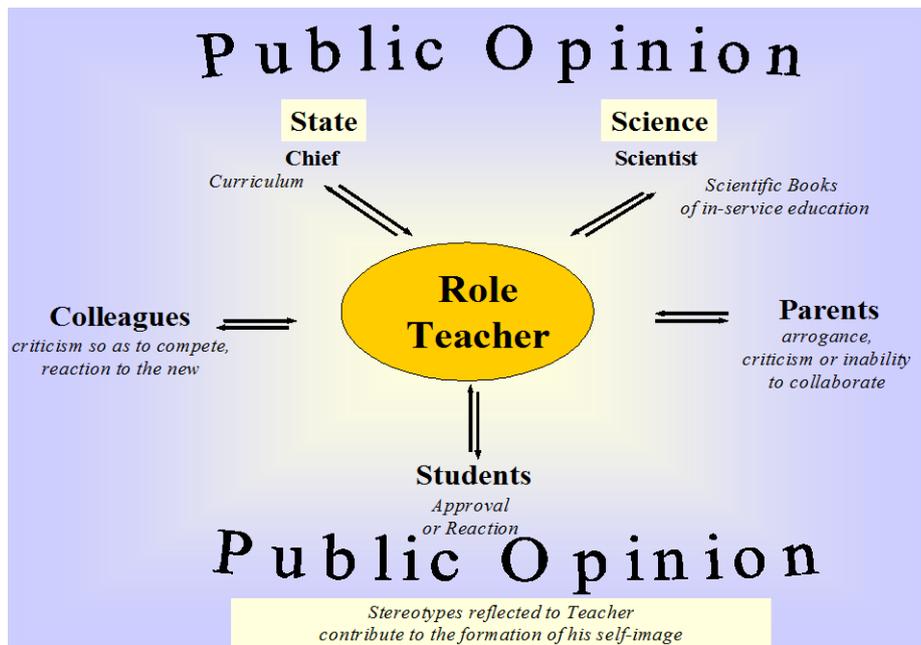
Table II

Causes teachers think that they get accustomed to a working method	Frequency	%
Easiness	45	35%
Security	19	15%
Deficient re-education	30	23%
Illusion of professionalism	19	15%
Several causes	17	13%

Table III

Implementation of educational changes	Frequency	%
No	10	9%
Yes	105	91%

Figure I





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