

Conference : *Teacher training in Europe : a comparative approach*

Investing in human resources is a European priority which was solemnly expressed in the E.U. Lisbon Summit in March 2000. The strategy devised during the Summit aimed at making the E.U. a major stakeholder in the knowledge economy by 2010. The importance of teacher training to implement this policy had been highlighted nine months before in the Statement on the Bologna Process by the E.U. Ministers of Education in June 1999.

A few years later, in August 2007, a report issued by the European Commission entitled “Upgrading syllabi and teacher training” reviewed the shortcomings of teacher training in Member States. In spite of the variety of approaches, the education systems find it difficult to keep in pace with the evolution of knowledge in our changing European societies. They do not quite manage to train teachers new skills (such as becoming increasingly digitally literate, providing pupils with tailored teaching and guidance, teaching to multicultural classes, a.s.o.). Yet, as the report points out “The quality of education – among other key factors – paves the way for the adequacy of the European Union to become more competitive in a global environment”.

Upgrading the student teacher training and the continuous professional development (CPD) of some 6,250 million teachers currently employed is a major challenge for the European Union. Its future clearly depends on this policy, with its capacity to face yet another challenge, which is just as important. The E.U. has entered a massive turnover phase. In the education systems, the percentage of teachers in the 45-64 age group exceeds 40 % in a host of countries.

The Conference entitled “Teacher training in Europe : a comparative approach” aims to foster exchanges between teacher trainers, researchers, heads of Colleges, Higher Education Institutes and specialists, policy-makers of E.U. countries on the issue of upgrading the quality of teacher training in Europe. From existing national experiments in context and in a comparative perspective, the Conference will present participants with food for thought testimonies, realistic application prospects and best practice examples to better prepare the CTE and in-service training of teachers for changing societies and pupils.

Suggested points of focus :

The conferences and debates will focus on five major themes anchored in present-day issues regarding quality improvement of teacher training systems in Europe. A particular attention will be devoted to each theme in order to cover the widest possible range of viewpoints and national outstanding experiments.

Point 1 : evolutions in the teaching professionalism

The fast pace of changes in European societies require the acquisition of new skills for teachers as extra tasks are now expected from them. A new profile of teachers is emerging.

The new role expected from teachers implies a deeper training in pedagogy but also a specific preparation to face heterogeneous classes, considering either the background or the capacities of pupils in mainstream classes. Teachers must be proficient in ICT , provide a tailored teaching to pupils, develop the autonomy of pupils as well as collaborative workflow, accept the necessity of a RoI (Return on Investment) self-assessment; teachers must also be able to act within a management framework system as schools gain greater independence.

How are student teachers trained to carry out their new assignments and face the evolutions of knowledge and changing pupils? Are the models of “reflective practice” or the “learning community” still valid to train E.U. teachers of the 21st century? What are the criteria which define an efficient teacher? What is the importance given to the various types of knowledge and to the current learning of social and instrumental skills in the syllabus of Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs)? What are the workable prospects to be considered for the future?

Point 2 : Innovative syllabus for teacher training

It seems that an agreement is emerging in the E.U. regarding teacher training. Several major ruling principles stand out: the necessity for a Higher Education syllabus, a genuine collaboration between campus and on-site practice in schools, a two-way flow between research and in-service training, especially when considering teacher training and innovation.

How can one develop a H.E. syllabus in Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs) mixing theoretical input with on-site school practice? What are the existing collaboration modes between campus and schools? How are the breakthroughs in research implemented in Higher Education. and Continued Professional Development ? How are the various levels of teaching effectively taken into account (Primary School, High School, Technical and Vocational Training specificities) ?

Point 3: CPD (Continued Professional Development) and LLL (Life Long Learning)

While the teaching community at large undergoes major changes, the Member States in the E.U. do not invest enough in CPD – a mandatory practice in only eleven Member States. Although training schemes do exist, their duration generally amounts to no more than 20 hours per year. Moreover, the rationale, the fallout capacity or the relevance of the training programs are often openly questioned.

What are the CPD syllabi to be devised and implemented ? How may teachers gain a new perception of the necessity to engage on LLL? What are the contents to be privileged in CPD? How can the CPD syllabi truly meet the expectations of participants ?

Point 4 : E.U. programs and updating teacher training

The Member States of the E.U. are in charge of devising the syllabi of teacher training and national curricula. However, the E.U. backs up changes with framework programs, such as Comenius, Erasmus-Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci, helping professionals to adapt. The LifeLongLearning program (2007-2013) focuses on the mobility of teachers and cooperation. Measures aimed at assessing and encouraging quality in Higher Education are being developed.

What are the conclusions of these E.U. actions? Do strong points emerge? How can improvements be considered? What are the new measures to be suggested?

Point 5 : Policy-making and managing teacher training :

In the years to come, a landslide transformation will affect teachers: many more of them will have to be trained to make up for retiring colleagues. E.U. institutions and national bodies will necessarily reconsider the importance of maintaining the quality of H.E. and CPD for the teaching community in terms of human resources and financial costs. Currently, it is widely estimated that about two thirds of the Education budgets are devoted to teachers' salaries.

Is it realistic to consider how best combine the upgrading of teacher training with the exacting management of national budgets in order to come up with a "good value" end result? How can one successfully prepare for the foreseeable massive recruitment of new teachers in the coming years?