

Do Education Reforms Fail? A Historian's Response¹

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to address the question of failure or relative failure of the majority of education reforms from a historical perspective. After some initial clarifications of the terms "reform" and "failure," recent contributions on the subject from the notions of "school culture" or "grammar of schooling" are set out as well as the possibilities, limitations and dangers in the use of these concepts. Finally, the main traits of the various cultures: those of the reformers and managers, scientists and experts and those of the teachers are analysed with the aim of integrating their differing conceptions and experience of education in the issue of the failure of education reforms and the wider question of change and innovation in education.

Key words: education reforms, school culture, educational innovation

RESUMEN

En este artículo se intenta responder, desde una perspectiva histórica, a la cuestión del fracaso o relativo fracaso de la generalidad de las reformas educativas. Así, tras unas precisiones previas sobre el significado de los términos "reforma" y "fracaso," se exponen las recientes aportaciones sobre el tema realizadas a partir de las nociones de "cultura escolar" y "gramática de la escuela," así como las posibilidades, límites y peligros de las mismas. Por último, se analizan los rasgos principales de la culturas sobre la escuela de los reformadores y gestores, de los científicos y expertos y de los profesores y maestros, a fin de integrar sus diferentes concepciones y vivencias sobre la educación en la cuestión del fracaso de las reformas educativas y, en la más amplia, del cambio e innovaciones en la enseñanza.

Palabras clave: reformas educativas, cultura escolar, innovación en educación

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article essaie d'adresser la question de l'échec ou l'échec relatif de la plupart des réformes éducatives d'une perspective historique. Après des clarifications initiales des termes "réforme" et "échec," des contributions récentes au sujet basées sur les idées de "la culture scolaire" ou "la grammaire de l'école" s'exposent ainsi que les possibilités, les limitations et les dangers dans l'emploi de ces concepts. Enfin, les traits principaux des diverses cultures: on analyse ceux des réformateurs et les gérants, les savants et les experts et ceux des professeurs dans le but d'intégrer leurs diverses conceptions et leurs diverses expériences de l'éducation par rapport à l'échec des réformes éducatives et la question plus large du changement et de l'innovation dans l'éducation.

Mots-clés

réformes éducatives, culture scolaire, innovation éducative

Introduction

AMONG THOSE who have analysed education reforms over the last few decades or are involved in issues related to school organisation, curriculum and educational innovation, there would seem to be fairly general agreement on the failure or relative failure of all these reforms. They claim that in spite of the successive series of reform initiatives undertaken in recent decades, the fundamental core of school practice has remained virtually unchanged or has not undergone noticeable improvement (Escudero, 1994; Fullan, 1994; Gimeno, 1996; Goodman, 1995; Sirotnik, 1994). They have even gone so far as to say that, on the whole, reforms succeed each other, one after another, without actually changing what takes place in the educational institutions and especially classrooms because they constitute, at best, a show of good intentions on the part of reformers with respect to the education system and, at worst, a smokescreen to distract those involved – teachers, students, parents, unions etc. – and hide the lack of an effective policy for improvement. As much in one case as in the other, they add, the reforms turn into a ritual to justify the reformers' existence and legitimise a given political situation (Campbell, 1982; Cuban, 1990a; Gimeno, 1992, 1996, 1998).

Criticism of the reformers, that is of those who design and launch reform after reform from the seats of political power and education administration, comes not only from those who analyse the reforms from a political or pedagogical viewpoint, but in recent years also from historians of education, especially those interested in the history of the curriculum, school disciplines or the daily life of educational establishments and the classroom in particular. In such a critique, undertaken from a historical perspective, sometimes the reformers have been blamed for a messianic belief in the possibility of a more-or-less total break with past tradition, in which current practices and reality would be cast aside without further ado and substituted by those proposed. That in ignoring them they behave as though said practices and traditions had never existed, as though nothing had previously taken place and they were therefore in a position to put up a new building from scratch. This fact prompts the need to break with this "current antipathy between strategies for reform of the curriculum and the history of the same" (Goodson, 1995, pp. 9-10).

References to the weight of tradition or "historical baggage" of the teaching institutions (Weiss, 1995, p. 587) and their neglect by those who project and implement reforms believing it possible to "reinvent" the school require a response from historians of education. The ball has been thrown into our court and demands some form of reply. The problem arises, however, when from the very same history of education the blindness of historians towards the everyday reality of educational institutions and classroom practice is demonstrated. This blindness has led to some having resorted in recent years to the simile of the "black box" in referring to the real curriculum (Goodson, 1995, p. 11), the classroom (Depaepe & Simon, 1995; Depaepe, 2000) or the school culture (Julia, 1995) as historical objects. Recognition of this black box gives rise to serious problems of theory, methodology and sources, but in recent years it has also been the object of studies in its own right (Grosvenor, Lawn & Rousmaniere, 1999) and also for its relationship with the history of scholarly disciplines (Chervel, 1996, 1998; Julia, 2000), with the divorce between theory and science of education and the

empirical-practical knowledge of the school teachers (Escolano, 1999, 2000) or with the question of the failure or superficiality of education reforms (Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Viñao, 1996, 1999). Thus, some answers to said demand have already been provided by historians. The aim of this text is to give an account of them, put forward a critical view and suggest some of the possibilities or paths to explore. First, however, it is necessary to provide some conceptual clarifications to enable us to open these paths.

Education Reforms and Innovations

The terms reform and education both have positive connotations. Education conjures up a worthwhile activity and when we talk of reform what comes to mind is a change that improves the current situation and implies advance, progress (Aldrich, 1998). Counter reform, on the other hand, has negative overtones. Thus, for example, some Catholic historians prefer to talk of Protestant reform and Catholic reform rather than reform and counter reform.

Can reform be unquestioningly identified with improvement, advance or progress? Change does not necessarily imply improvement or progress (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). That it should be so or not depends upon the ideology, values and interests of the judge (Cuban, 1990b). Hence, the historian should distinguish between improvement and success. Whether a change or reform can be classified as an improvement or not depends upon a personal judgement of its merits. However, judgement of the success or failure of a reform is cast in line with the extent to which its aims and its effects coincide, independent of the opinion held of each. Thus, for example, it could be said that the education reform carried out by the National faction in Franco's Spain after the start of the Civil War, based as it was, among other aspects, on the purge of the teaching profession and the imposition of an ideological grip of iron on the education system, was a complete success, even when going on to say that such success formed the most damaging, harmful and regressive episode in the entire educational, scientific and cultural history of twentieth century Spain.

What is more, in referring to the aims and objectives of an education reform and matching them to its effects and consequences, the historian must distinguish between explicit aims and aims not directly stated or implied, even at times denied. That is to say, distinguish between the theoretical discourse or discourse rhetoric of the reform and hidden objectives when these are detected. In this scenario, success or failure should not be considered in relation to the spoken aims, but rather to those actually aspired to but not expressed. When, in the context of a neo-liberal ideology, for example, the defenders and designers of the policies of free choice of education centre claim that such a policy will

1. necessarily raise the quality of teaching,
2. reduce costs and
3. favour, also necessarily, the equality of opportunity by reducing social and educational inequalities,

one cannot say that such policies fail merely because empirical evidence shows that

1. the best quality predictor is the family environment and not the free choice of centre,
2. that said quality does not simply depend on the application of policies of this nature,
3. does not reduce costs, and
4. that social and educational inequalities are increased (Ambler, 1997; Elmore & Fuller, 1996).

Why not? Because the upholding of theoretical assumptions when all evidence points in consistent manner to their falsity should prompt us to question whether the effects desired but not confessed are those claimed or actually produced. If they were the latter, we would have to conclude by admitting that said policies had been successful because they had attained the objectives really desired, not those stated, and put down to ideology obscuring in reality the theoretical discourse that hides the true intentions of such policies, as has happened in Spain (Viñao, 1998a, in press).

On the other hand, the terms “advance” and “progress,” linked to reform have both a linear and positive connotation. Advance or progress is forwards. Nobody would claim that their intention does not signify advance or progress in the sense of supposing an improvement relative to a given situation. What happens is that these two terms also have a time connotation: advance or progress over time. This is where the criticisms of the a-historic here and now of the reformers requires certain clarification. It is sometimes claimed that reformers ignore the past, but this is untrue. On the contrary, they turn to it, interpret it and use it as support for their thesis and proposals, either to demonise it when they blame reforms that preceding their own on the fall in quality or education level, or to mythologise a remote past, a supposed golden age that is never firmly situated in time, but when everything was better and to which a return is necessary. In this sense, it is not possible to label as an advance a reform that intends to go back in time (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). This label can only be given when the identification of advance is with improvement, or at least by those who defend this about-turn.

The polysemous nature of the term “reform” and its use as an umbrella term covering a wide range of objectives, initiatives and programmes further complicates the historical analysis of its success or failure. On the one hand, a distinction is normally drawn between reforms and innovations affirming that there are some reforms that favour innovations and others which block or complicate them. Both are “change attempts.” However, reforms appear to be more identified with global changes within the legal or structural framework of the education system and innovations with changes, likewise intentional, that are more specific and limited to the curriculum: content, methodology, learning-teaching strategies, materials and methods of evaluation (Pedro & Puig, 1998). Reforms would be, in short, “planned efforts to change schools in order to correct perceived social and educational problems” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 4). Other authors distinguish between reforms or first order improvements, that only intend to make current practice more efficient or effective and radical reforms or those of second order that affect the traditions and basic beliefs underpinning the organisations and school practice (Romberg & Price, 1983; Cuban, 1990b).

Given the difficulty, both real and terminological, of determining whether we are faced with an innovation or a reform and, in the latter case, of which type, it would seem advisable to specify the range with which we employ the term “reform” in this text. By “reform” I understand, along with Fransesc Pedró and Irene Puig (1998), “a fundamental change in the national education policies” (pp. 44-45) that can affect the governance and administration of the education and school system, their structure or financing, the content, methodology and evaluation of the curriculum, the training, selection or evaluation of the teaching body and the evaluation of the education system itself. Such change is in all cases promoted by policy initiatives, which excludes from our analysis bottom-up reforms, generally closer to innovations, and not taken on by the political powers at any time. This leaves outside our study processes for the spread and adaptation of certain ideas and teaching methods developed, generally, by associations or individuals: monitorial systems, infant schools, Froebel, Herbart, New School, Montessori, Decroly, Freinet, Freire, etc., in their turn the origin of supra-national reform movements, of adaptations, with the consequent interpretation and modification to different contexts from those in which they were developed and conflicts among those who consider themselves the true heirs and correct interpreters of the original system or method.

School Cultures and the Grammar of Schooling

Education reforms have been a frequent topic in the history of education. However, when studied, ideological, political, institutional, financial or legal aspects, along with references to their most famous personalities, laws or relevant facts have dominated analysis. Historians have also at times commented upon the failure of reforms or upon the disparity between target and attainment, between the intentions and that actually carried through. The blame for these disparities is normally laid at the door of: (a) lack of financial or material resources; (b) social and political change; (c) resistance or barriers found; (d) lack of support or favourable social climate; (e) corporate interests opposed to change; (f) or, simply, half-bakedness, weakness or contradictions in the reform undertaken. Overall, there lacks analysis that situates such reforms over the long term and within the wider question of educational change and continuity.

Repeatedly throughout history, the divergence between the proposals and theoretical schemes of the reforms and their application or real effect has therefore been pointed out. These effects have been unexpected, unpredictable (although predictable enough), and even sometimes the opposite of that desired and actually put forward. A single example will suffice. In 1868, after the so-called October Revolution and the coming to power of radical liberal or progressive powers, total freedom of education was introduced into Spain as a first step toward complete suppression of state education. The theoretical principles behind this radical liberalism were, in a manner of speaking, theoretically correct: out of freedom, error cannot rise triumphant, only truth. For example, in leaving the provinces and town councils free from state rule or guidance in the field of education, thereby de-centralising it, it was thought these provinces and town councils would throw themselves into the creation of schools for

children and adults. However, the decentralisation produced effects opposite to those sought. The theory showed itself to be false. Given a free hand the provinces and some town councils showed more interest in creating, with public funds, universities and institutes of secondary education – the very establishments needed by those with decision-making power over said funds – rather than schools for the working classes. Other town councils in rural areas dismissed the teacher and closed the school or contracted other teachers with no qualifications and at a lower salary. Only a few months after approving the freedom of education decree, Ruiz Zorrilla, the very same minister by whom it had been signed, made a specific renunciation in parliament of his theoretical liberalism and, not without regret, recognised the fact that he considered “a fairly long period of dictatorship to be necessary” in order that everyone in Spain should know how to read and write (Viñao, 1985).

This kind of explanation, like those that warn of the limitations and internal contradictions of a specific reform aimed at showing the gulf between theory, legality and practice, are brave but inadequate. They do not take into account or show the change without difference (Goodman, 1995), or the interaction of successive reforms, neither with each other, nor the actors and institutions of the education system, nor their rôle in the adaptation processes, ritualisation and alteration of the reforms. In short, they say little or nothing about continuity in the long and short term or the specific combination of change and continuity produced in said institutions.

It has been in the search for explanations of this kind when historians of education have coined two more or less novel expressions or concepts: that of education or school culture and that of the grammar of schooling. The expression “school culture,” thus understood has been coined and employed in the context of European education history (Chervel, 1996, 1998; Escolano, 2000; Julia, 1995, 1996, 2000; Terrón & Mato, 1995; Viñao, 1996, 1998b, 1999), at times with different meanings, and the “grammar of schooling” in the North American context (Tyack & Tobin, 1994; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). However, shades of difference between each concept do not blur the similarity between their basic assumptions: the ideas of continuity, stability, solidity and relative autonomy, and the characterisation of these elements in their make-up. Thus I believe it possible to give a definition and put forward a joint characterisation, even while preferring the expression “school culture” as more wide-reaching, to encompass the essential elements of each without implying that this personal synthesis be in any way taken on board by the authors cited.

Thus understood, the school culture would be made up in an initial approximation of a conjunct of theories, ideas, principles, standards guidelines, rituals, inertias, habits and practices – ways of doing and thinking, mentalities and behaviour, settled over time into the shape of traditions, customs and ground rules, unquestioned and shared by the actors within the body of the education institutions. These traditions, customs and ground rules are passed on from generation to generation and provide strategies for integration into said institutions, to interact and carry out, especially in classrooms, the daily tasks expected of everyone, as well as to face the demands and limitations that these tasks imply or entail. Characteristic traits would be continuity and endurance over time, institutionalisation and a relative autonomy, which allow them to produce

certain specific products, school disciplines for example, which shape them into this independent culture. In short, the school culture would be something that remains and endures; something on which successive reforms make no more than a superficial scratch, survives reforms and forms sediment laid over time. This sediment is made up, however, of layers intermixed rather than superimposed, archaeological style, which it would be possible to unearth and separate. Thus, the historian's task would be to determine the archaeology of the school.

The most visible aspects, around which said culture is formed, would be the following:

1. The practices and rituals of teaching actions: the grading and classification of the pupils, the division of knowledge into independent disciplines and their hierarchy, the idea of the class as a time-space entity managed by a single class teacher, the distribution and uses of space and time, the criteria of evaluation and the promotion of pupils, etc.
2. The management of the class between teacher and pupils and among pupils; that is, the modes, both disciplinary and instructional, for interrelating and direct teaching in the classroom.
3. The organisational methods, both formal (head or director, school council, staff meetings, etc.) and informal (treatment, greetings, attitudes, groups, prejudices, forms of communication, etc.), for the working of the teaching centre and relationships between its actors: teachers, students and families.
4. The speech, words, expressions, phrases, types of conversation and communication, mental representations and rituals that bring form and cohesion to the whole.

The fundamentally historical nature of the school culture, but a-historic character of the reforms that ignore its existence, would explain the superficiality of education reforms. These generally limit themselves to scratching the surface of the teaching activity without modifying, in spite of what is sometimes claimed, the real school, the everyday reality of its activity and the life of the teaching establishments. Reforms fail not because, as is well known, they all produce unexpected effects, unwanted and in some cases even the opposite of that desired; not because they create resistance movements, don't find the necessary support or do not manage to involve the teaching body in their application; not because in their implementation they turn into a formal and bureaucratic ritual, but because by their very a-historic nature they ignore the existence of a school culture or grammar of schooling. This culture or grammar is that conjunction of traditions and institutional norms laid down over time, rules of the game and shared, unquestioned beliefs, which are what allows the teachers to organise the academic activity, manage the class and, given the uninterrupted succession of reforms launched from the seat of political and administrative power, adapt and transform the reforms to fit the demands deriving from this culture or grammar of schooling.

An analysis can be useful to understand this mixture of continuity and change, tradition and innovation which is the teaching culture, as long as we bear in mind the limits and dangers offered by its use. It can provide an explanatory framework for analysis of:

1. How education reforms are implemented and adapted in the academic world.
2. How and why certain aspects of these are incorporated into school life with greater or lesser speed.
3. How others are rejected, ritualised, changed, reformulated or distorted by those ways of thinking and doing laid down over time, by those institutional norms that govern the practice of teaching and learning and the life of the teaching centres.
4. How educational change and innovation can be encouraged in teaching establishments.
5. How, in short, these are a combination of continuities and changes. This combination is submitted to the logic of said norms and the pressure of aspects external to said institutions, but made up by them, as is the very culture of every educational policy and certain social and technological changes.
6. How said culture, a product of history, therefore changeable and changing, enjoys relative autonomy in its creation of ways of thinking and doing and, consequently, of specific products related to teaching and learning, among which are found school disciplines, ways of organising space, time and interaction in the classroom, exams and forms of accreditation.
7. Finally, how society has given a social value to ways of doing and thinking specific to the school culture and has adopted them in other training contexts independent of the formal education system.

Limits and Dangers of the Expressions “School Culture” and “Grammar of Schooling”

Recourse to the expressions “school culture” and “grammar of schooling” as so set out, is not free from limits and dangers. As Robert L. Hampel warned in the debate offered by *History of Education Quarterly* on the work of David Tyack and Larry Cuban (1995), in which the expression “grammar of schooling” was coined, changes in education are difficult “to see or quantify, especially if the historian only examines institutional regularities and policy talk” (*Forum History and Educational Reform*, 1996, p. 476). In effect, to focus upon continuing and persistent features can lead us to put the changes to one side, even those changes caused by the education reforms in the school culture or the interaction and compromises always reached between them. We lack a theory, a historical explanation, for change and innovation in education and the discontinuities that form part of the analysis of the continuing and persistent features. It is not possible to separate both aspects, among other reasons because even though change cannot be ordained (this would certainly be one of the lessons taught by analysis of the interaction between the school cultures and the education reforms), nor can it be detained.

To sum up, the expressions or concepts of “school culture” and “grammar of schooling” prevent us, unless combined with a close look at the changes and the typologies of change, to understand:

1. Other aspects that also determine the relative success or failure of said reforms: social and political contexts, support or resistance, internal contradictions, financing, etc.

2. Effects and influence of the reforms upon the school culture and vice versa.
3. The medium and long-term changes in the same school culture because, it has to be said, school cultures also change, they are not eternal. They are made up of, among many other possibilities, a combination of tradition and change.

Furthermore the expressions “school culture” or “grammar of schooling” suggest a single structure. Is it possible to speak of a single culture or grammar of schooling? Would it not be more helpful to speak of cultures or grammars of schooling?

School Culture or School Cultures?

It may well be that there is a single school culture linked to all the education institutions of a set time and place and that we could even manage to isolate their characteristics and basic elements. However, from a historical perspective it would seem more fruitful and interesting to refer, in the plural, to school cultures.

As a Spanish teacher (Dóminguez Martín, 1935, p. 326) said and as I like to repeat: “every school is a law unto itself.” Every teaching establishment has, more or less visible, its own culture and special characteristics. There are no two primary schools, secondary schools, colleges, universities or faculties exactly alike, although similarities can be established between them. The differences increase when we compare the cultures of institutions belonging to different education cycles. As well as each centre having its own culture, there are also cultural traits, that is, stable and enduring features, that differentiate, for example, the primary school from the secondary school; and at the same time primary teacher culture (mentality, practices, etc.) is distinguishable from secondary teacher culture. These differences related to the teaching centres can be seen as much in their academic structure as in their internal organisation, way of conducting the classes and relationships among teachers and between teachers and students or parents. Largely, this explains the problems experienced by students in the transition from primary to secondary, and conflicts that arise when teachers from different levels of the education system come together in the same establishment.

Independently of this, within the ambit of the teaching institutions we can differentiate between the culture of the teachers, the culture of the students, the culture of the families or parents and the culture of the administrative staff and services with their corresponding expectations, interests, mentality and procedures. When, for example, Tyack and Cuban (1995) talk of the grammar of schooling, they are referring more to the grammar of the teachers than to the grammar of the students, as Cuban himself recognises (Forum History and Educational Reform, 1996). Therefore one part (the teachers), is confused with the whole (the school), no doubt because the fundamental aim of their book *Tinkering Toward Utopia*, is to show up the superficiality of the reforms undertaken in the United States over the last one hundred years and to show how these have been (re)adapted and transformed by the teachers from their own culture and that of the school.

Within the sphere of the teachers’ culture it is even possible to distinguish sub-cultures, sometimes linked, as already mentioned, to the educational levels at which their task is carried out, sometimes to teachers’ own level of academic rank, and at other times to their specialisation or subject area. In the words of Ivor Goodson (2000) “the

sub-cultures of the disciplines” show a “variety of ‘traditions’” (p. 141). Such “traditions,” he goes on to add, “initiate the teacher into very different conceptions” of the “hierarchies” which exist between them, their content, the “role of the teacher” and their “teaching philosophy.” In short, they make up a fundamental component of their training, their integration into a specific subject community, with its corresponding “disciplinary code” (Cuesta, 1997, p. 20), and in their conception of teaching and the world of the school. They see this world both from and via the standpoint of their academic discipline.

So, there are cultures specific to each teaching centre, each educational level and each of the groups of actors who play a part in the daily life of the teaching institutions as well as more specific sub-cultures. However, these institutions do not operate in a vacuum. They operate within a legal framework and a specific policy that possesses its own culture. This culture is managed by reformers, managers and supervisors with their own, specific culture of the school and conception or way of seeing it, and in inter-action with a science or sciences of education (principally pedagogy, psycho-pedagogy and sociology of education), which influence education reforms, condition the culture of the school and whose protagonists (pedagogues, psychologists, sociologists), pride themselves on being exponents of expert, scientific knowledge in the field of education. This dual interaction and confrontation of the culture of the teachers with the cultures of the reformers and managers and with the experts or educationists who are always tempted, circumstances permitting, to convert themselves into reformers, is to a large extent the reason for the failure of education reforms. We will focus therefore on this conflict or confrontation.

Reformers, Managers and Teachers: The Political Culture of the School

The different positions and viewpoints of reformers and teachers determine the relative failure of education reforms to the extent of making them almost inevitable. The teachers, supposed agents of change, also supposed, pose a problem for the reformers, managers and inspectors in education administration who are responsible for the implementation of reforms. The teachers become the problem. This is true even when, as is normally the case, said reformers, managers and inspectors were themselves once teachers. A change of position always brings about a change of perspective, a new mentality and also a new professional identity. The fundamental differences between both cultures, for at the crux of the issue is the fact that there are two different cultures, can be summed up in the following way:

A. Regarding the reformers (Viñao, 1996):

1. A clear and irresistible tendency to uniformity, centralism (relative to the position occupied), standardisation and bureaucratic formality.
2. A mechanistic conception of the directors and teachers of the teaching centres as mere organs or elements who only have to read, execute or put into practice what is ordered, proposed or suggested.
3. A repeated and insistent preference for macro reforms or structural reforms with a planned time-scale, inflexible and, above all, reform for reform's sake.

4. An understandable preference or concern for the administrative activities of the teachers, for documentation that justifies, gives account of or is demanded by those teaching duties, as opposed to the strictly educational, or, if preferred, for the documentary reflection of said duties and, consequently, for formal correspondence to the established guidelines or requirements.
 5. An a-historic here-and-now whereby the traditions and practices of the school culture either do not exist, or rather are not borne in mind, or it is thought that they can be wiped out or substituted by those suggested or proposed with no problem and in a short space of time.
 6. A tendency to seek in academic and professional sources external to the school (reviews, books, courses, conferences) information relevant to their activity as reformers or managers and to the organisation and working of the teaching centres and the teaching/learning processes in the classroom (Weiss, 1995).
 7. A monochrome or rational-technical conception of the distribution and use of school time, seen as a linear sequence, impersonal and programmed, barely sensitive to the context and in which only one thing is done at a time (Hargreaves, 1996). This conception is combined in the case of those politically responsible and reformers on a fixed-term posting with a narrow view of education problems and the need to achieve, within their term of office, results which are both visible and politically profitable in the short term.
- B. Regarding the teachers, their task is characterised (Hargreaves, 1996; Viñao, 1996) by:
1. Oppressive, demanding, immediate pressure of daily demands and occasional upsets. These are demands that occur simultaneously, are unpredictable and that arise or are created spontaneously according to the special requirements, conditions and needs of each context and moment.
 2. The pressure and demands generated by the need, as a wish or ideal, to give attention to and establish a relationship with all the students.
 3. The pressure and obligations caused by the imposed responsibility of achieving curricular objectives or the teaching of given programmes within fixed time scales. These pressures and obligations are intensified in the case of organisational and curricular reforms by the inherent changes, uncertainties and additional demands.
 4. The tendency to obtain information linked to their teaching activity, not from the academic and professional field (books, reviews, congresses, conferences etc.), but rather from the experience of colleagues in their teaching centre or other similar centres; that is, sources internal to the teaching institutions and deriving from their peers. As a result, there is mistrust of ideas and recommendations coming from those who are not, unlike them, “in the trenches,” that is to say in the classroom and furthermore in a classroom similar to their own (Weiss, 1995, pp. 583-584). Ideas and suggestions – never mind instructions – put forward by reformers, managers, inspectors or university lecturers expert in education themes are seen as unrealistic, impractical and sometimes – when they come clothed in new psycho-pedagogic jargon – unintelligible, and are consequently rejected.

5. A polychronic concept of school time, sensitive to the context and people, in which the pace of change tends to slow down in comparison with the plans and unrealistic time-scales set by the reformers (Hargreaves, 1996). Thus, over their academic career, primary and secondary teachers gather historical experience or wisdom about the different reforms and their professional duty that is in contrast to the shortened time perspective, both past and future, of the politicians responsible for education reforms.

In short, and in the words of Carol H. Weiss (1995),

administrators and teachers in our study differed considerably in their priorities and concerns. Half of all the principals were advocates of major reform in the school. Their belief in the responsibilities of education and educators, their information about current problems in the school and the viability of alternative modes of action, and their self-interest in becoming known as progressive and effective administrators led them to champion change (pp. 584-585).

On the other hand, “teachers’ self interest (interests), beliefs (ideologies) and knowledge (information) propelled more of them toward defending the status quo than to championing school reform” (Weiss, 1995, p. 585), especially when reform on a large scale was at issue. Weiss adds that the cause of this, as recognised by the teachers themselves, is the weight “of old ways of working,” of “the ground rules that had solidified in the school over the years” (p. 586); that is to say, the school culture or the grammar of schooling.

Furthermore, as has been stated, there is a political and administrative culture in the school that shapes school cultures and expresses and defines itself as certain standardised norms. Thus, for example, a very compressed summary of the education policies applied in Spain over the last two decades would demonstrate the passing and superimposing of the culture of representation and participation (Organic Law on the Right to Education, 1985)² to that of quality, autonomy in curriculum, professional collaboration and evaluation (Organic Law on General Organisation of the Education System, 1990)³, to end up, after the political change of 1996, in the culture of neo-liberalism and privatisation of the market. The effects of such reform policies from above are artificiality and red tape, if not their orchestration as ideologies hiding corporate or economic interests or strategies in the struggle for social and political power. Hence there has been talk of an artificial participation, a false collaboration, a misguided, bureaucratic, sterile autonomy and a technocratic, imposed evaluation and all this not only in the Spanish case. Or there have been repeated remarks on the contrast between the actual changes, for the most part slow, barely perceptible and superficial and, as has been previously mentioned, the impatient and noisy clamour of the reformers with their hopes of “reinventing” the school and their belief that the most suitable way

of carrying through said “reinvention” is through the Official State Bulletin, circulars and the drawing up within time limits of a whole series of administrative documents whose existence proclaims, through the power of the printed word, the virtual reality of such attempts. At the same time, the existence of these printed documents evolves into a bureaucratic requirement and, paradoxically, the main objective of the reform, displacing by their very existence the original aims.

Without any doubt, these reforms affect the school culture. They produce effects that are desired, sought and predictable. For example, the forming of organs of participation, the production of school curricular projects and syllabus plans, the introduction of evaluation of teachers and schools, the allocation of resources according to results or the conception of the director as a “manager” to be judged according to their “success” in competition with other directors, to just mention a few of the measures and specific aspects which are or could be a consequence of the three policies outlined above. However, they also produce attitudes and movements of rejection, inhibition and bureaucratic line toeing, if not cynicism, and other effects that, as has been stated, are not desired or anticipated. Among other reasons, this is so because of the very context-bound, circumstantial nature of the educational role, everyday school life as well as the complexity of education systems and the resulting impossibility of taking into account all the factors or elements that enter into the game.

Structural and curricular macro reforms formulated in the political-administrative camp do change, therefore, the school culture. However, they do not usually take on board, and are even opposed to, the school culture (because of the reforms’ characteristics and all-encompassing nature), and in particular the academic/teaching culture. This culture, made up of beliefs, mentalities, interaction and work practices acquired on the job, deep-rooted and transmitted, though not without change, from one generation to another is to what teachers resort when facing the daily routine, both inside the classroom and out, such as dealing with administrative guidelines and rules. Hence the delay found in the implementation of reforms, the diluting of their initial aims, their substitution by formal, bureaucratic processes and in the end by the relative failure of them all, especially when they have been promoted and implemented by champions of expert, scientific wisdom in education.

Educationists, Experts and Teachers

One of the characteristic traits of education reforms undertaken in recent decades is the close link, or even the one and the sameness of the reformers and reform managers and those considered experts in education matters through having devoted their professional lives to education sciences within the university, that is, a scientific study of education. The ever-expanding number of groups of experts in education or university specialists grouped into a scientific community around a given field: evaluation, school organisation, curriculum, methodology, management, etc. (Nóvoa, 1998) and the role they play in the development of discourses and jargons which legitimise education reforms via their preparation, design and implementation, has reinforced a process begun in the nineteenth century and solidified in the twentieth, that of a divorce between theoretic-scientific knowledge of education and the practical know-how of the teachers. This dissociation has led to an exclusion of said practical knowledge, an empirical basis, as an area of pedagogic wisdom (Escolano, 1999, 2000; Nóvoa, 1998).

The establishment of a link between the history of education sciences and the history of the process of teachers' professionalisation shows, as has been indicated by António Nóvoa (1998), that the consolidation, confirmation and recognition, both social and political, of scientific knowledge of education has been (until now and with only occasional exceptions) at the cost of a devaluation of the teaching profession and a delegitimisation of teachers as producers or sources of pedagogic knowledge based on their experience and reflection on their teaching practices. In this process of dissociation between theory and practice, and theoretical and empirical knowledge, both parties lose. The former loses because, in the eyes of the teachers, it is limited to speculation dressed up in jargon that has little or nothing to do with practice. The latter loses because it lacks conceptual and theoretical backing that would give scientific status (except that of the content of a subject area) to the task.

At the same time, the alliance previously referred to between the "experts," "scientists" and "reformers," either because of their temporary conversion into active supporters and promoters of a given reform or because of their incorporation into, and mental identification with, those bodies within the administration (managers, inspectors, directors) or those responsible for teacher training (teacher training colleges, trainers in teachers' centres) who are in charge of their implementation or become vehicles for the transmission of scientific expertise to those who are responsible for its practical execution, this alliance must be borne in mind. This, quite rightly, Agustín Escolano (2000) does when he distinguishes three "schooling cultures," an expression it would seem he considers more suitable than that of "school culture." These three cultures are:

1. the culture of expert knowledge or scientific culture of education stemming from the academic world;
2. the political-institutional culture associated with standardising discourses, produced in administrative and bureaucratic environments; and
3. the empirical-practical culture developed by teachers in carrying out their profession which makes up the "collective memory of the teachers."

This three-fold distinction is extremely useful so long as the temporary alliances that tend to be created between the culture of the experts and that of the reformers and managers are not forgotten. First, it allows the identification of the culture developed by the teachers with the school or academic culture, in the strict sense of the word, and partly explains the ever-stronger rejection by teachers, at least in Spain and especially at secondary level, of the reforms of 1970 and, even more so, 1990 and also their clear identification of these reforms with the pedagogic discourse of the experts and reformers, pedagogues referred to as pen-pushers and, in short, pedagogy and psycho-pedagogy as pseudo-sciences responsible, in their eyes, for all their problems.

As an example of this uprising or rebellion of the teachers against pedagogy, or rather against pedagogues and the identification of pedagogues with reformers or managers, I will cite just a few paragraphs from two recent books, widely-available in Spain, which put into black and white what can be overheard in school staff-room chats every day:

All this activity in pedagogy arises from and feeds upon a soil made up of nothing more than suspicion of teachers... from suspicion to verdict there's hardly a step, and everything else derives from this verdict.... [Teachers have suffered] the hi-jacking of their right to professionally and responsibly take decisions on content and procedures in carrying out their professional duties and to this has been added the obligation to account for each and every one of their actions, orally and in writing, both in outline and in the most incredible level of detail to the administrative powers-that-be who are none other than juries with the power to suspend from the profession workers on the mere count of a difference of opinion.... [These powers-that-be] demand from the teachers on an annual and sometimes shorter basis insane quantities of written documents in which the teachers must account, enumerate, list, sequence and explain every activity carried out during each and every teaching day. It goes without saying that these explanations, lists and sequences must conform to the model set by the same (pedagogic) powers-that-be who will consequently pass judgement of pass or fail on the professional in question....

The suitability of a teacher is decided according to their ability to come up with the right phrases, to give account of what they have done in class, the how, the why and the consequences of this action....

This question of the moral implications of every act and its exhaustive expression at great detail is the last straw on a battlefield where teaching has lost all the wars against pedagogy (Rodríguez Tapia, 1999, pp. 39-40 and 44-45).

If anyone has actively contributed to sowing confusion among the new generations of parents and the present education system on how to treat children at home and at school, it has been the pedagogues. Naturally, we are here referring to the official pedagogy. Those of us who qualified in pedagogy in the seventies and eighties are deeply affected by the weaving of the conspiracy. Throughout our studies, we were on the receiving end of two kinds of academic discipline: the mystical and the statistical...Over and above their academic rifts, both tenden-

cies had a common final objective, a mission: to show the world that pedagogy was a science and the pedagogue its prophet (Ruiz Paz, 1999, pp. 13-14).

With this in mind, this teacher adds, the pedagogues designed a consistent strategy in order to give pedagogy "a patina of science," integrating it into the group of "human sciences." Then through the creation of a cryptic language around education themes, the message was sent out that there was complex subject matter to be dealt with whose mastery was not within everyone's reach, and there was no point attempting it except with the guidance of a specialist. Immediately "the plan moves on to gain access to the media." The next step consists of convincing the parents that they do not have the necessary information to bring up their children. Thus, the pedagogue becomes "essential for the whole family." The strategy continues with an assault on teaching institutions:

After the parents, the next group to be worn down is that of the teachers. This marvellous world of well-prepared teachers who offer the kids a valuable general culture and who know Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Language, History and Geography is changed into a bunch of contemptible amateurs by the pedagogues' standards. Those who know nothing of any of these areas deem themselves fit to put themselves above the teachers in the setting of objectives, devising methodology, controlling feedback in teaching-learning situations or pontificate on the importance of education as opposed to mere instruction. How can they put forward criteria when they do not know the subject area to be conveyed?

Pedagogues behave as though they were the arbiters in the monopoly of reflection on teaching...this monopoly only exists in their imagination....

The supposed elevation of the professional pedagogue is nothing more than their total break with reality... pedagogy has lost sight of the object of teaching, of the teaching institutions and the limits of education (Ruiz Paz, 1999, pp. 15- 20).

These paragraphs, and other similar ones that can be selected from the professional literature of the Spanish teaching body, require no comment. They confirm that:

1. The more pedagogic-scientific knowledge is set up as an independent field of study, disconnected from the practice of teaching and subjected to or set out according to the private demands and interests of those who construct it, the more said wisdom is rejected by the teachers.
2. The closer the relationship and identification between the champions of expert knowledge and the processes of the preparation, development and implementation of education reforms, the greater will be teachers' rejection as much of the pedagogy and psycho-pedagogy as of the reforms thus designed and managed.
3. As far as Spain is concerned, though I am convinced that there would be no difficulty in finding similar examples from other countries, the education reform of 1990, designed, launched and managed by psychologists and pedagogues or primary and secondary teachers convinced by the objectives and rationale of the same reform, for the most part belonging to the administration, education inspec-

tion or teacher training centres, and disparagingly known as “chalk face desert-ers” by their colleagues, has been the detonator for a teachers’ revolt, increasingly extensive and vociferous and with the political support of the counter-reformers in power since 1996 which has led to the historic divorce, begun in the nineteenth century, between the science of education and the teachers. This process has had its ups and downs and its exceptions (the 1920s and 1930s, for example), but it is only recently that it has been of concern to historians of education, which at least partly explains the relative failure of education reforms.

Do Education Reforms Fail?

Does it have anything to do with the school culture and the issue of change in education?

The resort to notions of school culture, grammar of schooling or something along these lines may be useful in explaining the relative failure of education reforms and the processes of (re)adaptation of the same as carried out by teachers from their own academic culture, or for the analysis from this viewpoint of teachers’ relative autonomy (i.e., their capacity for developing their own creations and products: school disciplines, ways of organising teaching, giving classes or evaluating, etc.), or society’s taking on of school practices and their transference to other training contexts outside the formal education system. However, by focusing attention on the continuity and consistency that remain undisputed over time, there is a danger of giving an excessively stable and immutable impression of the education institutions, unless this is complemented by an analysis of change. Teaching institutions do change. The very same school culture is something alive and changing, with its own internal dynamic. If not, it would be incapable of creating its own products or of transforming and adapting them to its requirements and digesting successive education reforms.

It would therefore seem necessary to give a historical perspective on change to complete the perspective, likewise historical, that the notion of a school culture contributes. This analysis focuses upon and distinguishes:

1. The changes and long-term processes (literacy, schooling, feminisation of the teaching profession) that have taken place throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and continue as we enter the twenty-first.
2. Those other changes of medium term duration (a century, half a century), but no less important, such as the transition from baccalaureate or further education of an elite to secondary education for all or the introduction at the primary level of the organisational model of the grade school.
3. Those changes brought in by specific education reforms such as, in the Spanish case, the creation of associations and collective organs for the participation of teachers, parents and students in the management and direction of teaching centres (school councils) or the introduction of a new style of management through participation, at least in its legal and theoretical framework; both aspects were established by the 1985 Law on the Right to Education and incorporated

with their corresponding adaptations and changes into the school culture of the teaching centres. In the latter case, these have been incorporated to such an extent that any attempt to introduce the French or Anglo-Saxon models of management, taking away from parents or teachers the possibility of decisive intervention in directors' appointment, would be immediately rejected.

4. Those changes, also referred to as innovations, which are the result of individual initiative, certain education institutions or small groups of teachers creating out of necessity, doubts or problems arising from the practice of teaching, developed from this practical base and then spread and through their diffusion (re)adapted and changed by other teachers individually or collectively to the point where they are even taken on for their dissemination by public bodies, private corporations and associations or by specific pedagogic movements in the international field. This would be the case, for example, with the monitorial system, infant schools, Froebel's kindergarten, the Montessori method, Decroly's centres of interest, Freinet techniques or the ideals and principles of the New School.

The concept of a school culture or grammar of schooling can be useful, then, to understand the conflict between different cultures: that of the reformers and managers, that of experts and education scientists and that of primary and secondary teachers with their different protagonists (except in the case, more and more common, of experts converting themselves into reformers and managers), interests, needs and perspective and carries with it the relative failure of education reforms and their reformulation, transformation and (re)adaptation from the stand of a school culture which also has its own internal dynamic of change and its own conflicts and contradictions.

This explanation, like all historic explanations, cannot be monocausal in any form. As has already been said, in order to give an account of the failure or success of these reforms, the historian must look at: (a) their internal contradictions, (b) the restrictions of the political and social context (what can be achieved out of utopia), (c) the support, resistance and barriers found, (d) political and social changes taking place during their implementation, (e) the interplay of interests and changes in the hierarchies and power relationships established in the education system, (f) the financing and last but not least (g) the characteristics of the culture of the reformers and managers. It may well be that the explanation for this failure is found not in the school culture, but rather in the culture of the very reforms themselves: the institutional culture built up by the same reformers and managers according to their own needs, viewpoints and interests.

Notes

1. This text is a revised version of the previous one on which the opening lecture of the First Brazilian Congress of History of Education, held in Rio de Janeiro in November, 2000, was based. It has been translated into English by Joy Morris.
2. Ley Orgánica 8/1985 Reguladora del Derecho a la Educación.
3. Ley Orgánica 1/1990 de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo.

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