

IS TEACHING REALLY A GLOBAL PROFESSION

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Abstract

If we compare teacher education (in Europe) of the late 1980s and recently, we can say that teacher education is no longer isolated. It is part of a higher education and has achieved more comparable level with all three cycles of study offered to teachers (undergraduate, MA and Doctoral studies) with opportunities for professional development and some mobility. There are some global concerns within the profession as well, such as competitiveness and attractiveness of the profession, employability, salary etc. But teaching in almost all countries is as a rule a nationally regulated profession.

Teacher education and the teaching profession in Macedonia are a matter of constant concern among the general public due to the number of affected parties (students, parents, teachers, local authorities etc.). Huge number of changes in the legal provisions of the education system were introduced lately which were not open for a public discussion neither with experts nor with the general public. Thus, the changes have had repercussions on the teaching profession as well as the teachers' education and training. Instead of improving basic and transversal skills, these teaching related reforms might have many adverse side effects in the education as a whole. Therefore, there is a need for the changes to be reconsidered and discussed with the teachers as a matter of urgency.

This paper explores different questions and concerns about whether teaching is truly a global profession and how mobile Macedonian teachers can be on a global level.

Key words: *teachers, teacher education, competitiveness, attractiveness, global profession.*

Conceptual framework

Over the years, the concepts according to which the teachers' education has developed, have been changing and developing. The practical orientation has been changed from "apprentice" to an idea of a teacher as a reflexive practitioner, and the academic tradition has developed from an idea for an academic education as a general knowledge, to an idea for the teacher to be an expert/scholar in the scientific field they teach (Buchberger, et al., 2000).

Some authors, (Cohran – Smith, 2001) represent the concept of teachers' professional education, following the four basic issues by which it is organized, and those are: 1) characteristics of a good teacher; 2) the quality of their teaching; 3) what knowledge, skills and abilities the teacher should develop; and 4) how to recognize a good teacher. These issues actually lead through four different concepts in the teacher education: from personal, through behavioral, to the concept of professional competences and the so called, new century education.

The initiative for introducing teachers' competences originates from the 1960s, from the USA, as part of a large movement for introducing competences in education. Later in 1980s and 1990s, the competence based education also appeared in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Asia and Latin America, mainly in the vocational education.

In the early discussions, the teachers' competences were considered "an ability to create activity for achieving certain standards". Teaching competences were interpreted as a set of discreet practical skills, void of theory. There were many attempts to improve the competence based model on teachers'. A numerous scientific researches for brain development, development of people and the way people learn to overcome the shortcomings have been used. A holistic (integrated) approach has appeared, in which the competence is considered a complex combination of knowledge, skills, notions and values viewed in the context of accomplishing a task. The competence is not considered a learned, practiced behavior, with well-thought capability and development process. The holistic approach for competence is influenced by constructivist perspective, that is, the idea that the people create their reality interacting with other individuals. The cultural context and the social practices are included in the competent behavior, reflecting how personal attributes are being used for achieving results in the work within the organizational and social relations. The teaching conditions (the size of class, general valuable beliefs in the wider community about the teacher's role) are taken into consideration, and they are essential when speaking about the development of teaching competence, and the description of the teaching competence should take into account the context and the teacher's personal characteristics when emphasizing how the competence and performance are connected. Socio-emotional competences are also required from the teachers to be able to effectively manage the emotional development of the students.

Later, a model based on competence was developed, a model which represents a developed version of the model for teacher training, although it should have surpassed the behavioral orientation in the teachers' education. The basic idea of the model is that, if the aim is for the teachers to successfully handle the rapid changes in the education and in the society in general, they would have to equip themselves with skills, abilities, knowledge and notions that will make them autonomous professionals. Under the auspice of the competence in the concept of teachers' education, pedagogic disciplines (teaching sciences) and supervised practical training have been introduced, while on the other hand, research orientations have been developed, whose aim is to increase the teacher's ability to participate in solving professional problems. (Buchberger, et al., 2000; 61)

The current educational systems for teachers in the European countries are mostly derived from various different concepts. The complexity of the teachers' education area requires more theoretical approaches to be instituted in the individual systems. The importance of knowing the theoretical foundations from which the models and programs for the teachers' professional education are derived, emanates from the fact that these systems are not only a result of tradition and experience acquired through substantial practice, but at the same time, it is a result of systematic critical reflection and researches.

Buchberger (Buchberger et.al. 2000; 45) recognizes the following common components of the educational systems in the European countries: pedagogic disciplines (education studies), academic disciplines which are essential for the subject studies, and distinctive subject didactics and the teaching practice.

By criticizing the current conditions in the teachers' education, Russel analyses that it is clear that the initial teachers' education faces three dilemmas: (1) unsolved tension between theory and practice, (2) blind certainty that learning from experience happens automatically, which results in ritual and not principled knowledge about practice, (3) aversion to thorough following and analysis of the practical work. He mentions that the issue is not if the teachers'

education should be placed in universities or in schools, but how to develop strategies for learning through practical experience (Russell, 1993; 213).

The issue about what the best context to educate the teachers is, whether in schools or in universities, arises attention, but the majority of educators assume that it is not, and should not become a focus point in the teachers' professional education due to the fact that in the last decades numerous issues and dilemmas were broached, and various answers were also offered. Notwithstanding that this pedagogic pluralism may, to some extent, initiate certain confusion, it may happen only if a single and precise answer is being sought. Perhaps the essence lies in the fact that numerous topics have been opened, discussions have occurred and that presents the best part of the teachers' education today.

In the contemporary concepts for teachers' education, the concept of teacher as a reflexive practitioner has been extensively analyzed. From the historical point of view, Dewey introduces the term reflection, explicitly in the field of teachers' education. For him, reflection represents contemplation about action which aims to solve the problem the practitioner faces in the teaching process. Ken Zeichner from the University of Wisconsin offers another model in a form of concept about critical pedagogy. The concept of critical research emanates from the critic of the current models for teachers' education. The critical pedagogy discards reducing the teacher's reflection about the teaching (means-as a target of the reflection concept), because here, the contemplation about technical issues in the teaching methods has been restricted, and the comprehensive education model has been neglected. He emphasizes that "...the teacher mustn't concentrate their attention only on classroom... Inclusion into issues and activities that exceed the classroom boundaries requires time, energy and competence, but that does not mean that the attention from their key mission, working with students, has been diverted. The teachers cannot decide by themselves some of the social issues and problems, but they can contribute to building a more just society. It is important that the teaching does not stay neutral, and therefore the "building" of the teacher as well..." (Zeichner, 1993: 6-14).

As most sound and widely discussed document for teachers' education is considered *Green Paper on Teacher Education in Europe*⁵². In this document it is established that none of the member-countries of the European Union has succeeded in turning high academic requirements from teachers into reality. Three aspects of all the listed ones are mentioned as the most relevant:

- The teachers should acquire competence to provide *powerful learning environment* in order to achieve really high quality in education. Do (future) teachers have extensive opportunities for acquiring necessary competence in the current programs for teacher training?
- The teachers should be able to *transform the academic knowledge into situations for learning and teaching* in order to enable extensive foundation for learning, acquiring knowledge (concept of holistic education, thoroughly understood and learned). Does the contemporary teachers' education provide the necessary competence with its focus on the *practice* or with a small number of academic disciplines in these transformational processes?
- *Cooperative solving problems* and *team work* seem to be of vital importance for realizing the challenge of teaching and learning. But does the teachers' education provide adequate surroundings for learning with its dominant individualistic approach and culture?

United Nations Organization for education, science and culture (UNESCO), in their endeavor to expedite the accomplishment of goals introduced in **Education for all**, prepared a *Strategy on*

⁵² Green Paper on Teacher Education in Europe, High Quality Teacher Education for High Quality Education and Training, Thematic Network on Teacher Education in Europe, Umea Universitet, 2000

teachers (2012-2015). Recognizing that teachers and the corresponding policies that have influence on the teaching profession are the most important issues for providing quality education, in the *Strategy*, the main emphasis is on supporting teachers for providing quality learning. This *Strategy* emphasizes that it is important to configure a teaching force that “works in an environment that rewards professional improvement and that is committed to improve the opportunities for student learning with well qualified and duly supported teaching practices” [UNESCO Strategy on Teachers (2012-2015), p.1] ⁵³. In *Strategy* the following priorities are defined:

- Overcoming the shortage of qualified teachers by developing the national capacities for their education and support;
- Improving teaching quality by systematically disseminating the existing knowledge about quality teaching, particularly in difficult work conditions, and by mechanisms to support teachers and their professional development while removing the obstacles to their success, and
- Researches and comparing knowledge by supporting the development of policies and legislation as well as by establishing international dialogue on successful policies and practices, including peer learning [UNESCO Strategy on Teachers (2012-2015), pp. 1 and 2].

Trends in teaching profession

In Europe, the prevailing qualifications is the 4-year bachelor degree for teachers from ISCED 1 and 2, and for the teachers in the programs ISCED 3 in majority of countries have to have a master's degree. Alternative pathways to obtain a teaching qualification are not very widespread in European countries. In a majority of countries, initial teacher education programs should develop students' knowledge and skills relating to educational research. There recommendations apply to training programs at both bachelor's and master's level.

In most European countries, admission to initial education programs seems to have no specific selection criteria for entry into tertiary education, apart from the general entrance requirement for entry. Only a third of countries have specific selection methods for admission. But overall, specific aptitude tests and/or motivation interviews for candidates are not often applied in most of the countries.

Mentoring support for a new/beginning teacher in the early years of their career is structured and offers additional training, personalized help and advice for beginning teachers in many countries, and in several they have been introduced only recently. The different components of this support (teaching, additional training, contact with the mentor, evaluation, etc.) are not weighted in the same way everywhere. Although there are differences in providing support for teachers-newcomers to the profession, it is directed towards overcoming specific difficulties the teacher-beginners may experience, and help to reduce the likelihood that they will leave the profession early.

Growing number of European countries require schools to have professional development plan for teachers. Continuing professional development has gained importance in a majority of countries and it is linked to career advancement and salary increases, as is the case in Bulgaria, Spain, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia. The most frequent reason for participation in teachers' continuing professional development is its contributing to promotions

53 UNESCO Strategy on Teachers (2012-2015), available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002177/217775E.pdf>.

and career advancement. In many countries, it is not a sole condition for career advancement but often it is an important pre-requirement.

In almost all European countries, the teachers belong to the age group above 40 in primary schools, and in secondary education they are aged over 50. More than half of the teachers in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Norway and Iceland are aged over 50. The number of applicants for teacher education has declined, which leads to a certain concern that before long, there will be teacher shortage. Therefore, many countries consider various ways to attract young people into the teaching profession.

Teachers in Europe have equal number of working hours in teaching, 20, and other working hours weekly are between 35 and 40. In some countries, the manner of realizing working hours which do not include teaching, is pre-defined, although it is a time spend by teachers on preparation, research and administrative obligations.

Teaching methods are mainly left to teachers' discretion and teachers can act autonomously on the choice of teaching methods.

Conclusion

Global trends indicate the fact that the teaching profession is coordinated and with significant development regarding the quality of programs and requirements for support, primarily due to the established notions that the students' success is closely related to a high-quality teacher. Although this profession's basic trends are part of Macedonian everyday life (regarding the degree of education, modernization of the school programs, initial and professional development, number of classes and admission policy for teaching schools), unfortunately, in Macedonia there is a significantly decreased quality of results that our participants have shown in international evaluation. This certainly calls in question the quality of our teachers' education. Teacher education and the teaching profession in Macedonia are a matter of constant concern among the general public due to the number of affected parties (students, parents, teachers, local authorities etc.). Great number of changes has been recently introduced in the legal provisions of the education system, which have not been open for a public discussion neither with experts nor with the general public. These changes have had repercussions on the teaching profession as well as the teachers' education and training. Instead of improving basic and transversal skills, these teaching related reforms might have many adverse side effects in the education as a whole. Therefore, there is a need for the changes to be reconsidered and discussed with the teachers as a matter of priority.

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