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**THE CHANGING ROLE  
OF TEACHERS**

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OF TEACHERS**

**Editors: Michael Schratz,  
Mojca Pecek, Romița Iucu**

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**ENTEPE**

**EUROPEAN NETWORK ON TEACHER  
EDUCATION POLICIES**

**THE CHANGING ROLE  
OF TEACHERS**

**Editors:**

**Michael Schratz, Mojca Peček, Romița Iucu**

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## INTRODUCTION

The idea of launching a new ENTEP collective volume was coming from the ENTEP perspective as an academic and research response to the new challenges which are surrounding the new teacher's role and statute in the classrooms, in the school and in the society, as well.

In the last years, the European bodies and national authorities enhance their interest in teacher education field. Proof of that at the European level, the Draft conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on Improving the Quality of Teacher Education adopted in October 2007 provides a useful reminder of the mission of teaching, stating that "teaching provides a service of considerable social relevance: teachers play a vital role in enabling people to identify and develop their talents and to fulfil their potential for personal growth and well-being, as well as helping them to acquire the complex range of knowledge, skills and key competences that they will need as citizens throughout their personal, social and professional lives". In addition, the *Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications* (European Commission, 2005) agreed by the Member States in 2005, aiming to support policy-makers at national or regional level, but also providing a potentially interesting research and evaluation agenda. As the 2008 Communication, *Improving Competences for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: An Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools* (p. 32), stated that 'Staff need the skills to give every pupil adequate opportunities to acquire necessary competences in a safe and attractive school environment base on mutual respect and cooperation, which promotes social physical and mental well-being and where bullying and violence have no place. Yet most countries report shortfalls in teaching skills.' These preoccupations remain a central focus of the EU strategy on education and training, as illustrated in the Council Conclusions of 26 November 2009 on the professional development of teachers and school leaders that highlight the importance of the knowledge, skills and commitment of teachers as a critical component

in achieving high quality educational results and stressed the lasting effects of good teaching on learners. These challenges teachers have to face, require a change of education paradigm and need from teachers continuous reshaping of their competences and their roles at both school and society level.

In this line, Kincheloe (2012:138) consider that teachers have to deal with new challenges in the current society, which highlighted the role of the teacher as knowledge constructor and reflexive practitioner. The author summarizes the following changes teachers have to deal with:

1. *Constructing a system of meaning. Critical action research begins with the teacher's construction of a tentative system of meaning, a source of authority to which they look for philosophical guidance in considering the purpose not only of their research but of their teaching.*
2. *Understanding dominant research methods and their effects. Armed with this emancipator system of meaning, critical teacher researchers are empowered to expose the assumptions of existing research orientations, to critique the verified knowledge base that emerges from them and to reveal the ideological effects of such processes on teachers, schools and the culture's view of education*
3. *Selecting what to study. Guided by emancipator system of meaning and their rejection of instrumentally rational research and the educational practices justified by it, critical teacher researchers begin to see their classrooms from unique angles which reveals problems often unperceived by less prepared practitioners.*
4. *Acquiring a variety of research strategies. Acquaintance with the literature of qualitative inquiry provides the teacher researcher with a diverse battery of inquiry methods.*
5. *Making sense of information collected. The system of meaning developed by the critical researcher is invaluable to the action research process. In this case the system of meaning allows the teacher researcher to identify previously unrecognized patters in the data collected in the system of meaning, the teacher researcher is able to uncover relationship*

*among classroom, school, community which serve to change the focus of one's professional life.*

6. *Gaining awareness of the tacit theories and assumptions which guide practice. As teacher researchers view themselves as part of a wider cultural panorama, relationships are revealed which help them to see how they come to believe and act.*
7. *Viewing teaching as an emancipator praxis-based act. Critical action research is incompatible with a view of teaching as a technical act of information delivery.*

All these aspects will need a reconsideration of the initial and professional development of teachers, implementing measure to support teachers at the beginning of their career, training programs able to develop the interdisciplinary and intercultural competences of teachers, enhancing the role of the inquiry – based education in order to ensure a more closer relation between classroom realities and pedagogical theories and practices.

The Finish perspective of the new role of teacher through the *Armi Mikkola, study, Teachers, Professional Development – a finish example, describes the national professional development programme for teachers* being carried out in Finland from 2010 to 2016. The five-year programme is funded by the government and is an investment in the professional development of Finnish and Swedish speaking teachers. The article sets the scene by presenting the Finnish system for professional development of teaching staff, and the development needs of the system. It then goes on to describe the launching of the national programme and the stages of its implementation, as well as evaluating the importance of the programme to date as a support for the professional development of teachers. The article concludes by presenting the programme's future challenges.

(Professional development of teachers, teacher's in-service training, participation in professional development)

In a very interesting study, *Educative Mentoring and the Changing Roles of Teachers: A Mentoring Project in Styria, Austria,*

*Karin da Rocha, Andrea Holzinger Pädagogische Hochschule Steiermark* (University College of Teacher Education Styria), the first Austrian team was launching the idea that due to the growing diversity in society, permanent changes and subsequent necessary developments in educational matters, teachers experience a constant re-definition of their profession calling for a continuous lifelong flexibility. In a phase, in which a newly organized teacher training program is being developed, the University College of Teacher Education Styria in Graz, Austria, is carrying out a pilot project to mentor new teachers in primary schools. This project takes place in three Styrian districts and is accompanied by evaluation research from 2012 to 2014. Teachers new to the job are counseled by experienced colleagues at their local schools. Additionally, in-service training for new teachers, mentors and principals is offered. The lectures' design allows social and digital networking. The contents of the courses are adapted to the roles and interests of the three focus groups and hold the possibility of peer discussion and cross-group communication. Among the topics are mentoring basics, classroom management, administration, working with parents, and grading. The qualitative research entailed in the project asks for supporting factors of educative mentoring on structural, systemic and personal levels. It is based on questionnaires, expert interviews and group discussions. Furthermore, the value of educative mentoring for the development of professional learning communities and human resources in schools is examined. Finally, this paper relates to the changing demands on new teachers, mentors and principals with regard to mentoring programs in schools.

The Luxembourg team, *Dr. Gérard Gretsches, and Samantha Wynandy from the Faculty of Language and Literature, Humanities, Arts and Education* have been in charge with analyzing the Luxembourg's multilingual and multicultural classrooms which could offer many opportunities for autonomous, active and exploratory language learning – a situation which prompted one of the authors to develop the TEO software back in 1994. The positive results and feedback by teachers as well as the evolution of technology encouraged the same author 18 years later to develop iTEO, an iPad app, in collaboration with a team from the University of

Luxembourg. The app allows for the recording and editing of spoken language. This paper investigates the ways in which 19 teachers used iTEO for the purpose of learning and teaching languages. The teachers, with a range of professional experience, attended a Continuing Professional Development course over the period of one calendar year. The data underpinning this paper are drawn from written projects, feedback, oral documents (iTEO recordings) and interviews. Our findings show that teachers have developed a rich variety of approaches for integrating iTEO into their regular classroom practice in order to change their roles and practical statute.

The German study done by *Dr. Ellen Christoforatu from the University of Kassel, Center for Teacher Education: Planning and Teaching Lessons in Transnational Teams: Outline of the Interdisciplinary and Transnational Course with Swedish and German Student Teachers*, has been focused on surveying how can student teachers prepare for the challenges and expectations associated with the guiding principles of the European teacher while they are still at university? How do transnational projects benefit the development of prospective teachers' corresponding skills and attitudes? – Based on these questions, an outline of a transnational course intended to help strengthen the international dimension of teacher education and teacher training was developed as part of a pilot project at the University of Kassel. A lot of interesting questions which were trying to argue that during the course, German and Swedish student teachers jointly identify curricular themes, develop educational materials, test them in the context of team teaching in a school, and finally utilize them in the form of a publication for schools, classes, and teacher training. The author was also underlying that all these joint activities expand the German and Swedish students' expertise, and not only in terms of didactic methodology. In the process, the exchange that occurs through the differences that arise in the shared activity proves to be a crucial cornerstone of the course: Through the mirror of their foreign peers, students have various opportunities to critically examine the education systems that are familiar to them, their own personal ideas

about education, and, moreover, their understanding of themselves and their own roles as future teachers.

In the context of the Austrian lower secondary school reform Neue Mittelschule (NMS), which was mandated in 2012, a new teacher leadership role, Lerndesigner, was initiated. In this context, *Tanja Westfall-Greiter and Michael Schratz from the University of Innsbruck* was proposing a very important reflection on this topic, a very relevant and quite new in the educational landscape: *Lerndesigner as change agents for school reform*. They are explaining that Lerndesigners are teacher leaders with specific expertise in areas of curriculum and instructional development (Lerndesign) related to the reform goals of equity and excellence. Ideally Lerndesigners act as change agents in a shared leadership dynamic with school principals and other teacher leaders (subject coordinators, school development teams, etc.). The rationale for working with, qualifying and networking change agents was clear and focused: effective school reform occurs on the school level and change agents require networking and communities of practice in the context of school reform.

As a result, the teacher leadership role of the Lerndesigner was a massive system intervention which continues to be met with some resistance in each new generation of NMS. Nonetheless, the Lerndesigners were and are important change agents for school reform. Each Lerndesigner creates his or her own role in the context of his or her school through processes of role-taking and role-making. The effectiveness of Lerndesigners as change agents in a teacher leadership role depends to a significant degree on the culture and leadership in their schools. Although school autonomy is relatively restricted in Austria, the mental model behind the NMS reform pilot was one of diversity rather than uniformity. This diversity reflects the general tendency of schools to think and act locally, rooted in the federalist structure of compulsory education in Austria.

The 2010 reform of initial teacher education in Italy has meant varying priorities and outcomes for different stakeholders (policymakers, ITE providers, teacher educators, teacher candidates, school institutions): aligning programmes to European standards,

shifting focus in ITE curricula, preparing teachers to deal with current socio-cultural challenges and diverse learning needs, facing teacher recruitment issues in an economic crisis, improving pupil attainment, integrating new technologies in teaching, underlining *Francesca Caena Ph.D. Ed. from the University of Venice in a very interesting study proposal Changing ITE curricula, evolving roles of teachers and teacher educators: initial teacher education reforms and developments in Italy*. A comparison between ITE programme features before and after the reform can underscore the elements of continuity and change, as far as key aims and outcomes are concerned – ITE curricula and the professional profile of the teacher, against the general background of teacher policy. Reformed ITE curricula for secondary teachers underscore the profile of a subject-savvy expert who can meet diverse pupils’ needs, and whose competence development is boosted by the integration of knowledge and experience coming from school practice, workshops and theoretical courses. However, the Italian teacher policy maze, linked with recruitment and labor market issues – many temporary teachers claim rights to qualifications and eventually tenure – has complicated reform implementation. The latter was frozen in 2013, after the first round of new post-graduate annual ITE programmes, to make room for fast-track, annual university-based qualification routes for temporary teachers (due to be offered for three years, until 2016). However, these programmes lack teaching practice, as well as supervision and mentoring by teacher educators. Moreover, the key requirement is three years’ teaching experience (even consisting of many short-term assignments), downplaying the importance of entry selection filters. This poses a challenge – how to ensure updated subject knowledge requirements and the build-up of a reflective mindset in these teacher cohorts – which represents the tip of the iceberg in the teacher quality issue, for Italian policymakers and ITE providers. University Ca’ Foscari in Venice represents an interesting case study, as an ITE provider both before the reform and afterwards.

Key words: initial teacher education, policy reform, ITE curricula, European Higher Education Area, teachers’ professional profile.

A very diverse approach is offering by the Romanian author *Georgeta Ion*, who are starting the case studies underlining that

Romania is going now through a complex process of teacher's roles change, mainly as result of the new Law of Education enacted in 2011. One of the key challenges of this process is related to research designing, implementation and development, namely integration of research results in teaching and learning levels of educational processes and correlation with cognitive and emotional development of the students, through classroom management strategies. The study present the results of a research ("Educational research impact: linking research-policy and practice funded by the Romanian Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding) that aims to analyse the role of postgraduate students and teachers in secondary schools in terms of their contribution to the total research activity, the breadth of research undertaken, and the linkage between schools and research. Developing an integrated approach of research, across educational processes, but also throughout learning cycles and stages of teaching should be a complex area for reflection and contribution in the near future in Romanian educational system. In line with this specific area of approaching the new role of teachers could be explored, as part of the school improvement and institutional development strategies.

Thorough *Prof. dr. Mojca Pecek's* study, *Diversity in the classroom as a challenge for teachers and teacher education*, the Slovenian perspective of changing role of teachers starting with the idea that the current legislation presents new challenges for teachers and teacher education in Slovenia. It requires that all pupils in regular schools who can meet the minimal knowledge standards are provided with high quality education. Special attention should be paid not only to pupils with special needs but also to pupils from the lower socio-economic classes and to those whose mother tongue is not Slovenian. Research shows that many teachers are not willing to accept pupils from all vulnerable groups as they do not feel qualified enough to work with them and would like to have more training in this area. Research, however, also shows that the methods of work applied by teachers as well as their attitudes toward vulnerable groups of pupils are indicative of segregation and marginalization in regular schools and classrooms. For this reason, the Faculty of Education at the University in Ljubljana decided to put more emphasis

in its education programs that have undergone the Bologna reform on educating teachers for working with vulnerable groups of pupils. This paper presents the courses and programs available at the Faculty of Education in this field and poses the question what type of teacher education is required for teachers being better qualified for working with vulnerable groups of pupils. In other words, how should we train teachers not only to acquire more knowledge about teaching vulnerable groups of pupils but also to become more open and accept differences and be more willing to embrace diversity in the classroom not as a hindrance but rather a challenge?

*Malgorzata Sekulowicz from University of Lower Silesia Wroclaw, Polish teachers in a changing educational role – theoretical and practical analysis of the problem, has proposed a very interesting approach of new role in Polish education. Social changes demand from school and teachers, influence the targets, the tasks, content and methods of educating. Teachers are facing new and ever-changing situations and that determines their working environment and the content. The role of a teacher is strictly connected to social changes, as they are the ones to prepare the pupils to be part of that society. On one hand, it is the result, on the other, though, the reason. For years the role and function of a teacher in the modern educational systems is suffering a crisis – a serious situation, its roots are deep in the general crisis of school. Fundamentally, the crisis can be seen in the disproportion between growing, complicated educational tasks and teacher’s capabilities of fulfilling those. The upbringing, educating function of school (each type and rank) is diminishing, revealing the shortcomings of its organization, didactic processes, but also the shortcomings of a teacher as an individual. The growing distrust of school system hit the teachers and institutions dedicated to their education. This chapter presents an analysis of how the implementation of new standards in teacher’s education in Poland serves to instill in the teachers a sense of professionalism and work ethos. Through a series of case studies – both experienced, working teachers and students of pedagogy – the article confronts the present day model teacher with a day-to-day reality of the job.*

The last contribution to this book is dedicated to an interesting transnational analysis done by *Alexandru Strunga, PhD. from the University of Bucharest: „Teachers’ roles dynamics in knowledge society – a transnational model”*. As the author is underlining, in the context of knowledge societies, the issue of teachers’ new roles is rapidly becoming one of the most important features in many European educational policy documents. In the same time, the social and economic status of the teachers urgently needs to be consolidated in order to successfully overcome the challenges of postmodern societies. These challenges, in particular the advances of new information and communication technologies have a huge potential in reconstructing education and teachers’ roles, competences and identities. This paper aims to identify what are the main European mental images of teachers, from a transnational perspective, taking into account as well how these images could be integrated in a possible theoretical model of teachers’ roles dynamics. This model could be used as a common starting point for further operationalization of the teachers’ new roles and competences, especially at European level.

Michael Schratz, Mojca Peček, Romița Iucu

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# **CASE STUDIES**



(GERMANY)

**PLANNING AND TEACHING LESSONS IN  
TRANSNATIONAL TEAMS: OUTLINE OF AN  
INTERDISCIPLINARY AND TRANSNATIONAL COURSE  
WITH SWEDISH AND GERMAN STUDENT TEACHERS**

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**Abstract**

How can student teachers prepare for the challenges and expectations associated with the guiding principles of the European teacher while they are still at university? How do transnational projects benefit the development of prospective teachers' corresponding skills and attitudes? – Based on these questions, an outline of a transnational course intended to help strengthen the international dimension of teacher education and teacher training was developed as part of a pilot project at the University of Kassel. During the course, German and Swedish student teachers jointly identify curricular themes, develop educational materials, test them in the context of team teaching in a school, and finally utilize them in the form of a publication for schools, classes, and teacher training.

These joint activities expand the German and Swedish students' expertise, and not only in terms of didactic methodology. In the process, the exchange that occurs through the differences that arise in the shared activity proves to be a crucial cornerstone of the course: Through the mirror of their foreign peers, students have various opportunities to critically examine the education systems that are familiar to them, their own personal ideas about education, and, moreover, their understanding of themselves and their own roles as future teachers.

## **Outline and Implementation of the Pilot Project**

Increasingly high expectations are being placed on teachers in the course of Europeanization: They are supposed to teach beyond state and national curricula, know about other European educational systems and EU education policy issues, consider the heterogeneous, multicultural nature of European society, and encounter additional European languages during their training and development. In the process, they are expected to become proficient at teaching their subjects in languages that are not native to them (Schratz, 2005). The fact that teachers' education, professional lives, and additional credentials long ago ceased to be regarded as a national issue is further illustrated by the Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications (2005). Given the large time burden placed on student teachers in modularized programs, there is justifiable doubt as to the feasibility of these high education policy demands. At 25%, international mobility among student teachers in Germany is far below the average of 34%<sup>1</sup> and, despite various developments sparked by the Bologna process,<sup>2</sup> it cannot yet be assumed that student teachers (particularly those who do not study a foreign language) are addressing international issues in the course of their studies.

The transnational course proposed below is intended to offer student teachers the opportunity to develop educational materials jointly with their foreign peers, become familiar with various didactic methodologies in the context of school instruction – and critically examine their own, often nationally informed understanding of school and educational cultures by reflecting on their shared experiences. The following were the primary questions in the development of the pilot project:

How can teachers be enabled to meet the expectations placed on them? What happens when students from different countries acquire knowledge about a particular group of themes in a joint

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<sup>1</sup> Figures retrieved 01.06.2014 from <http://daad-magazin.de/25148/>.

<sup>2</sup> A brief overview of the development of teacher training in Sweden since Bologna can be found in Höstfält & Wermke, 2011.

course, develop teaching units in common based on that knowledge, and implement those units in the form of team school teaching? What concepts and content will the participating students work on? What inferences can be drawn from this collaboration with respect to school and educational cultures?

The course outlined here was first implemented in the winter 2011-12 semester and the summer 2012 semester under the title “Teaching Right Livelihood: The Alternative Nobel Prize in School, Education, and Teacher Training.” The participants were student teachers from the universities of Kassel and Stockholm who were already familiar with the theoretical foundations of didactic and methodological decision-making, had basic pedagogical experience, and were planning on teaching children and young adults from fifth grade and up. The Kassel students were future teachers at German Hauptschulen (basic secondary schools), Realschulen (secondary modern schools), Gymnasien (grammar schools), and Berufsschulen (vocational schools); the Stockholm students were prospective teachers at Swedish grundskolor and gymnasieskolor.<sup>3</sup> The Right Livelihood Award, in some countries better known as the Alternative Nobel Prize, was chosen as the thematic frame of reference. This award is given annually in the Swedish Parliament to people who distinguish themselves through their particular commitment to a sustainable lifestyle and are therefore influential pioneers in social and ecological movements due to having developed best practice models in response to global challenges of our time.<sup>4</sup> The themes around Right Livelihood therefore reflect the project’s interdisciplinary thinking and open approach because it offers various points of contact with the shared content of the work and methodological implementation based on each student’s field of study and individual interests. The teaching units that were created during the course prove that, by engaging with concrete examples, students as well as teachers

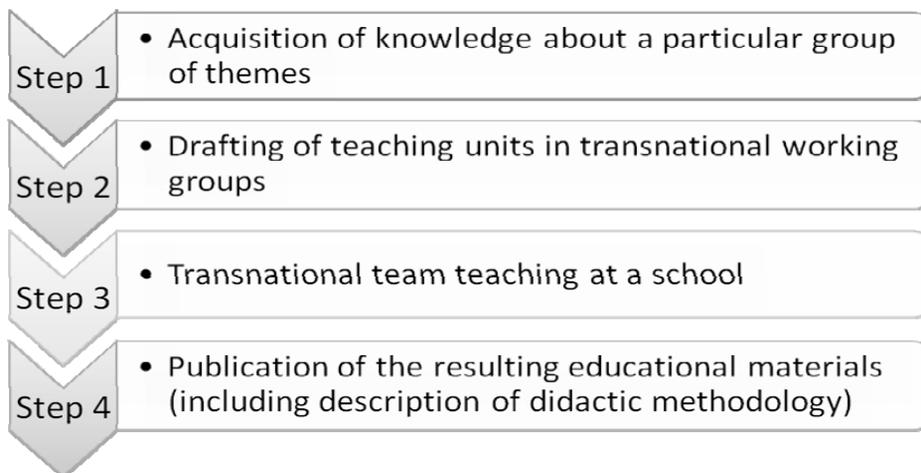
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<sup>3</sup> For the Swedish school system see <http://skolnet.skolverket.se/polopoly/utbsys-eng/>.

<sup>4</sup> The website of the Right Livelihood Award Foundation offers an overview of the winners’ broad spectrum of activities: <http://rightlivelihood.org/>. For more on the origins of the Right Livelihood Award, see for example Lüpke, 2010, Srinivas, 2010, Streich, 2005, and Uexküll, 2007. More recently, see also the impressive portrayals of numerous award winners in Mouratidi, 2012.

and teacher trainers are exposed to an array of possibilities for implementing the educational concept of global education in schools, pedagogy, and teacher training (Christoforatu, 2012).

On the German side, the course was implemented as module 9 (“Education and Upbringing in the Context of Society”) as part of the University of Kassel’s Erziehungs – und gesellschaftliches Kernstudium (core education and social sciences courses), which covers the educational portion of the teacher education and is taken by all student teachers regardless of their field of study or teaching position. In order to integrate the Swedish students into the Kassel course, it was conceived as a blended learning arrangement, in this case as a combination of electronic teaching/learning phases and in-person events as well as an instruction phase on-site at a school.<sup>5</sup> The following chart illustrates the course structure as it was first implemented during the winter 2011-12 term:



**Figure 1:** Structure of the Transnational Course

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<sup>5</sup> Critical notes on possibilities and errors in the application of blended learning arrangements can be found in Wankel & Blessinger, 2013, and, with respect to the particular conditions of teacher training: Reinmann, 2011.

**Step 1: Acquisition of Knowledge about a Particular Group of Themes**

After the students largely independently gathered information about the Right Livelihood Award Foundation's methods of operation and became acquainted with the philosophy of the Right Livelihood Award by engaging with selected past award winners, they then gathered in Stockholm in December 2011 for a joint block seminar. There they engaged in a discussion with Alternative Nobel Prize founder Jakob von Uexküll and other foundation representatives and talked with selected award winners about the development of their projects as well as the conditions under which they were carried out. These personal encounters and a deepening engagement with issues of social justice, conservation, and sustainable economic development not only gave the students insights into the effects of globalization but also acquainted them with concrete examples of attempted solutions to current problems.

**Step 2: Drafting of Teaching Units in Transnational Working Groups**

As was previously explained, one essential goal of the project was to anchor the Alternative Nobel Prize, the award winners' projects, and therefore, indirectly, the idea of right livelihood more firmly in regular school lessons by drafting concrete educational units. Consequently, the students faced the challenge of functionally, didactically, and methodologically processing the knowledge and insights that they had acquired in such a way that they would be accessible to other teachers and students in the form of concrete educational materials in English. During the in-person event in Stockholm, the students formed transnational, interest-based working groups during a workshop. Each of these working groups dealt with a topic based on their areas of concentration and personal interests. In that process, the students were largely free to decide for themselves how they would go about drafting these educational units. Nobody else influenced either content selection or the manner of implementation. The only suggestion that was given to these prospective teachers was that, with respect to the current core curricula, they first agree on what goals they were pursuing in drafting the educational units and what skills their students might gain from working with these educational materials. They jointly

decided on their instructional methods only after taking these ideas into consideration.<sup>6</sup>

In Stockholm, each of these teams developed their own roadmap in which they documented their course of action and the individual steps along the way. The educational units were actually developed with the aid of Moodle, an open source internet platform that supports cooperative teaching and learning and that enabled all of the participants to simultaneously consult with one another as well as to process the materials within time and spatial limits.<sup>7</sup> The members of the different working groups experienced this two-month work phase in quite distinct ways: While some working groups operated effectively from the outset, others obviously had difficulty utilizing the technical possibilities.<sup>8</sup> For that reason, the virtual meetings were supplemented with four in-person events, during which the Kassel students presented their teams' interim results and put them forward for discussion. The proposals and advice from the other seminar participants were conveyed to their Swedish counterparts, who integrated them into the development of the educational materials.

### **Step 3: Transnational Team Teaching at a School**

To determine whether or not the drafted educational materials were also usable in school environments, the Swedish and German students met in Kassel in February 2012 to test their educational

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<sup>6</sup> This restriction seemed important because experience shows that prospective teachers with little educational experience tend to place their choice of methodology at the center of their educational planning (e.g., "We're doing group work" or "I want to develop a simulation game"). In doing so, they often neglect to question as to whether these methods fit the content and the intended skill acquisition. Although the experience of this discrepancy is very important with respect to teachers' instructive and reflective abilities, in this case the students would have been overwhelmed given that they had never developed educational units before and were already dealing with the significant challenges of working in transnational teams.

<sup>7</sup> For a good account of the opportunities that Moodle currently offers, see Höbarth, 2013, and Hoeksema & Kuhn, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Some teams also occasionally seemed to have difficulty deciding on dates for their online conferences. This is not an unfamiliar problem in online education development (Röthler, 2010).

units in selected learning groups and, where necessary, to revise them. Students in the introductory phase of the upper stage of a German Gymnasium were the pupils. In addition to the teacher trainers, the teachers responsible for the learning groups also participated in these classes, subsequently reflecting on the classes together with the working groups. The issues discussed included, for example, the causes of deviations from the anticipated course of instruction. This might have been due to the material or to imprecisely defined tasks but also to unclear teacher conduct, which can mostly be attributed to the lack of professional experience among the participating student teachers, who were largely unfamiliar with the learning groups.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, after a class, one German student said that she had learned “how important it is to really talk to the students and to work with their answers – to get into them in order to possibly discover something about yourself as a teacher.”

#### **Step 4: Publication of the Resulting Educational Materials (Including Description of Didactic Methodology)**

The educational concepts that were developed and tested in this project were published in the form of a handout (Christoforatu, 2012), which is internationally available online at <http://www.uni-kassel.de/upress/online/frei/978-3-86219-370-7.volltext.frei.pdf>. The English-language educational materials reflect the bi-directional impact of this publication: It is obviously intended as a handout for teachers who would like to address the topic of right livelihood in foreign-language or bilingual education. For that reason, the students prioritized didactic methodological considerations in the worksheets that they created, which, in addition to the subject matter, also included suggestions for the technical content fields and areas of competence as well as secondary literature.

Beyond that, the book is explicitly oriented to basic and advanced teacher trainers who take the international dimension of teacher education more firmly into account and would like to find

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<sup>9</sup> Although the student teachers had had the opportunity to meet the learning groups that they would teach, to sit in on English classes, and to ask the teachers questions, the extremely important individual learning capabilities with respect to teaching decisions was naturally unattainable through those encounters.

suggestions for their own projects in the readings. The added value that can be derived from transnationally designed courses is illustrated below.

### **Challenges and Opportunities of a Transnational Course**

The project briefly described here was designed so that the students would play a dual role: On the one hand they are teachers who instruct schoolchildren or pass on their knowledge to other teachers through this handout. At the same time, they were also students faced with the challenges of creating their own didactic methodology draft for the first time, becoming aware of the great demands of skills-based learning, selecting the right materials, and giving the appropriate assignments. The students' various approaches, which are attributable to personal tendencies and individual skill levels, can be seen in the heterogeneity of the materials. In addition, the following observations should be noted:

Because English was the students' common working language, it also made sense to write the educational materials in English and to make them internationally applicable in light of the teachers' nascent "Europeanness" (Schratz, 2005). The teachers were gradually sensitized to the great importance of their foreign language competency in both the planning and implementation of their classes. Although only a few of the students were prospective English teachers, few of the group members had difficulty communicating from the outset. Inspired by this experience, some of the working groups decided to write their texts in the foreign language and to place them at the center of their working materials. It was only through real classroom experience that the students became aware that they had overestimated their knowledge of English, leading to a revision of the texts by native speakers. The insight that the ability to understand a foreign language does not qualify a teacher to write idiomatic texts and use them as working materials was an important lesson – and not only for the prospective foreign-language teachers, given the increasing prevalence of bilingual education in primary schools (Hollm et al., 2013).

In an anonymous survey conducted after the project was over, the students said that they had learned a lot about constructing an

educational unit, adapting materials for teaching, the degree of difficulty of assignments, and formulating questions. One German student described an insight that was important to her by writing that, “You have to think ten times how and if the material, methods, and the intended learning all fit together.” In creating the joint drafts of educational materials and particularly in teaching, it emerged that the German and Swedish students fundamentally differ from one another with respect to their ideas of “good teaching,” their conception of themselves and their role as teachers, and their relationship with the students. Accordingly, one Swedish student wrote, “I have recognized differences, but I can’t really name them. I have the impression that there are completely different approaches [regarding] how a Swedish and a German teacher works with his class.”

Particularly with respect to teaching preparation and execution, the participants from both countries mentioned that German team members planned in much greater detail than Swedes. It will be up to future studies to determine whether this is due to the fact that the University of Stockholm did not give its students credit for participating in the course, which may have induced the Swedish students to invest less time than their German counterparts, or whether didactic analysis is less emphasized in Swedish teacher training.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, the explanation by a student from Kassel is worth considering. She stated that, “The Swedes ... did not want to divide the topic into a draft or a structure like the German students did. Moreover, I feel that the Swedish students want to approach the students emotionally while the Germans want to teach ... general knowledge through information. Consequently, the German students have nearly perfect, if narrow, educational materials while the Swedes teach very frankly and by speaking.”<sup>11</sup>

The widespread assumption that Swedish teachers would pursue more innovative teaching/learning concepts than their German

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<sup>10</sup> Hopmann, 1995, as well as Westbury & Hopmann, 2000, offer initial reference points for further considerations; more recently, see Hudson & Meyer, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> This observation coincides with the findings of Midtsundstad & Hopmann, 2010, who emphasize the “living dialog” between teachers and students as the essential characteristic of Scandinavian classes.

colleagues, however, was not confirmed in the course of this project.<sup>12</sup> Instead, all of the Swedish students tended to use frontal instruction, thereby development-oriented forms of teaching. The strong focus on the teacher became apparent in the class visits, but also in the course of joint lesson preparation. One German participant summarized his impressions as follows: “The Swedes [planned] in a way that was focused on the teacher, [they used] less varied methods, [taught] in a way that was very goal oriented, including in discussions [with the students].” It is no surprise, then, that most of the Swedes cited trying out new methods as learning experiences after the project was finished. One Swedish student summarized, “After my lesson in Germany, I learned that I need to be more focused on letting the students take place in the discussion.” – However, the extent to which this statement is actually a consequence of his encounter with the German educational culture or simply a document of an important step in the cognitive process of one future teacher has not yet been examined.

## **Outlook**

There is currently an array of publications and project proposals that take the international dimension of teacher education into account. It should also be pointed out that attempts at thinking internationally about teacher education are not a new phenomenon (Gonon, 2011; Jantowski & Möllers, 2012): Comparative education research projects, transnational conferences, and joint publications existed long before the developments that have taken place through the Bologna process; nor is there anything novel about teacher study trips or exchange programs.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, transnational courses,

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<sup>12</sup> Ringarp/Rothland, 2010, uses various examples to prove that the ideas of numerous German educators frequently do not line up with the reality of Swedish schools and education.

<sup>13</sup> For example, plans for trips abroad have been developed in Kassel since 1975 with an eye toward initiating essential reforms in teacher training as well as school development (Garlichs, 2011). See Leutwyler & Meyerhans, 2011, for more on the great significance of mobility programs for teacher skill development in general.

and particularly those with global connections, are an exception not only in the context of education science but across the board.

For such courses to regularly take place in the future irrespective of the persons involved, it is important to institutionalize collaboration with foreign institutions of higher education and in the process to offer as many teachers as possible the opportunity to work on various transnational teaching and research projects. A joint research structure could be established and, with the help of joint outside fund-raising, continued over the long term.

The project seminar presented here represents only one of many possibilities for more firmly anchoring the internationalization of teacher education.<sup>14</sup> Its focus is therefore not on the field trip as such but on the topical collaboration between German and Swedish students. In the course of working together on the same content, the students coalesced not only as a learning group, but also as a contemplative community. Joint action with foreign peers gave them the ability to interrogate both the education systems that were familiar to them and their personal understanding of good teaching, as informed by their own cultures, traditions, and socialization. The skills that the students gained in the process can absolutely be attributed to the model of the European teacher (Schratz, 2010). Meanwhile, their experiences during this time may represent a particular value that extends beyond the professional sphere and can be described, in the words of one Swedish student, as follows: “Learning from other countries and bringing the best out of both worlds is a great idea that I really believe in.”

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<sup>14</sup> Quezada, 2012, offers an overview of current projects intended to strengthen the international dimension of teacher training.

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(LUXEMBOURG)

## **THE IMPACT OF ITEO ON TEACHERS' PRACTICES IN THE TEACHING OF LANGUAGES**

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### **Abstract**

Luxembourg's multilingual and multicultural classrooms offer many opportunities for autonomous, active and exploratory language learning – a situation which prompted one of the authors to develop the TEO software back in 1994. The positive results and feedback by teachers as well as the evolution of technology encouraged the same author 18 years later to develop iTEO, an iPad app, in collaboration with a team from the University of Luxembourg. The app allows for the recording and editing of spoken language.

This paper investigates the ways in which 19 teachers used iTEO for the purpose of learning and teaching languages. The teachers, with a range of professional experience, attended a Continuing Professional Development course over the period of one calendar year.

The data underpinning this paper are drawn from written projects, feedback, oral documents (iTEO recordings) and interviews. Our findings show that teachers have developed a rich variety of approaches for integrating iTEO into their regular classroom practice.

Key words: language teaching, Continuing Professional Development course, use of iTEO

## **Introduction and research aim**

Over the past decades efforts have been made to enhance the efficacy of language learning and teaching in primary and preschool classes in Luxembourg. This paper describes the use of an iPad application named iTEO, which has been developed in order to promote and propel dialogue, language skills and meta-linguistic awareness in multilingual language learning through the recording of utterances while creating stories.

The Bachelor in Educational Sciences (BScE), a 4 year teacher training programme with 240 ECTS at the University of Luxembourg, promotes the use of iTEO in schools for the purpose of developing dialogue, language skills and meta-linguistic awareness through the recording of stories. It also developed a Continuing Professional Development course the aim of which was to help the teachers to integrate iTEO into their regular classroom activities and to document this process. This study will focus on 13 primary and 6 preschool teachers with who attended the course.

The aim of this paper is to analyse how the use of iTEO prompted the teachers' to reflect on their language teaching practice and to consider the extent to which these reflections led them to change their teaching practices. These findings could help us identify, first, how the teachers experienced their role and, second, to what extent they were able to transform it.

During the Continuing Professional Development seminar the teachers were requested to document and analyse their activities (e.g. observations, interviews, recordings).

First, we will describe the context for the use of iTEO in Luxembourg, then the iTEO tool itself, and then the Continuing Professional Development course and the methodology. We will then discuss concrete examples of teachers' practices with iTEO and how the implementation of the iTEO tool may contribute to the development of new practices in the teaching of languages in Luxembourgish educational settings. We will conclude with a short description of a research project through which we hope that the participating teachers will continue to develop their competences

thanks to the regular meetings over the next two years with the support of the Ministry of Education, among others.

### **The context for the use of iTEO in Luxembourg**

Located geographically between its neighbours France, Germany and Belgium, Luxembourg is a multilingual and multicultural country with a trilingual education system. The school intake is heterogeneous. Luxembourg's long-standing educational policy for languages aims at the development of children's competencies in the three official languages in fundamental school in the following order: oral Luxembourgish from pre-school, oral and written German from Year 1 at primary school, oral French from Year 2, and written French from Year 3. This model draws on the belief that languages should be taught in a monoglossic way and that language skills develop separately and in a linear way. Seen from this perspective, they are considered as functioning in the learner in a compartmentalised manner (García, 2009, 2012). Languages are mostly taught in a way such that pupils perform individual tasks mostly with pen and paper even in the domain of oracy (MENFP, 2011). The timetable allows for the streaming of pupils into monolingual ability groups. This system is not fit for purpose as governmental statistics show that the 48% of ethnic minority children underachieve (MENFP, 2011, 2012; STATEC 2012).

### **iTEO – iPad application**

In contrast with the monolithic and compartmentalised perspective on language teaching/learning as outlined above, iTEO was designed

- 1) to promote a heteroglossic and dialogic perspective on language learning in the classroom;
- 2) to institutionalise the practice of 'storying' (i.e. children collaboratively creating stories) in the classroom;
- 3) to propel language development in a dynamic way;

- 4) to understand language learning as a team activity linking human (the pupils) and non-human actors (iTEO and/or other technological devices);
- 5) in sum, as a means of giving structure to the social practices that propel the collective language learning process.

Children are encouraged to draw on their existing linguistic resources or capital and on their ‘simultaneous dynamic bilingual practices’ (García, 2009b, 151, 140). They are allowed to use several languages in a flexible and conscious way in order to fit their communicative and interactional needs. In Luxembourg’s schools for example, contents and processes can be discussed in one language while utterances and stories are finalised in one of the target languages. Such a view grants equality of status to all languages in the multilingual Luxembourgish institutional setting by capitalising on existing linguistic knowledge originating from formal and informal settings. Hence, iTEO enables teachers to set up learning situations that work with rather than against the linguistic diversity of the school population, thus using the ‘interanimation of languages’ (Bakhtin, 1981, 51) in order to foster sustainable language development in diverse languages.

iTEO runs on the iPad with its in-built camera and microphone. The app makes use of this recording device to allow users to record the spoken language. The iTEO user interface begins with a blank frame, such as shown in Figure 1. In Figure 1 the small blue square icon to the left informs us that iTEO is readied for material to be recorded. This will be recorded as number ‘1’. Upon pressing the ‘+’ button on the right of the control bar a microphone appears for a second recording. Clicking on this green microphone will allow the users to record speech. In Figure 2 the recording of utterance ‘2’ is under way as can be seen by the microphone on the main square and by the red button on the second top square which has now been added to the right of the first. Clicking on the red microphone ends the recording. There is no time limit to the recordings: the users decide on the length. Utterances in the Bakhtinian sense may be as

short as a grunt and as long as War and Peace (Saul Morson & Emerson, 1990, 126). The icons on the screen denote a sound, a word, a sentence or a whole story.



**Figure 1:** Blank frame with the recording button



**Figure 2:** Recording before automatic replay

Once finished, the recording is automatically replayed permitting the users to monitor and to assess their performance. The learners have the opportunity to hear themselves talking and to discuss their recording with classmates. An important feature of iTeo is that recordings may be deleted, re-recorded or edited (e.g. rearranging the order of the items) at any time.

The user may use the inbuilt camera to take pictures to be used as desktop background pictures or to identify/label each recorded icon as can be seen in Figure 3. Such a labelling process may help the user to identify particular stretches of discourse or particular utterances within the stream of production. Teachers and pupils may also use such pictures as prompts for utterances and stories.



**Figure 3:** Pictures used in the recording process

### **Continuing Professional Development course**

The Continuing Professional Development (CPD) course entitled “Sprachenlernen durch Storying mit iTEO” (Learning languages through storying with iTEO) is led by Assistant-Professor Dr. Claudine Kirsch and by Dr. Gérard Gretsches of the University of Luxembourg. The aims of the course were, first, to help the teachers to become aware of the value and importance of observing, documenting and analysing the pupils’ oral strategies and documents and, second, to analyse their own practice of using the iTEO tool. Teachers were given several iPads. They were requested to use iTEO regularly and to encourage the pupils to record stories or other oral documents. The course leaders stipulated that children would use a range of languages given their diverse language skills and given the demands of the curriculum.

Thirteen primary and six preschool teachers with various teaching experiences attended the course which ran over the calendar year 2013.

The first meeting aimed at familiarising the teachers with the tool. Teachers also exchanged previous experiences in language teaching and learning with or without the use of electronic tools. They were encouraged to conceive of different ways of using iTEO in educational and institutional settings.

In the following 5 sessions, the teachers presented their experiences with iTEO in order to analyse the linguistic activities and trajectories of their pupils. Furthermore, the teaching strategies were analysed on the basis of mainly sociocultural language learning theories (Vygotsky, 1986, 1994; Rogoff, 1993; Lave & Wenger, 1991). The participants were encouraged to use the iTEO tool and the recordings for virtual (via dropbox) and face-to-face exchange with colleagues, parents and children. During the sessions every effort was made to ensure that the teachers were comfortable with the tool despite the fact that it was still under development and suffering from many bugs. The purposes of the data gathering procedure were also highlighted.

### **Contributions of the teachers**

The paper under discussion is a report of the contributions by the participant teachers to the Continuing Professional Development course. Documents and contributions of teachers and of their pupils will be scrutinised for elements revealing attitudes and roles of the teachers in the light of the implementation of iTEO in the teaching and learning of languages. During the Continuing Professional Development course teachers could gain insights into teaching and learning by directly participating in educational processes and by making sense of them in their particular environment. Teachers were encouraged to attend and listen to their pupils in the knowledge building process and to watch them perform in the teaching and learning arena. In order to avoid drop-out of the participants, the two leaders of the course insisted on the need to publish and to share the participants' documents via dropbox. The data received by the teachers were used to contribute to the theoretical and pedagogical discussions on teaching and learning during the seminars.

Of the 19 participants, five teachers dropped out of the course, most for personal reasons, gaining no certificate. Teachers contributed data according to the time and to the resources that they allocated to the collection process.

In our report we analyse the contributions of 8 participants, two from each cycle 1 to 4, in order to, first, give an overview of the different ways in which they integrated iTEO and, second, to document the various challenges they faced as teachers.

Teachers were encouraged to record oral notes with iTEO in May 2013. They recorded as much information as possible about their experiences in managing the tool and in incorporating it into their language learning and teaching activities with their pupils.

Furthermore, they were advised to write a documentation describing their thoughts, beliefs and attitudes about critical incidents and about the management of iTEO in general in March and in November. This documentation was used for certificate of participation in the Continuing Professional Development programme.

The written documentation and some information from the teachers' recordings will be used for discussing the role of the teacher in the implementation of iTEO in this paper.

Additionally, the researchers identified cases in which there was a mismatch between data and teacher behaviour, i.e. where teachers did not act as they claimed to have done.

### **iTEO's contribution and link to "Changing Roles of Teachers"**

We want to present and to analyse the documentary data of eight participants in order to explore how their concepts of teaching were impacted by the implementation of the tool in their classroom settings. The teachers' quotes and the excerpts of the Curriculum have been translated into English.

We will proceed in two steps. First, we will analyse how the teachers' documents reflect the implementation of iTEO as a tool-and-result; we will describe the teachers' findings on how the children applied the tool as authors of their own learning process in relation with the different activities initiated with iTEO. Second, we will analyse how the teachers experienced and evaluated the

implementation of iTEO (e.g. their primary fear of using a technological tool, parent-teacher meetings, assessment).

Even within the formal school setting teachers are free to organise a pedagogical environment where pupils can work and perform autonomously with iTEO. In what follows we will present some relevant, but not necessarily representative, examples from the teachers' experiences, thoughts and attitudes regarding the use of iTEO in the different classrooms.

We will first describe the use of the iTEO as a tool-and-result in each cycle by quoting the teachers' written impressions in relation to the theory and the excerpts of the national curriculum before we specify the integration of iTEO and its use as an auxiliary tool in the official assessment procedure and its relation to the concept of 'storying'.

### **iTEO as a tool-and-result**

Over the period of the project some teachers came to see iTEO as a tool-and-result for managing the inevitable uncertainties arising in authentic and dialogic language learning in a target language. The metaphor of tool-and-result in the Vygotskian sense (Holzman, 1997), of means and ends (Latour, 1999) refers to the unpredictable process of transformation and completion that takes place when human (learners) and nonhuman actors (iTEO) join together to transform and complete their dialogues and stories.

The iTEO team activity of story-telling or 'storying' generates the motive and constitutes the meaningful context for the use of the tool (i.e. the recording of the utterances with iTEO) and for the achieving of the result (i.e. the finished story), as mentioned below:

“The pupils are all very interested in the work with iTEO. They ask for this particular work, they ask for a specific partner, they even ask to work with the same partner again and again, because they get along well with them, and they like having fun in creating a story, or in developing an on-going story.” (Teacher, cycle 1)

Tool and result are related in a dialectical unity (Holzman, 2009) where each unit of the dialogue encapsulates and anticipates the meaningful result of the final story. iTEO as a tool-and-result offers the participants the possibility of continuously creating and re-creating their learning environment even as they learn in it (Holzman, 1997).

## **The implementation of iTEO in different cycles of fundamental school**

### ***Cycle 1 (Kindergarten, 5-6 year old children)***

The national curriculum outlines the oral competences in Luxembourgish that children are to develop. Some examples are specified below, first for language production in Luxembourgish, then for 'listening skills' or language reception in Luxembourgish:

- The pupil is able to express his/herself in a comprehensive way on familiar topics and to answer in short utterances and simple expressions on questions regarding the school-context (Cycle 1 – competence: speaking in interaction; level 1, MENFP, 2011, 4).
- The pupil understands a short text (a story, an explanation ...) in a global way and he/she extracts the main message. He/she follows the line of a conversation about familiar topics (Cycle 1 – competence: understanding a text for listening; level 1, MENFP, 2011, 6).
- The pupil is able to articulate a simple evaluation of a text (Cycle 1 – competence: analyse, compare and evaluate texts for listening; level 1, MENFP, 2011, 6).

Against this background a teacher called her project „listening and becoming a listener“. Her aim was to help children develop their voices and their language skills, specifically their listening skills. The teacher described her astonishment about how the children listened autonomously to their recorded utterances, evaluated the outcome and edited their stories if needed. In their utterances, texts or stories the children could juxtapose language drawn from other cultural, social, and linguistic home environments by implementing multiple voices and forms of utterance (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992, 19).

Furthermore the teachers from cycle 1 reported that the children were freely creating individual and collective stories (in telling stories on their own or on the basis of a book), and that they took responsibility for the selection of the language and of the partners they wished to work with (Kirsch, 2012).

During the last meeting in the Continuing Professional Development course a teacher reported that the pupils, apart from telling stories, also made documentaries on iTEO. For example, one boy who had deconstructed a toy car described every single piece for five minutes.

However, the data-analysis of another teacher revealed a mismatch between the actual practice of using iTEO and her written documentation of this practice. The activities with iTEO were mainly teacher-driven although the teacher had claimed the children had used iTEO in a learner-centred way. In this particular setting the children used iTEO under the guidance of the teacher rather than working autonomously and without teacher input. They retold stories already heard in class by describing pictures and by answering specific questions.

If the pupils did not provide the expected answer, the teacher kept asking again and again. The teacher's aim was vocabulary instruction rather than story-telling or 'storying'.

### ***Cycle 2.1 (year 1 in primary school, 7 year-old children)***

In Cycle 2.1 a team of two teachers focused on the inclusion of a child with special educational needs. They aimed at improving her language and speaking skills through 'storying' with classmates on iTEO. At first this child contented herself with listening to her classmates' stories, but later on her own recorded her first utterances in German. The teachers were challenged as they had to re-organise the classroom's language learning setting in order to allow for the use of iTEO. In the final meeting these teachers, who had by then integrated a second child with special educational needs into their classroom, reported that, to their great surprise, the first child outgrew the more passive role and immediately adopted the role of expert. Indeed, she immediately volunteered to show the new pupil how to use the iPad with iTEO. Unfortunately, we have no further details about this particular use of iTEO.

In a second class from cycle 2.1, a team described their discomfort at letting the children work on their own. The teachers found it difficult to relinquish control and to hand over to the pupils the responsibility for the language learning process. Throughout the first term the children were confined to fixed and closed tasks. For example, they were asked to describe experiences of a school-trip with the help of pictures and to record predetermined oracy tasks taken from the German course book. Such activities correspond to the targeted competences of the formal curriculum as demonstrated in the following competence ‘speaking in interaction in German; level 3 for cycle 2:

- The child answers in short utterances and simple expressions to questions regarding the school-context (MENFP, 2011, 4).

Like the nursery teachers, these teachers mentioned that they used the tool in order to trace the children’s language learning development within the frame of reference of the official curriculum. However, we have not seen any examples.

### ***Cycle 3.1 (year 3, 9 year-old children) to cycle 4.2 (year 6, 12 year-old children)***

In cycle 3.1 (year 3) and in cycle 4.2 (year 6) the tool has mainly been used for project work. The pupils were requested to record pre-defined tasks about specific topics or activities (e.g. visit to a museum, field trip) mainly for purposes of documentation. These activities corresponded to the formal curriculum’s descriptions and requirements:

- Cycle 3 (example: speaking in interaction; level 5; German language; MENFP, 2011, 5): The child takes part in short and simple verbal exchanges, prepared in class, regarding things of everyday life (to do the shopping, fix an appointment...) or,
- Cycle 4 (example: speaking in interaction; level 8; German language; MENFP, 2011, 5): The child communicates fluently in a familiar situation, prepared in class, and only consisting of a simple and direct exchange of information.

It is curious to notice that some teachers believed that explicitly setting the tasks for the children did not interfere with the establishment of a learner-centred setting. They thought that the use of iTEO, probably by turning the children's attention towards a screen away from the teacher's direct influence, implicitly created a learner-centred setting that helped the pupils to become competent, motivated, confident and independent language learners:

“These adventure stories are based on the children's experiences, because they experienced the field trip themselves. The children find themselves in authentic learning situations, the learning is real and meaningful. When listening to their recordings the pupils come to realise that each peer assimilates and tells the experiences differently, because each of them has different impressions. Hence, pupils learn to accept and to understand other opinions and feelings.” (Teacher, cycle 3)

The teachers also noticed that pupils who were not yet fully competent in French became more confident and more competent in verbal exchanges. The teachers reported on how the learners started to seek assistance from their peers in order to improve their oral language proficiency. During a field trip to France, for instance, the children had to complete the task of interviewing French-speaking children and of recording this activity on iTEO. The Luxembourgish pupils wanted to make themselves understood in this concrete situation and resorted to asking other classmates during the interview where they did not know the right words or expressions.

### **Children as authors of their own learning process**

Some teachers describe the influence of systematically listening to the children's proudly presented stories on their own practice of teaching. They came to change their roles in the language learning setting as they realised the importance of allowing the children to be responsible authors and competent users of the tool. Pupils could thus take control of their own language learning development. The

opportunity to listen to themselves and to subsequently edit their productions may help the pupils to become responsible authors:

“Meanwhile I know, I realised that the children are their own judges, they need this particular function of listening to themselves.” (Teacher, cycle 1)

The implementation of the iTEO tool-and-result offers teachers the possibility to use the differences of their pupils and their different ways of enacting things (Bingham & Hinchcliffe, 2007, 2) in the domain of dialogical language learning. In the highly differentiated work of the iTEO team, meaningful language learning is “work within and upon difference, to make differences (Law, 2008, 637).”

The iTEO tool-and-result promotes the awareness of the users that they may become successful language users, especially in a another target language, if they use all available resources in order to create meaning, despite the limited or insufficient linguistic resources of their own (Coughlan & Duff, 1994, 190). Even if some of the teachers in the Continuing Professional Development course persevered with fixed and closed tasks, iTEO came to be perceived as a tool that can lead to the interpretation and negotiation of discourse and language structures in the target language.

The following moves can lead to a heightened awareness of the language production as well as to knowledge: Planning appropriate locutions and storylines, recruiting the necessary resources for recording the expressions, recording and evaluating the outcome after the automatic iTEO replay, intentionally replaying an utterance or a sequence of utterances, choosing to keep the recording or to delete it (Poehner, 2008, 48):

“In my class all the children are of foreign origins. I was able to conclude that the work and the interactions with iTEO complement teaching methods in a meaningful way. The pupils’ oral contributions could not only be extended but also be linguistically corrected thanks to the authentic context and thanks to the immediate and enthusiastic reactions. The small working groups create an atmosphere of trust where children can

collaborate without any pressure to perform and without the continuous need for external assessment.” (Teacher, cycle 3)

The repetition of the children’s utterances by means of the immediate iTEO replay is likely to engage the pupils in a continuous assessment of their utterances.

In the last meeting of the Continuing Professional Development course some teachers reported that they still found it difficult to relinquish control, but that due to the positive feedback of parents they will endeavour to give the pupils more responsibility for their language learning process.

“When S.’ parents were worried that their daughter had not already settled in class and when they wondered if she interacted with her peers, I could tell them that S. asserted herself with confidence. I noticed simultaneously, that I have documents on the interactions and their participants without even taking part in the activities.” (Teacher, cycle 3)

All the teachers who replayed the children’s iTEO documents during parent-teacher meetings received positive feedback from the parents. The materialised and objectified oral language was considered to be a powerful tool for retracing the language learning process. Parents of ethnic minority children were particularly eager and proud to listen to their child talk in a language different from the one used at home. They realised that their child developed competencies in multiple languages through interacting with various actors (e.g. peers, teachers, etc.) and tools (e.g. iTEO) in diverse learning activities.

### **iTEO as an auxiliary tool for assessment**

Teachers in the Continuing Professional Development course came to adopt a focus on assessment through the use of the iTEO tool as they had ample opportunities for listening alone or with others in a team to the children’s oral productions:

“iTEO led to manifold conversations with my colleagues at work as well as with the parents concerned. Instead of satisfying myself with simple statements such as ‘this child can express his/herself well, quite well, very well in Luxembourgish’, we have a common window on the child’s oracy thanks to the examples from the iTEO recordings which illustrate his/her learning process.” (Teacher, cycle 2)

According to the teachers, iTEO provided them with the opportunity to trace the pupils’ language development by objectifying and materialising oral language:

“iTEO is known to be (or have) a patient ear, and I learned to become one as well. The rigour (that gradually transformed into curiosity) with which I listened to the children’s iTEO recordings at night at home opened up a new aspect of oracy that I had underestimated so far. The pupils’ negotiations when being partners in front of the iPad screen, their pauses and their hesitations, their experimentations with words, their comments and their judgements on the form and the sequences of the stories tell me so much more about the development of a language. iTEO offers the opportunity of this in-depth study due to its possibilities for objectifying and materialising oral language.” (Teacher, cycle 1)

As mentioned above, the teachers made use of the iTEO recordings during the parent-teacher meetings where they presented the children’s oral competencies and envisioned potential developmental steps that are mandatory in the official assessment procedure. Some teachers thus valorised the pupils’ recordings during the assessment procedure in accordance with the requirements of the competence-based curriculum:

“iTEO became helpful for the documentation and observation of the developmental level of each child. As a teacher-team, the artefacts are very meaningful for us. We can listen together to the oral recordings, because iTEO allows us to trace the pupils’ language development and to evaluate the recordings according to the competencies outlined in the curriculum.” (Teacher, cycle 2)

By tracing the pupils' language development iTEO recordings can play an important role in the assessment procedure:

“iTEO enabled us to be quick on the uptake of the children's recordings, thus simplifying for us the definition of the next individual steps of development in the target language.” (Teacher, cycle 2)

The iTEO recordings can constitute a good basis to discuss the stories, the composition process and the languages used to develop children's metalinguistic and metacognitive skills (Graves, 1983; Spitta, 1997; Wells, 1987). The teachers in the Continuing Professional Development course mentioned that they developed their sense of the importance of meta-linguistic awareness.

### **Integrating a technological tool**

In the Continuing Professional Development course most of the teachers from cycle 1 to 4 were aware that the integration of a new technological tool into their classroom could threaten established practices, a fear that one of the teachers describes:

“The iPad is an expensive tool that I first thought I would have to protect from the children's' inept and foremost compulsive behaviour. Hence my decision not to leave the iPad out of my reach for fear of the children causing any disorder of the iPad's functions. (...) I wanted to keep 'controlling the button'.” (Teacher, cycle 2)

After the introduction of the tool, most of the teachers described that the pupils used the iPad and the App intuitively, even in preschool settings, so that their initial fears were unjustified:

“As a teacher I became persuaded that my primal doubts were unjustified because of the simple manipulation of the tool and because of the pupils' enthusiasm for the new medium.” (Teacher, cycle 3)

Technological tools like iTEO play active roles in the network of human and nonhuman actors performing language learning. The

teachers came to view the iPad and iTEO as partners in the language learning:

“Now I regularly put the tablet on the table to record the children’s conversations.” (Teacher, cycle 2)

Technological tools have the potential for shaping spatial formations that might compete with the existing spaces in school settings (Sørensen, 2009, 188) where such tools are too often seen as interfering with ‘real’ individual human activities and objectives. In the context of changing roles of teachers in the language learning situations, the implementation of iTEO came to sensitise the teachers to potential reconfigurations in the network of teachers, learners and technologies during regular classroom activities.

### **iTEO and the concept of “storying”**

Some teachers on the Continuing Professional Development course created a further need for ‘storying’ by informing the pupils what the stories would be used for. The teachers agreed that an abstract concept like ‘storying’ must be made explicit to pupils before they engage in the concrete work with iTEO (Negueruela, 2008, 222). One nursery teacher offers the pupils the opportunity to present their stories in class:

“The children really do care about what they offer their classmates as an audio sample.” (Teacher, cycle 1)

A teacher from cycle 1 who had institutionalised the practice of ‘storying’ as a framework for language development in her classroom regularly listened to the stories at home. She spoke about the content and the form of the stories with the pupils on an individual basis in order to foster the development of their metalinguistic and metacognitive skills. While this teacher and others regularly listen to stories, the practice of listening to all of the stories in the plenary had not yet been established.

Our description shows differences in the type of activities organised by the nursery and the primary teachers. Although the

official curriculum offers teachers considerable freedom to organise pedagogical environments where pupils could work and perform autonomously with iTEO, only some teachers acted on this. While the activities at the nursery school tended to focus on the children's communicative needs and on the development of their language skills in wholistic activities, the activities at primary school tended to be more teacher-directed and based on curricular exercises for language learning. It is important to recognise that iTEO is fully compatible with the national curriculum. Each descriptor of oral development – whatever the cycle – can be met through activities with iTEO.

## **Conclusion**

This paper describes how the participants on a Continuing Professional Development course experienced the integration and the use of the technological tool iTEO for supporting the pupils in their language learning. It illustrates the teachers' practices in relation to the integration of a technological tool in their classroom for the dual purpose of developing language and of tracing the learning process. At the beginning of the course the majority of the teachers seriously doubted they had the technical knowledge and skills to use iTEO efficiently. However, the children proved them wrong from the outset by the ease with which they handled and manipulated iTEO. Some children, of course, were already used to working with an iPad at home.

Most of the teachers described their fear of relinquishing control and of changing established practices through the use of iTEO. At the end of the course it appears that they saw the tool more and more as a potential and powerful partner during their classroom activities. Listening to the recordings enabled the teachers to become peripheral participants in the pupils' recording process.

Even at the end of the course some of the teachers still found it difficult to relinquish control. However, the positive feedback of colleagues on the Continuing Professional Development sessions, of parents and of pupils as well as their own experiences with the iPad, convinced them that the use of iTEO enabled teachers to gain deeper insights into the pupils' learning process.

Teachers also learned to appreciate that the children's taking control of their oral products helped them grow in responsibility. Some teachers observed how the pupils created their own learning environments where each of them would collaborate without any pressure to perform and without the continuous need for constant teacher assessment. The pupils resorted to self-assessment and became their own judges when selecting the audio samples they wanted their classmates to listen to.

The co-leaders of the Continuing Professional Development course intended to deepen the teachers' reflections on the processes of learning and teaching languages and to help them realise the importance of observing, documenting and analysing both the oracy practices and the pupils' strategies. If teachers and pedagogical teams adopt these attitudes, pupils may become authors of their own learning in dynamic learning environments, where iTEO serves as a propeller of language learning.

The description of the Continuing Professional Development course suggests that the work with iTEO has the potential for implementing action-research in which the researcher and the researched are collaborative participants over a longer period within a rigorous methodological frame for data collection and data interpretation.

Proponents of action-research in education believe that teachers as practitioners are in a good position to pursue questions as researchers because they are interested in how pupils develop as learners. Teachers can gain insights into teaching and learning by directly participating in and by making sense of educational processes in their particular environment. Through action-research teachers can contribute to the theoretical and pedagogical discussions on teaching and learning (Duckworth, 1987, 134, 140). Through collaboration the researcher and the researched both become engaged learners. The action researchers bring research and action together as they engage in careful inquiry and acquire information that can be applied to the solution of specific problems (Stringer, 2004, 3). Action-research may thus become a valuable tool for reconfiguring the roles of teachers.

In the last section we will present a new project with iTEO.

## **New research with iTEO**

A full-fledged research project called ‘iTEO, a tool for learning and teaching languages’ will run from September 2013 to December 2016. The project was highly appreciated by 4 external international evaluators and shows that there is a growing awareness among all the stakeholders that we need much more research into the learning of languages in the specifically Luxembourgish diverse and multilingual context with innovative pedagogical perspectives:

“The project is supported by a clear understanding of relevant contemporary theories that interpret language use and technology in novel ways to promote learning. The proposal explicitly details innovative pedagogical perspectives for multilanguage as well as multiliteracy learning. The goals of the study are sustained by an insightful discussion of relevant findings from previous research done in the fields of language and literacy development as well as a small scale pilot study investigating the same issues.” (External reviewer 1)

With its emphasis on translanguaging as a means of respecting and developing diversity in the learning of multiple languages, the research project allows for the tracing of the development of languages of the children involved in the study. Children are encouraged to draw on their existing linguistic resources or capital, on their ‘simultaneous dynamic bilingual practices’ and to ‘translanguage’ (García, 2009b, 151, 140). Translanguaging refers to the use of several languages in a flexible and conscious way in order to fit one’s communicative and interactional needs. Additionally, the role and function of iTEO will be studied. The methods for data include the audio files on iTEO, semi-structured interviews with teachers, parents and children and regular video-recordings of the use of the iTEO by the children and the teachers.

The research team consists of the co-leaders of the Continuing Professional Development course, a part-time teacher, a scientific collaborator and a student.

These manifold aspects have been deeply appreciated by the external reviewers:

“The particular focus on iTEO as a means for facilitating/ recording translanguaging and interactions with oracy and literacy is different from other previous studies of translanguaging. The use of the iPad and app provide new methods of data collection and documentation of technologically mediated language use/learning.” (External reviewer 2).

Some of the key concepts related to language learning in multi-lingual contexts remain the same as in the Continuing Professional Development course: the children’s meaningful activities, interaction, identity, collaboration and ‘storying’ (doing, listening to, telling, drawing, acting out, writing stories), another aspect that was highly appreciated in the external review as mentioned above in the comment of reviewer 1.

Results of the research will be disseminated through various academic and non-academic means: articles, book chapters, conference presentations, a booklet with information for all teachers, a video, a newsletter and an Internet blog. As in the Continuing Professional Development course, the teachers will present their experiences to each other and to the research team in order to analyse the linguistic activities and trajectories of the pupils.

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(FINLAND)

## **TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT – A FINNISH EXAMPLE**

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### **Abstract**

The article describes the national professional development programme for teachers being carried out in Finland from 2010 to 2016. The five-year programme is funded by the government and is an investment in the professional development of Finnish and Swedish speaking teachers. The article sets the scene by presenting the Finnish system for professional development of teaching staff, and the development needs of the system. It then goes on to describe the launching of the national programme and the stages of its implementation, as well as evaluating the importance of the programme to date as a support for the professional development of teachers. The article concludes by presenting the programme's future challenges.

(professional development of teachers, teacher's in-service training, participation in professional development)

### **1. Teachers' professional development system in Finland**

On the basis of how the financing is sourced, the responsibility for the professional development of teachers can be divided as follows: in-service training organised by employers, government financed continuing professional development for teaching staff and individuals' self-directed learning.

The impetus for employers' staff training is made up of the strategic needs of the organisation, and the development of own aims of individual. The employer covers the costs of in-service training. Teachers have an obligation to participate in at least three

days of study and planning work each academic year, in addition to their attendance during school days and fulfilling their other professional obligations.

The role of government funded professional development of teachers is to promote the functioning of the education system, support the implementation of national education policy, and raise current issues that are important for the development of educational institutions. One main objective is also to enable the provision of professional development for teachers nationwide. The general policy for allocation of the government's budget for professional development is decided by the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the detailed implementation is carried out by the Finnish National Board of Education.

The National Board of Education uses the allocation to procure professional development from universities and their training schools, vocational teacher training colleges and other organisations expert in professional development on the basis of tenders and applications. Participation in government funded professional development is free for teachers, but the costs of any related travel and accommodations have to be agreed between the participants and their employers. In addition, the employer may incur costs through arranging cover for teachers during training.

The costs of independent study are covered by the person themselves and the studying takes place on the individual's own time. The employer may contribute towards the costs of independent study if they wish.

## **2. Problems with participation in professional development**

National statistics on teachers is collected every three years by the Statistics Finland. The survey includes monitoring teachers' participation in professional development. The figures from the data collection in the beginning of millennium have shown that participation in professional development had started to decline. 1990s, only about 3.5% of teachers had not participated in professional development (Jakku-Sihvonen & Rusanen, 1999). By the middle of

the following decade, the proportion of non-participation increased to about 11 per cent of teachers (Piesanen & Kiviniemi & Valkonen, 2007). The proportion of teachers not participating in professional development continued to increase so that in 2007, only about two thirds of teachers in primary education, general upper secondary school and vocational education undertook professional development. Only about a half of teachers in adult education participated. The most active group of participants were the head teachers, of whom 80% participated in professional development (Kumpulainen, 2009). Clear regional differences were also identified in participation in professional development. The lowest level of participation was in northern Finland (56 %) (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2009).

The growing problems of participation in professional development mean that a good twenty thousand teachers from different sectors of education reported that they had not undertaken professional development training. The results did not show in detail how non-participation was distributed. However, it was obvious that there were significant differences in participation in professional development between different groups of teachers and between different geographical areas. In the investigation of the reasons for non-participation, the most common issues mentioned were the following: too busy, problems with cover during training, additional work caused by the training, contents of the training did not meet training needs, and long journeys to take part in the training (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2009).

### **3. The Osaava programme as a support for teachers' professional development**

There are many demands placed on a teacher's expertise. A teacher has to have a high level of knowledge which combines the subject or field being taught with strong pedagogical knowledge and a learning perspective. An important part of a teacher's expertise is the ability to develop their own work and working community while acknowledging their ethical and social responsibilities. The new virtual learning environments, multicultural issues and cooperation between the pupils' parents and the immediate environment of the

educational establishment are examples of topics where many teachers have a need to update their skills.

Teaching is facing change and has to live with it and influence it. Change is coming into schools in an ever more concrete fashion; it is being brought in by children and young people. Changes in pupils' living environments and in the whole of society are challenging schools to be open and interactive. The previous common view in society of the role of the school is crumbling and changing into a continuous dialogue between different viewpoints. If a teacher does not have the support for interaction, to develop of their work and to update their skills that professional development provides, the problems of coping at work will increase (Luukkainen, 2000).

It was obvious that reforms to teaching staff's professional development were needed, and they should increase the opportunities for participation, and the desire for professional development. The reforms should support schools and teachers in their changing roles, and they should shift the focus of the provision of professional development from being supply-driven to being demand-driven. Local education officials, education establishment managers, principals and teachers, all need new models to map out training needs and for the systematic development of the working community and its members. The training offer must take better account of the fact that training needs for principals and teachers are different during the different stages of their careers.

On 15.9.2008, the Ministry of Education established a working group to respond to the Government programme's (2007-2011) objective, according to which "providers of education are to be obliged to ensure that their staff receive regular professional development to improve their skills" (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2009, p. 10).

The working group proposed that the employer should have a legal obligation to ensure professional development of staff. It was not possible to implement this because of resistance from the municipalities and other education providers. Instead, as the working group proposed, the Ministry of Education and Culture decided to set up a fixed-term development programme for the professional skills of teaching staff to run from 2010 to 2016. The programme was

given the name “Osaava”. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012). “Osaava” is an adjective in Finnish, which means professionally skilled, able and capable.

The Osaava programme is intended for principals and teachers in primary education, general upper secondary school, vocational education and adult education. Its role is to support the providers of education and teaching, local education establishments and staff, in ensuring the systematic development of their own skills and those they need in their work. Local and regional networks are used to create plans, structures and new models that will develop skills, and that will develop local possibilities to offer and arrange professional development..

The main target groups for the programme were identified as school leaders, new teachers, teachers over the age of 55 and persons who have not participated in CPD in recent years. The aim was to promote and increase participation in professional development, particularly in respect of those people who have not participated in training at all, or only little, because of insufficient regional provision, or because the training did not correspond with personal needs (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012).

From the beginning, the programme has been addressing five strategic objectives. They are:

- Supporting inclusive lifelong learning for teachers throughout their teaching careers. Making flexible learning paths a reality in education institutions.
- Promoting equity, active participation and leadership in teachers’ continuing professional development.
- Enhancing the adaptation of innovative professional development needs (incl. use of technologies) and mainstreaming locally invented successful CPD practices.
- Improving networking and collaboration between education providers and institutions providing continuing professional development services.
- Improving the quality and efficiency of government-funded professional development of teachers.

The main sections of the Osaava programme are:

1. National programmes which include training programmes for principals, peer group mentoring for new teachers, and the development of information and communications technology for teaching purposes in schools that are responsible for teacher training practice periods.
2. The development of local CPD structures and encouraging participation in in-service training. This includes activating teachers who rarely participate in training as well as taking into account the training needs of teachers over the age of 55, new teachers and of part-time teachers.
3. Measures to support the development of the working community, which include the promotion of well-being at work, quality development and the use of information and communications technology in teaching.
4. Networks between the education providers to create models for the systematic development of the skills of teaching staff (e.g. mapping training needs, performance appraisals, staff training and development plans) (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013, p. 6).

The Ministry of Education and Culture, the National Board of Education and Regional State Administrative Agencies are responsible for the management of the Osaava programme. In the organisation of the programme, advantage has been taken of the broad expertise of interest groups and of opportunities to support the success of the programme, its smooth roll-out and monitoring. Representatives of national and regional educational administration, employers and employees, as well as representatives from education associations, support the programme in an established national organisation. Dialogue between the government, executors and participants is promoted in an annually organised broad forum where good practices that have been developed during the programme are presented, discussions are held on topical issues of significance to the education sector, and innovative education solutions are rewarded (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013).

The programme is financed from the Government's budget. Participation in the Osaava networks is covered. Travel costs for

participation are reimbursed mostly by the education organisations themselves.

In 2010, EUR 8 million were available for the launch of the programme. The programme has been given annual funding of EUR 10 million for the period 2011 to 2013. This has meant that the amount of Government money directed towards professional development of teaching staff has doubled.

The funding directed towards the Osaava programme will be reduced by degrees so that there will be EUR 8 million available in 2014, EUR 6 million in 2015 and EUR 4 million in its final year of 2016. 20% of the funding for national programmes has been reserved for the use of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the National Board of Education. Most of the funding has been directed towards local government authorities who then award funding on the basis of applications to local and regional education networks for training and other measures (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013, p. 9).

#### **4. Observations on the Osaava programme**

##### *4.1. Participation in professional development increasing*

As the programme is still running, there are no figures available on total levels of participation. Figures on participation so far indicate that teaching staff have largely embraced the Osaava programme. The target group consisted of a total of about 65 000 teachers and over 70 000 teachers have taken part in the Osaava programme. Thus some teachers have participated in several parts of the programme (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2014).

The national programmes for principals of educational establishments and new teachers have reached their target groups as hoped for. Training in using information and communications technology for teaching purposes for teachers at training schools of universities has been popular. According to estimates made by local government, the main target groups (for example those who have not participated much in training, teachers over 55, part-time teachers) have been well represented in the training (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013).

According to earlier teacher data (Kumpulainen, 2009; Kumpulainen, 2011) teachers in adult education in particular have clearly lower levels of participation in professional development than those working in other education sectors. There are a large number of teachers in adult education who have other jobs and so find it difficult to participate in skills development, and for whom there has been little suitable training on offer. The Osaava programme has produced a noticeably positive change by increasing the training on offer and improving the availability of training (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012; Kumpulainen, 2014).

#### *4.2. Networks to support development of teaching staff*

The objective of the Osaava programme's network projects is to develop local and regional structures for systematic staff training of those engaged in teaching, so that the individual needs of teachers and the development needs of the community of educational establishments are taken into consideration. Some of the more typical forms of activity have been consolidating performance appraisal practices, the regular mapping of training needs, the drawing up of training and development plans for staff in closer cooperation with the municipalities' development strategies for education, and coaching the management of educational institutions in personnel management and pedagogical management. This has given the regions more needs-based training and knitted together the fragmented training offer. The opportunity to participate online or via video has been seen as a positive factor and one which improves the accessibility of training (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013).

Cooperation through networks has been organised in different ways depending on the priorities of the project and the extent of the network. Good experiences have been generated through cooperation between the municipalities' education services management, cooperation between materials groups, cooperation between groups involved in the same level of education, and the gathering together and commitment of managers of educational establishments and material banks. Networking has been particularly important for

small municipalities that do not have the reserves of personnel nor the financial resources to offer professional development on their own (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013).

The challenges for the operation have been related to the heterogeneity of the network, the unlearning of old habits of working, and management of the network. On the other hand, the Osaava programme has been seen to result in new mutual interests and has achieved a shared vision of education. This has enabled the creation of the foundations for the reform needed in professional development regionally, locally and for individual schools.

It is clear that creating something new takes time. Operating through a network, the idea of joint planning or learning, or systematic planning of professional development in educational establishments does not happen in a moment. The networks have been operating for a couple of years, so it is too early to evaluate what kinds of practices will prove to be successful and permanent. It is obvious that an operational approach which respects the autonomy of educational establishments and teachers and is founded on their own activity is appreciated. The Osaava programme has provided the framework and stimulus for communal development work, but has not placed too many restrictions on operational approaches (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013).

#### *4.3. National mentoring programme*

The role of the Osaava programme's national programmes is to consolidate common, good practices among all education providers with systematic programmes for teaching staff at critical stages of their education pathways. These programmes include training for principals of educational establishments, peer group mentoring for new teachers, and the development of social competence in the information society for teachers at universities' teacher training schools. The following examines some examples of the mentoring programme.

The core idea of peer group mentoring is to provide new teachers, who are just beginning their working career, with the opportunity to participate in groups whose members are supported in combining informal information, acquired from one's working life, with theoretical knowledge to manage their own professionalism and to strengthen their professional persona. The objective is to develop their work and skills as well as their well-being. The approach is based on reflection of their own work in small groups. The approach emphasises pragmatism and learning together. The themes covered by mentoring arise from the interests of the participants and are therefore very close to their working lives. Each group has a trained mentor to provide support (Heikkinen & Jokinen & Tynjälä, 2010).

A broad mentoring programme has been instigated under the auspices of the Osaava programme, and universities' teacher education units and the vocational teacher training colleges have participated in it. Jyväskylä University is responsible for the national mentoring training. The University also produces training material and is responsible for monitoring and evaluation of the project. The universities and vocational teacher training colleges are responsible for regional training and support.

Peer group mentoring is a fairly new form of professional development in Finland. It has been received with interest as there is an obvious need for this kind of support for teachers at the early stage of their careers. The novelty of this mode of operation has also caused problems which have to be resolved before peer group mentoring can consolidate its position. Practice among municipalities in paying mentors' fees and making arrangements for peer groups to meet vary significantly. In some places it has tailed off because mentoring fees were no longer paid. Elsewhere, municipalities have considered that the costs of peer group mentoring are low in comparison with the benefit they produce (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012).

#### *4.4. Challenges in the final years of the programme*

The main tasks during the final three years of the Osaava programme (2014-2016) are to consolidate the good planning and training practices that have been developed, and to disseminate information about them nationally. During the closing years of the Osaava programme, considerable research monitoring and evaluation of the national programmes as well as of the local and regional programmes is needed so that documentation of good practices is as comprehensive as possible and can also be utilised nationally after the programme has come to an end. An external and independent research was launched in the end of 2013 and it will be finished by the end of 2014.

The number of participants in the programme so far has been gratifyingly high. As the programme is still underway, there are no precise quantitative data on how it has succeeded in reaching the groups of teachers whose participation in professional development has been low. The data that has been collected so far indicate that the Osaava programme has been able to substantially eliminate the long-running problem of lack of participation in professional development. It also appears that it has been possible to organise a training offer for new teachers, teachers who have worked in teaching for a long time, those working in adult education and part-time teachers, that has inspired them to take an active role in their own professional development.

As municipal finances will be rather stretched in the next few years, there is a danger that once funding for the Osaava programme comes to an end the financing of professional development for teaching staff will suffer. There is a threat that the good level of participation in professional development that has now been achieved will fall. At the local level, knowledge of the importance of developing human resources is really growing, so it can be assumed that at least some of the cooperative networks that have arisen will be preserved and will continue to support the development of teaching staff's skills. The Osaava programme has produced, and continues to produce, planning and training skills that are school

specific as well as at local and regional levels. These skills will be preserved as a resource for municipalities and educational establishments for a long time.

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(SLOVENIA)

## **DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM AS A CHALLENGE FOR TEACHERS AND TEACHER EDUCATION**

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### **Abstract**

The current legislation presents new challenges for teachers and teacher education in Slovenia. It requires that all pupils in regular schools who can meet the minimal knowledge standards are provided with high quality education. Special attention should be paid not only to pupils with special needs but also to pupils from the lower socio-economic classes and to those whose mother tongue is not Slovenian. Research shows that many teachers are not willing to accept pupils from all vulnerable groups as they do not feel qualified enough to work with them and would like to have more training in this area. Research, however, also shows that the methods of work applied by teachers as well as their attitudes toward vulnerable groups of pupils are indicative of segregation and marginalisation in regular schools and classrooms. For this reason, the Faculty of Education at the University in Ljubljana decided to put more emphasis in its education programmes that have undergone the Bologna reform on educating teachers for working with vulnerable groups of pupils. This paper presents the courses and programmes available at the Faculty of Education in this field and poses the question what type of teacher education is required for teachers being better qualified for working with vulnerable groups of pupils. In other words, how should we train teachers not only to acquire more knowledge about teaching vulnerable groups of pupils but also to become more open and accept differences and be more willing to embrace diversity in the classroom not as a hindrance but rather a challenge.

### **Introduction**

The 1990s, when Slovenia became an independent state, were a turning point in the contemporary development of the educational system. In 1995, the White Paper on Education, establishing the core principles of the Slovenian school system, was introduced, followed by a package of new school acts. The reform was based on

the following principles: the right to education, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, freedom of choice, fostering of excellence, education quality, increasing teacher and school autonomy and professional responsibility, plurality of cultures and knowledge, and lifelong learning (Krek, 1996). Since then, acts and regulations have been amended several times, but the underlying rules have remained more or less the same.

The legislation requires that all pupils who can meet the minimal knowledge standards be provided with high quality education within regular schools. Special attention should be paid not only to pupils with special educational needs (SEN) but also to pupils with a lower socio-economic background, to immigrant children and Roma children<sup>15</sup>. The above mentioned groups represent pupils who often encounter lower academic achievements, difficulties with social inclusion, marginalisation and exclusion in schools (Barle Lakota et al., 2004; Komac et al., 2011; Vonta et al., 2011; Flere et al., 2009; Dekleva & Razpotnik 2002; Peček & Lesar, 2006; Medveš et al., 2008; Košir, 2008; Lesar, Čuk & Peček, 2013; Peček, Čuk & Lesar, 2013). Moreover, it should be pointed out that in Roma and in immigrant children, as well as in pupils with SEN, lower academic achievement is related not only to their ethnic background or SEN, but frequently also to their parents' lower levels of education and socio economic status. Hence, those groups are underprivileged in two respects: because of their differences as members of a minority group or because of their SEN, and as members of families who live in considerably less favourable socio economic circumstances (Peček, Čuk & Lesar, 2008). According to PISA 2009, socio-economic factors explain 14.3% of dispersion of achievements of Slovene upper secondary students (PISA, 2010). The majority of children from social

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<sup>15</sup> In connection with pupils whose mother tongue is not Slovenian, this paper will draw attention to children of immigrants (the majority of whom comes former Yugoslavian countries) and Roma pupils, since it is them who most often face marginalization and exclusion. Slovenia is home to two ethnical minorities, i.e. the Italian and the Hungarian minorities who have special educational rights ensured with legislation: in the Hungarian-speaking area, bilingual instruction in Hungarian and Slovenian is compulsory; the Italian-speaking area hosts Italian schools that have Slovenian as a compulsory subject and Slovenian schools that have Italian as a compulsory subject.

environments where different rules apply than in school also find it difficult to code sophisticated social messages, which often results in inappropriate reactions and messages (Razdevšek-Pučko, 2003; Bernstein, 2004; Bourdieu, 2004). This is something that frequently happens to the pupils from lower socio economic backgrounds and from minority ethnic groups, which puts them in a worse position not only in respect to their academic achievement but also when building relationships with others (Peček, Čuk & Lesar, 2008).

Among reasons for the marginalized position of vulnerable groups of pupils, studies refer to those originating in the wider society (such as exclusion and discrimination), and also inappropriate school legislation, since legislation fails to adequately encourage the search for inclusive solutions, as well as unsuitable work of teachers. The latter will also be the subject of our further analysis. This paper will give a short presentation of the way in which teachers face vulnerable groups of pupils and which changes have been adopted at the Faculty of Education of the University in Ljubljana within the frame of the Bologna reform in order to better qualify teachers for working in diverse classes. The pertaining question what type of education for teachers is required to result in teachers who are better qualified for work with vulnerable groups of pupils will be pointed out. In other words, how to train teachers not only to acquire more knowledge about teaching vulnerable groups of pupils, but also to become more open and accepting of differences and to be willing to embrace diversity in the classroom not as a hindrance but rather as a challenge.

### **Teachers facing vulnerable groups of pupils in Slovenian primary schools**

Vulnerable groups of pupils were included in the regular school system already in the times of previous school legislation. In spite of the fact that legislation did not provide for this, silent integration of SEN children took place. The new legislation, however, deals with inclusion of vulnerable groups of pupils in a more planned and systematic way. It namely requires all teachers to include pupils who are able to achieve minimum knowledge standards in their classes, paying special emphasis to the quality of inclusion and setting a more or less clear framework how teachers should achieve it. In

their work, all teachers may encounter the need to teach pupils with SEN, together with children of second and third generation immigrants from the former Yugoslavia, particularly on the account of wars in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, and ever more frequent economic migrations. In their classes, teachers more and more often encounter pupils whose mother tongue is not Slovenian, and, since the economic crisis is deepening, with pupils whose families are on the brink of survival. So it could be said that the current legislation and social developments in general represent new challenges for the work of teachers.

What is teachers' opinion on variety in the classroom and inclusion of vulnerable groups of pupils? Let me point out some examples from the results of a study carried out on a representative sample of Slovenian primary school teachers (Peček & Lesar, 2006). The study, for example, shows that many teachers are not willing to accept pupils from vulnerable groups in their classrooms. The question whether they would accept a pupil in their classroom if they were able to decide was answered by as many as 17.4% teachers in the way that they would not accept a Roma pupil in their classroom or they were unable to decide whether they would accept such a pupil in their classroom. More than 10% expressed such attitudes regarding Albanian or Muslim pupils. The share of teachers who gave such an answer regarding pupils with SEN was even greater. For example, as many as 52.2% teachers answered that they would not accept in their classroom or they were unable to decide whether they would accept a pupil with emotional and behavioural disorders and 40.2% gave such answers regarding a blind and visually impaired pupil. Teachers' attitudes regarding inclusion were indicated only for some groups of vulnerable pupils, while analysis shows that among these groups, teachers are the most reserved regarding inclusion of all groups of pupils with SEN into their classroom. For example, as many as 9% of teachers stressed that all pupils with SEN should be included in special programmes. A great share of teachers is also of the opinion that such a pupil's main problem is their disability or handicap, which was confirmed by a study by Novljan et al. (2004), with 80% of teachers stating that the degree and nature of the disability present a very significant

determinant of achievement for SEN pupils. This implies a strong presence of medical discourse in the minds of teachers.

It is noteworthy that most teachers actually agree that integration of SEN pupils is better than segregation, but they also emphasise the need for these pupils to be taught as often as possible individually, outside regular classes (Peček & Lesar, 2006; see also Novljan et al., 2004). This leads to the question, how much and in what way can individualised teaching have an integrative effect without becoming its own negation, i.e. segregation. This in turn opens the question whether results of the study could be interpreted as teachers' opinion that the integration of SEN pupils in regular classrooms is better than segregation, but 'please, not in my class'? Let it be emphasized that individual teaching is often linked with the work of various experts, including specialised teachers, which implies teachers' transfer of responsibility for teaching those pupils to other professionals.

Results of the study also demonstrate an inconsistency between the ideal of an equitable school and the practice of teachers in the classroom (Peček & Lesar, 2006). In principle, teachers agree that teaching should become as individualised and differentiated as possible, and also that an equitable school is one that enables pupils, in various ways, to reach comparable results, while in practice individualisation and differentiation are rare. This means that practice reflects the belief that various pupils just need to be provided equal learning conditions. Based on such beliefs, the solutions which teachers look for when teaching and providing social inclusion of vulnerable groups of pupils, often fail to be constructive. For example, to avoid accusations of non-acceptance, teachers tend to relax academic requirements for SEN pupils and award them better grades (Košir, 2008; Zupanc & Bren, 2010), which Slovenian legislation considers inadmissible. Teachers also often feel pity for vulnerable pupils, especially those with SEN (Zaviršek & Urh, 2005), which is a further reason why they are sometimes not as strict to these groups of pupils.

While numerous studies prove that teachers who have accepted responsibility for the social inclusion of vulnerable groups of pupils in the classroom and for their academic achievement, i.e. not only for teaching but also for learning, are more effective than those who have not (Rix et al., 2006; Jordan, Schwartz & McGhie-Richmond,

2009; Gore, Griffiths & Ladwig, 2002), analyses carried out in Slovenia do not demonstrate a high level of teachers' readiness to accept responsibility for learning and social inclusion of vulnerable groups of pupils. They namely show that many teachers transfer this responsibility to parents or pupils themselves and to other school professionals (such as special pedagogues). For example, teachers' answers to the question how much the factors linked to the teacher, parents and pupil determine the pupil's academic achievement demonstrate that teachers attribute only a quarter of the influence to teacher-related factors (such as the teacher's teaching method), while the rest is attributed to factors linked to the pupil and his/her domestic environment (Peček & Lesar, 2006; similar also in Bačlija, 2008). It has already been mentioned that many teachers have reservations with regards to the inclusion of vulnerable groups of pupils and that they would not accept them in their classrooms if they had a chance to decide. That they often react with exclusion is evident for example in the fact that Roma children are seven times more often transferred to primary schools with adapted curriculum in comparison to other pupils (Barle Lakota et al., 2004). Teachers also often try to define an immigrant pupil as a pupil with SEN due to linguistic and cultural differences in order to receive more resources for their additional education or in order to easily transfer the responsibility for that pupil to someone else (Skubic Ermenc, 2004; Peček & Lesar, 2006). Every second teacher expects non-Slovenian parents to speak Slovenian with their children at home and they believe that in this way they will be better prepared for schooling (Peček & Lesar, 2006). And it is a widespread expectation that all parents, not only those from vulnerable groups, will help their children learn and carry out their homework at home.

Study results thus show that vulnerable groups of pupils are often left to themselves or to the efforts of their parents when it comes to their inclusion in the classroom and achieving good learning results. Many teachers expect pupils to be as perfectly and quickly as possible assimilated into the current school system, while at the same time believing that they are not obliged to shape their teaching of these pupils in a significantly different way than for other pupils. A comparison of inclusion of different vulnerable groups of pupils in the classroom shows that pupils the most excluded in the classroom

are Roma children. Teachers also encounter difficulties respecting and recognising Roma children (Peček, Čuk & Lesar, 2008).

These teaching practices, however, cannot be understood outside the context of the entire educational system, for the system includes inclusive tendencies on the principle level but does not follow through to their realisation in the education legislation, rules and regulations (Peček & Lesar, 2006; Kobolt et al., 2010a; Kobolt et al., 2010b). The key criterion of regular education is to meet the knowledge standards, not social inclusion; it focuses on knowledge achievements, while other aspects of individual development and the social context of educational environment fade into the background (Peček et al., 2008; Kobolt et al., 2010a). The Slovenian educational system is geared towards productivity. This system is one of the reasons why teachers seem to assume that vulnerable pupils are responsible for adjusting to the school system, not the other way around, and that parents, not teachers, are primarily responsible for helping their children complete their schoolwork and learn.

Similar attitudes are also evident from studies carried out on student teachers. Let me point out some attitudes of student teachers enrolled in the first year of the Class teacher education programme at the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana (Macura-Milovanović & Peček, 2013; Peček & Macura-Milovanović, 2012; Peček & Macura-Milovanović, 2014). Since, according to research, inclusive education is indelibly linked to the issue of equity, we wanted to find out the opinions of student teachers regarding equitable school for vulnerable groups of pupils. An analysis of student teachers' attitudes points to their understanding of equity as the principle of equality (everyone receives the same treatment) rather than believing in principles of need (individuals receive the treatment they need) (Berry, 2008). They emphasize the teaching method of the vulnerable that does not compensate for deficiencies, because 'treating others fairly may mean treating people unequally in the sense that equity requires adjustments that bring people into more comparable statuses' (Cambell, 2003). The analysis also showed that almost all student teachers mostly agreed or strongly agreed with providing additional support for vulnerable pupils outside of regular classes. Most student teachers were also of the opinion that learning problems in vulnerable pupils were most influenced by

their disability and very few for example that teachers' teaching method was crucial in this respect. In terms of responsibility for the learning of vulnerable groups of pupils, and also regarding understanding reasons why vulnerable pupils often academically fail at school, there is a clearly discernible opinion of most student teachers that responsibility for this lies primarily with parents and the pupil and only to a smaller degree with the teacher. Results of the study indicate thus a similar understanding of the position of vulnerable groups of pupils in the classroom and the role of teachers in their learning and social inclusion as teachers have, which means that there is a great threat that the trend in teaching and looking for solutions for vulnerable groups of pupils as seen in currently employed teachers continues also with future teacher generations.

It can be concluded that most teachers show no obvious preparedness to develop inclusive practices, while non-inclusive attitudes towards vulnerable groups of pupils can be seen also in student teachers. However, teachers themselves often express that they do not have enough knowledge and are not adequately trained to work with vulnerable pupil groups (Novljan et al., 2004; Magajna et al., 2005; Peček & Lesar, 2006). Thus, when creating schools as inclusive institutions, it is ever more important to focus on the process of educating future teachers. Facing student teachers' opinions on teaching and including vulnerable groups of pupils should be the key challenge of their education. For those reasons, the Faculty of Education at the University in Ljubljana decided to put more emphasis on its education programmes that have undergone the Bologna reform on educating teachers for working with vulnerable groups of pupils.

### **Education of teachers for teaching in diverse classes**

The importance of educating teachers to teach diverse pupils is a dimension which is more in the focus in modern times and in modern teacher education programmes, while in previous teacher education programmes these topics were almost non-existent in Slovenia. By way of example, I refer to two programmes of teacher education carried out at the Faculty of Education at the University of Ljubljana, namely the Class teacher education programme providing

education for class teachers at primary schools and the Subject teacher education programme educating subject teachers at primary and secondary schools for the following subject matters: Biology, Home Economics, Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Computing and Technology<sup>16</sup> (Faculty of Education, 2013a; Faculty of Education, 2013b).

According to the Bologna reform the two programmes were first carried out in the 2009/10 academic year; they encompass 5 years or 300 ECTS according to the 4+1 (240ECTS + 60 ECTS) system. A graduate of the subject teaching education programme acquires basic professional knowledge on two subject areas that are taught from the second cycle of the primary school and in secondary schools, while a graduate of class teaching acquires knowledge of all subject areas that are taught at the first cycle of primary school, namely, together with learning about the profession, special didactic skills and practical pedagogic trainings. In both programmes, a graduate acquires basic professional knowledge on educational, psychological, philosophical and sociological sciences. Basic professional knowledge includes subjects such as didactics, developmental and pedagogic psychology, information and communication technologies in education, theory of education, pedagogic methodology, inclusive education, sociology of education and philosophy of education. While prior to the Bologna reform, neither of the programmes had a special subject related to teaching vulnerable groups of pupils (only the Class teacher education programme offered an optional subject on children with SEN) and these contents were rarely included in other subjects, after the Bologna reform, both programmes have a special obligatory subject dealing with teaching vulnerable groups of pupils. Moreover, such content is also included in basic professional and special didactic subjects. Together with obligatory subjects, student teachers can also choose optional subjects either within the frame of the Faculty of Education or University of Ljubljana as a whole. There is a vast range of

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<sup>16</sup> Primary school in Slovenia takes nine years; children start school at the age of six. School is divided into three three-year periods: the first three years are taught by class teachers, the last three years by subject teachers, and the middle three years are taught by a combination of both.

subjects, including also those that deal with the subject matter of teaching vulnerable groups of pupils; however, recent practice shows that these subjects are chosen by student teachers less often.

An essential difference between the analysed programmes is in the fact that subjects providing basic professional and didactic knowledge are better covered in the Class teacher education programme than in the Subject teacher education programme and they are more involved in teaching practice for student teachers – in general, the Class teacher education programme includes much more practice than the Subject teacher education programme. As an example, let me point out the subject Inclusive education which involves 60 hours of direct pedagogical work, meaning 4 ECTS for the Subject teacher education programme, and 90 hours or 6 ECTS in the Class teacher education programme. The Class teacher education programme thus puts more emphasis on the pedagogic, psychological and didactic training of candidates, and at the same time more emphasis on teaching vulnerable groups of pupils in the framework of a special subject, while these contents are to a greater extent included also in basic professional and special didactic subjects. The difference in programmes is a result of the prevailing opinion of teacher educators that subject teachers, in comparison with class teachers, need more subject knowledge. Furthermore, the designers and performers of teacher educational programmes for teaching in last classes of primary and secondary schools seem to be less aware that education needs to be adjusted to diversity of pupils, also to vulnerable ones.

In reference to teaching vulnerable groups of pupils, the analysis of Subject teacher education programme shows (Peček & Lesar, 2011), however the same is true for Class teacher education programme, that programmes place most emphasis on the field of knowledge of theories and the current situation of educational disadvantage (e. g. being familiar with the situation in the sense of knowing which groups of pupils are vulnerable, how their position shows – e.g. lower academic success, social isolation, discrimination, etc.), less on the field of individualised teaching, handling of heterogeneity and differentiation in classroom, and even much lesser on diagnosis, support and counselling. However, it is essential to note that in Slovenian primary school, such work is primarily the

responsibility of school counsellors and not of teachers. The task of the teacher is to identify whether a child needs additional help and assist him/her if the help is needed within the framework of something 'manageable' for the teacher, otherwise the teacher refers the pupil to the school counselling service. (Peček & Lesar, 2011)

Among vulnerable groups of pupils, the focus is on pupils with SEN (Peček & Lesar, 2011). The fact is that the integration of children with SEN into mainstream school is still considered a novel topic. That is why the Faculty of Education has an obligation to train student teachers for that. With respect to other groups of vulnerable children there seems to be a belief that they do not need many adaptations of the education programme and approach, with the exception of those who do not understand the language of their environment. Most often the latter group comprises immigrant children and Roma pupils, who also stand out because of different prior knowledge and culture. (Peček & Lesar, 2011) For this reason there are still not many contents in teacher education programmes to train student teachers for work in ethnically varied classes. As a consequence, student teachers do not acquire knowledge of how to teach Slovenian language as a second language, how to teach other subjects if a child does not understand the teaching language; Slovenian as a second language is also not a subject in Slovenian schools.

As to work methods, lectures prevail; there are fewer seminars where student teachers deal with a problem themselves, present and discuss it with fellow student teachers; there are even less practice sessions and workshops where work is carried out in smaller groups where student teachers more easily face their own stereotypes and prejudices, but also with fear they have regarding teaching vulnerable groups of pupils. Similarly to teachers, student teachers namely often point out that they lack knowledge on vulnerable groups of pupils and also on working with them. In comparison to pre-Bologna programmes there is more practical training of student teachers, particularly at the Class teacher education programme; however, it does not give enough attention to the question how to organize work in classes, considering SEN, ethnical and socio-economical variety of pupils, how to effectively use knowledge on individualization and differentiation in the classroom. Moreover, it often happens that

student teachers who are coming from practice, especially those who have doubts as to the feasibility of inclusion, are even more convinced of its impracticality. As a result, after the practice they are sure it is possible only in theory but not in practice, which implies inferior quality of student teachers practical training in this field. During the studies, the emphasis is therefore on providing knowledge, while student teachers work less on themselves, on the development and creation of their attitudes, on facing their own fears, prejudices and stereotypes linked to vulnerable groups of pupils, and on applying theoretical work in connection with actual teaching in diverse classes.

A comparison of Bologna programmes of teacher education at the Faculty of Education at the University of Ljubljana with programmes of other faculties and universities that also educate teachers in Slovenia shows (Peček & Lesar, 2011) that contents referring to inclusion are a constituent part of most teacher education programmes, either as obligatory or optional subjects that cover only teaching vulnerable groups of pupils, or they are constituent parts of other subjects for teacher education: the younger the children who will be taught by future teachers, the more of such a type of contents and the higher the number of hours dedicated to special subjects connected to this subject matter. The comparison also demonstrates that the manner and degree to which such contents are included in particular programmes depend on strong campaigns of teacher educators to create particular programmes and are therefore more or less a matter of viewpoints, attitudes of individual teacher educators rather than the result of any commitment at the national level, or standards at the professional level.

## **Conclusion**

Although the causes of problems visible in relation to education and social inclusion of vulnerable groups of pupils in regular classes are linked not only to teachers' qualifications and readiness for teaching such pupils, but also to the organizational frame of the school system, work strategies in schools and classrooms fostered by school legislation, the following text will concentrate on the question what can be done in the area of teacher education in

connection with forming more inclusive schools and classrooms. In this regard, both teachers and student teachers often stress that they lack knowledge on the situation of vulnerable groups of pupils, on how to recognize them and how to react to them in the classroom. However, on the basis of the above-mentioned analysis, the key question and challenge in connection with future teacher education is how to train teachers not only to acquire more knowledge about teaching vulnerable groups of pupils but also to become more open and accepting of differences and to be willing to embrace diversity in the classroom not as a hindrance but rather as a challenge. Let me expose some key problems that should be faced by designers and performers of teacher education programmes in order to address this challenge (see also Macura-Milovanović & Peček, 2013; Peček & Macura-Milovanović, 2012; Peček & Macura-Milovanović, 2014).

Let me first point out that in Slovenia there is a ‘two-track’ teacher education system, in which teachers are trained separately to work with regular pupils and with SEN pupils. The teacher education system such as it is addresses the view that teaching pupils with SEN is something different and particular, and can only be performed by those who have acquired special knowledge. Student teachers are addressed in a similar way by special subjects designed to train them to teach vulnerable groups of pupils. The results of such a teacher education system are frequent opinions of student teachers and teachers that they would face teaching and social inclusion of vulnerable groups of pupils if they had sufficient knowledge on their specificities and particularities, if they were more familiar with the deficiencies and handicaps. They are thus not aware that the main key of their successful work in the classroom is in individualization and in differentiation of work for all pupils and that teaching approaches and strategies for vulnerable pupils are not significantly different from the approaches used to teach all pupils (Davis & Florian, 2004). In order to capacitate student teachers for inclusive education, we should first ensure that contents on teaching and including vulnerable groups of pupils become part of all the subjects that train the teachers for their profession, also the didactics, and not only a part of special subjects such as, for example, Inclusive education or even special teacher education programmes.

Student teachers should finish their studies with a clear awareness that accepting responsibility for the learning, teaching and social inclusion of vulnerable groups of pupils should be essentially connected to the quality of teaching and learning (Florian & Rouse, 2009), that consequently it is primarily teachers who are responsible for the learning and social inclusion of all pupils in their classrooms and that inclusion is not a choice, but a requirement and a necessity. Student teachers should be aware that by transferring responsibility for learning and teaching to parents they additionally strengthen the influence of socio-economic and cultural factors – parents from lower classes, ethnical minority groups, immigrants will encounter more difficulties helping children with their school work, they will find it harder to pay for private tutoring<sup>17</sup>, which will predispose these pupils for even lower academic achievements. This certainly does not presuppose that parents should not be interested in their child's school work, as it is clear that the influence of socio-economic-cultural factors can be, at least to some extent, neutralized through contextual factors: in spite of low income and lack of education, parents can foster high aspirations in their child; the academic achievement is significantly influenced by the family structure, the level of harmony in the family and also parents' support and interest in their child's school achievements (Flere et al., 2009; Puklek Levpušček & Zupančič, 2009). It is therefore the parents' task to provide a stimulating domestic environment to the child, while it is teacher's task to use such teaching strategies that will provide the most efficient learning process and participation to all pupils. Teachers' acceptance of responsibility for learning and social inclusion is, after all, important also for the very status of the teaching profession. A teacher who explains parents that they have to teach their children at home, neglecting the fact that he/she spent five years or more studying precisely how to teach pupils, i.e. a teacher who simply transfers teaching-related tasks to parents who

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<sup>17</sup> Due to high educational requirements already at the level of primary schools, parents are hiring tutors for their children. There is no available data on how many children receive tutoring and how many of those tutoring hours are payable (if they are not for free, for example those provided by relatives or neighbours); we can only perceive from media that the supply of tutoring is high. (Kobolt et al., 2010a)

have not been educated for that purpose, definitely cannot expect to be appreciated, nor can the same be expected for the teaching profession.

In view of the fact that school practice shows a lack of individualization and differentiation in classes and that pupils with SEN often pass through too lenient grading, during their studies, student teachers should systematically face not only the question of equity in education and the need for teachers to 'care for' pupils, as advocated by the ethics of care (Noddings, 1999), but also the consequences of overly permissive attitudes and the use of a charity discourse in treating vulnerable pupils (Fulcher, 1989). Student teachers should learn how to adjust their teaching methods to meet pupils' needs and how to understand the difference between an overprotective attitude towards vulnerable pupils and teaching in their zone of their proximal development (Vigotski, 1983).

Teachers enter the profession, while student teachers enter education, with beliefs about teaching and learning that are intransigent with fears and also prejudices and stereotypes towards diversity. Therefore it is necessary during their study process to make their implicit beliefs explicit. Tacit beliefs can become explicit when student teachers have the opportunity to reflect on them and to discuss them, and to be challenged by feedback from colleagues and peers (Jordan, Schwartz & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). In doing this, they can rely not only on methods, such as persuasion, teaching, informing. To the contrary – during their study process they should use more interactive approaches and methods, such as role play, simulation and group work that 'put' student teachers in situations where they experience and consider first-hand what it means to be different, marginalized, stigmatized, discriminated and what it means to discriminate others. Student teachers' active role is therefore essential, as it is evident from studies that the most convincing are arguments made by students themselves (Ule, 2009; Samaluk & Turnšek, 2011). For student teachers to be more competent to face their implicit theories, it would be sensible to learn their beliefs and attitudes as soon as possible at the beginning of their studies, since in this way the study process can be better planned on the basis of their implicit theories.

Considering the fact that beliefs and attitudes are hard to change, it would be sensible to ask the question whether it would not be indispensable, already upon enrolment in educational studies, to introduce selection criteria that are not based only on the grades candidates achieved in secondary schools, which is the selection criteria in the case of over-enrolment in Slovenia<sup>18</sup>, but also to test other aspects, such as: whether candidates really wish to teach, their ability for empathy, care for others, sensibility to children's needs, readiness to accept responsibility for all pupils, or their courage in fighting injustices (Macura-Milovanović & Starčević, 2010; Haapanen, 2000). If such selection criteria were introduced, the quality of candidates might improve on the basis of measured items, however, it is true that this could by no means replace the need for student teachers to face their own implicit theories during their studies. This should namely present an important part of the study process, since if student teachers do not face them, this may prevent performance of inclusive education. At the same time, we have to be aware that although some attitudes cannot be completely changed, it is important that student teachers are provided an insight at least in those attitudes and prejudices that lead into discrimination, that make us blind to our own deficiencies and weaknesses. In this way, a person no longer blindly follows the dynamics of prejudices, nor is he/she a victim of dangerous illusion of being free from them (Ule, 2009; Samaluk & Turnšek, 2011).

Last but not least, it is of great importance to verify the quality of teaching practice provided to student teachers. Studies namely show that work and interaction with pupils from various vulnerable groups of pupils increases self-confidence and trust in their teaching competences. Therefore it is important that student teachers be provided with opportunities to observe high quality teaching in diverse classrooms and gain personal experience in working with vulnerable pupils (Loreman, Forlin & Sharma, 2007; Sharma,

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<sup>18</sup> A condition for entry into university studies, also teacher education, is completing the matura exam, which is an examination at the end of secondary education. When admission is limited, the criteria include academic achievement at the matura exam and grades from the third and fourth year of secondary school (Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology, 2006).

Forlin & Loreman, 2008). It is important not only that student teachers are provided practicum placements in schools, but also that this is accompanied by high quality mentoring in schools that have strong inclusion policies and practices. Only this will increase the probability of student teachers viewing diversity as a resource rather than as a problem (Taylor & Sobel, 2001).

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(AUSTRIA)

## **EDUCATIVE MENTORING AND THE CHANGING ROLES OF TEACHERS: A MENTORING PROJECT IN STYRIA, AUSTRIA**

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### **Abstract**

Due to the growing diversity in society, permanent changes and subsequent necessary developments in educational matters, teachers experience a constant re-definition of their profession calling for a continuous lifelong flexibility. In a phase, in which a newly organized teacher training program is being developed, the University College of Teacher Education Styria in Graz, Austria, is carrying out a pilot project to mentor new teachers in primary schools. This project takes place in three Styrian districts and is accompanied by evaluation research from 2012 to 2014. Teachers new to the job are counseled by experienced colleagues at their local schools. Additionally, in-service training for new teachers, mentors and principals is offered. The lectures' design allows social and digital networking. The contents of the courses are adapted to the roles and interests of the three focus groups and hold the possibility of peer discussion and cross-group communication. Among the topics are mentoring basics, classroom management, administration, working with parents, and grading. The qualitative research entailed in the project asks for supporting factors of educative mentoring on structural, systemic and personal levels. It is based on questionnaires, expert interviews and group discussions. Furthermore, the value of educative mentoring for the development of professional learning communities and human resources in schools is examined. Finally, this paper relates to the changing demands on new teachers, mentors and principals with regard to mentoring programs in schools.

**Keywords:** educative mentoring, induction, new teachers

## **Introduction**

Approaching a newly organized teacher training program with a four-year bachelor studies program followed by an obligatory induction at school and a subsequent two-year master studies program, the career start of teachers becomes one of the main foci of current research and in-service training in Austria. The practical training on the job in the introductory phase is supposed to be accompanied by mentors at school. Until now, primary and secondary teachers in compulsory schools were not assisted with the professional challenges during their first year of teaching. From day one, new teachers had to take full responsibility of their work, often in a fulltime employment contract. Their only practical experience came from the three-year pre-service training, which included teaching practice. These phases were often reduced to a weekday with two lessons and reflective analyses per semester as well as a three-week stay at a school during the last semester before graduation. At that stage students taught up to 16 lessons a week. In these short periods, students were only able to see a few glimpses of real school life as a teacher but, due to the short time spans, could not observe processes which only become visible in longer periods of on the job training. As Feiman-Nemser puts it, “beginning teachers have legitimate learning needs that cannot be grasped in advance or outside the context of teaching” (Feiman-Nemser, 2003, p.26). It is not possible to simulate administrative or organizational issues, parent-teacher meetings or the responsibility of grading the pupils.

In the next few years, several hundred primary and up to 900 secondary teachers are going to retire in the Austrian province of Styria. In addition to the recent endeavors to design a new teacher training curriculum which results in a master’s degree, the University College of Teacher Education Styria initiated two projects to support the current developments. On the one hand, a six-semester master program in mentoring was launched in co-operation with the Catholic University College for Education Graz, the University College of Teacher Education Burgenland and the Karl-Franzens-University in

Graz. Participants are trained to be facilitators for future mentors in schools as soon as induction programs are implemented nationwide. On the other hand, a pilot project for counseling new primary school teachers, which is accompanied by evaluation research, is being carried out in three Styrian regions from 2012 to 2014. This article focuses on the latter project; it describes its structure and offers for new teachers, the research design and methodology, results of the first year, factors for successful mentoring and their implications on the changing role of teachers as mentors, and principals as facilitators.

### **Fostering pedagogic professionalism through educative mentoring**

Worldwide comparative studies (Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005; Wang & Odell, 2007; Huber, 2010) concerning induction in schools showed that this concept was tested and established in various Anglo-American (Great Britain, USA, Australia, New Zealand), Asian (China) and some European countries (for example, in Sweden, Estonia, Germany and Switzerland). Great Britain, France, Italy and Greece have compulsory induction programs but the amount of teaching practice during teacher training is low. In contrast to that, Switzerland already offers practical pre-service training during the studies as well as support in the first year of professional teaching, which comprises personality development and additional subject-related tuition (Blömeke & Paine, 2009). Models vary in matters of assessment and resources, for example, the time provided for mentoring conversations differs (Huber, 2013).

Terhart (2001) points out that challenges at the beginning of teachers' careers require individual strategies for coping in order to develop a professional identity. He agrees with Hericks (2006) on the importance of developing pedagogic attitudes and value systems as well as specific occupational competencies. However, these cannot be achieved during the pre-service teacher training. They can only be acquired in the course of actual teaching (Messner & Reusser, 2000). Helsper (1996; 2012) describes six constitutive antinomies of teaching. These action dilemmas, which can never be completely

solved, but only reflected on, are huge challenges for new teachers. The antinomies of distance and proximity as well as uniformity and deviation can only be experienced in real teaching situations. As far as personal development is concerned, models about professional biographic development mention various stages to be mastered, referring to terms such as surviving, exploring or mastering (Fuller & Brown, 1975; Hubermann, 1991). Britton, Paine, Pimm and Raizen (2003) consider a successful induction process to be a valuable way of learning in this initial phase. They emphasize the importance of structure in such a model (Britton et al., 2003). Norman and Feiman-Nemser (2005) stress the value of well-organized induction programs for school development and individual professional development. In this respect, Huber (2013) refers to mentoring and systemic coaching as effective means in induction. It can be concluded, then, that the high demands on new teachers require the development of strategies to cope with them. Well-structured induction programs can prevent new teachers from feeling overwhelmed and offer a reflective approach for a permanent professional learning process.

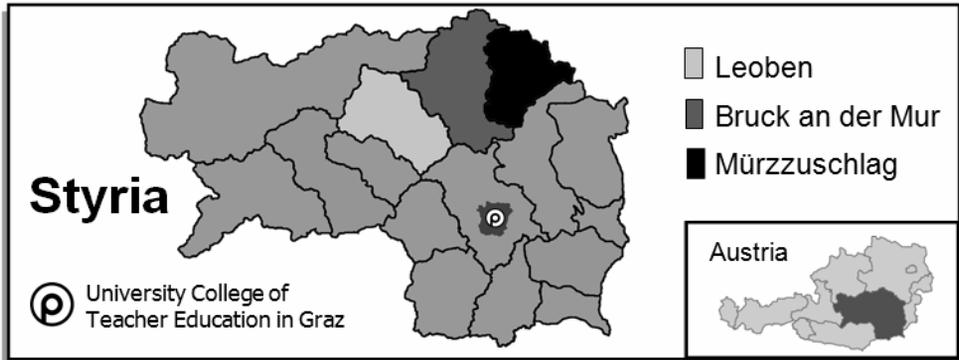
Pedagogically oriented mentoring, in contrast to coaching or supervision concepts, relies on a relationship-based co-operation (Ittel & Raufelder, 2009) with the mentor being an expert in the field. This rather formal way of mentoring refrains from only giving guidance and advice. It does not resemble the hierarchic “apprenticeship model” (Halai, 2006) either but endorses educative mentoring, which reinforces the development of new teachers by “cultivating a disposition of inquiry, focusing attention on student thinking and understanding, and fostering disciplined talk about problems of practice” (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p.28). Educative mentoring enhances self-reflection as well as reciprocal learning within the mentoring relationship with the goal of fostering an on-going professional learning process. Langdon (2007) as well as Feiman-Nemser (2001) point out that this concept is linked to a strong opinion about good teaching on the mentor’s side, who is willing to share his or her beliefs and constantly enables reflective conversations about one’s own actions. A few processes which might

occur in professional mentoring conversations are “Guiding/leading/ advising/supporting; Coaching/educating/enabling; Organising/ managing; Counselling/interpersonal” (Harrison, Dymoke & Pell, 2006, p.1056).

Being a mentor at this important initial stage of professional development means a highly responsible and challenging duty. In the guidelines for an induction and mentoring program, the New Zealand Teachers Council published a detailed definition about high quality mentoring led by a person who “is a reflective practitioner” with “a clear understanding of outstanding teaching” (NZTC, 2011, p.15). Moreover, the mentor is a person who accepts his or her leadership role in this position with the goal of facilitating new teachers’ professional growth by providing knowledge, time and training as well as guidance, support and feedback in a respectful way. Moreover, the necessity of working relationships among colleagues as professional learning communities as well as the reinforcing and supportive attitude of principals is stressed (NZTC, 2011). From the new teachers’ perspective, emotional and psychological support is one of the most vital needs, as reviewed by McDonald and Flint (2011). Based on the theoretical framework of the educative mentoring concept, the Styrian pilot project was modeled according to local needs and research results, which focused on new teachers’ needs at primary schools (Lipowski, 2003; Martinuzzi, 2007; Keller-Schneider, 2010).

### **Designing a model project: context, research design and methodology**

The project Supporting New Teachers at the Beginning of their Professional Careers at primary schools, which is organized by the University College of Teacher Education Styria and fostered by the local supervisory school board, is conducted in the three Styrian districts, Leoben, Bruck an der Mur and Mürzzuschlag, from 2012 to 2014.



**Figure 1:** Styrian districts in the mentoring project

The geographical area, situated along the rivers Mur and Mürz, is characterized by rather densely populated towns surrounded by multiple industries and a rural landscape on the districts' outskirts with sparsely populated far-ranging extensions. This special geographic feature leads to difficult conditions when it comes to employment and schooling. On the one hand, due to the small number of pupils in the countryside only few teachers are hired. Principals report that it is also difficult to find teachers for remote schools. Moreover, there is the danger of schools being closed down or merged with others because of their small size. On the other hand, schools in town centers face a great heterogeneity concerning pupils' family support and varying first languages among others.

As more than 40 new primary school teachers started their professional careers in each of the two project years, the University College of Teacher Education Styria developed a program which supports new teachers by providing mentors at their local schools as well as additional courses with teaching-related topics. Principals, mentors and mentees were invited to introductions and further training in mentoring principles. Table 1 below shows the project's points of emphasis.

**Table 1:** The project’s points of emphasis

New teachers are supported by experienced colleagues at schools		
In-service training for new teachers	In-service training for heads of schools	In-service training for mentors
Learning through social and digital networks (online-tutoring; peer-mentoring)		
Monitoring research		

According to the three participant groups’ needs, a research-based program for new teachers including topics like classroom organization, parent-teacher meetings and assessment was established. Mentors were offered assistance for educative mentoring. They reflected on their roles and were provided with tools like feedback or collegial intervision. Principals were informed about challenges new teachers face when coping with unfamiliar situations and how to support them and implement a mentoring culture and system at their schools. Table 2 shows an overview of content areas provided in the course of the project’s training program.

**Table 2:** Points of emphasis in the project’s in-service training

In-service Training for New Teachers	In-service Training for Heads of Schools	In-service Training for Mentors
classroom management; parent-teacher meetings	professional challenges for new teachers	reflecting and defining the role of a mentor
professional role and identity	mentors’ roles and responsibilities	inducing learning conversations
individualization in teaching; assessment	basics about educative mentoring in school	observing and providing feedback

During the two-year period of the project, monitoring research is carried out. The overall aim of the study is to explore factors of successful mentoring on personal, structural and systemic levels. Here, any changes are observed and the value for human resource and school development is investigated. Correspondingly, the research questions below are looked into:

- Which factors help to establish successful mentoring?
- How can mentoring help build professionalism in new teachers?
- How does specific in-service training facilitate new teachers' starts in professional life?
- Which roles do social and digital networks play regarding the challenges of new teachers' professionalism?

The research for this study is based on a qualitative approach rooted in the reconstructive tradition. For that purpose, evaluation research comprising surveys and group discussions was conducted – also to provide a means of feedback for the participants. The variety and complexity of processes between mentor and new teacher were integral to the research. For that reason, semi-structured one-to-one expert interviews with new teachers, mentors and principals were conducted in one school in each of the three project districts. Table 3 shows an overview of the study's research tools applied in the first year.

**Table 3:** Research timeline for the project year 2012/2013

Timeline	Target Group: New Teachers	Target Group: Heads of Schools	Target Group: Mentors	Expert Group (one per district)
October 2012	written survey		written survey	expert interviews with new teachers, mentors and heads of schools
January 2013				expert interviews with new teachers, mentors and heads of schools
March 2013	group discussion	group discussion	group discussion	
June 2013	written survey		written survey	expert interviews with new teachers, mentors and heads of schools

The qualitative data collected from the questionnaires, group discussions and expert interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed according to categories. The analysis was based on adaptations of Mayring's content analysis (2010) as well as on guidelines for analyzing expert interviews (Meuser & Nagel, 1997; Gläser & Laudel, 2010). This inductive approach generated categories by applying an open coding system. Finally, the mixed-methods approach chosen for this project resulted in a triangulation with subsequent categorization.

All the primary schools with new teachers in Leoben, Bruck an der Mur and Mürzzuschlag participated in the project. In each school, principals, mentors and new teachers attended the further training program. For the school year 2012/2013 that meant a total of 32 heads of schools, 35 mentors and 42 new primary school teachers. The participants were primarily female. Mentors were between 24 and 60 years old with work experience ranging from 3 to 30 years.

### **A selection of results from the project year 2012/2013**

Excerpts of the first year's findings are depicted according to the projects' main points of interest: requirements for being a mentor, factors for successful mentoring, the value of additional in-service training as well as the role of social and digital networks.

### **Great expectations and challenges**

In the project's first survey for mentors and new teachers in October 2012, the main focus was on the teachers' beliefs, attitudes and expectations about the mentoring concept. The results showed that both participant groups were aware of the demanding profile of a mentoring personality.

First of all, there was a mutual agreement of mentors and new teachers that mentors have to have outstanding pedagogical skills and excellent knowledge of the curriculum and how to put its demands into practice. This refers to the necessity of the mentors' experience in practical teaching. Additionally, they need to reflect on

their own teaching, have a wide repertoire of classroom organization skills and interact with a strong interest in a permanent professional learning process. Moreover, mentors have to be experts on their local school's administrative and organizational customs with knowledge about school laws and professional networks to turn to. Besides, mentors are expected to have profound social skills, especially concerning communication with pupils, parents as well as colleagues and heads of schools. Already at this point, both participant groups stressed the necessity of a relationship based on mutual trust for successful mentoring. In this respect, it was emphasized that a comfortable atmosphere and tolerance for individuality and diversity are of crucial importance. Both participant groups were asked to list challenging situations for new teachers. Table 4 shows an overview of the manifold areas that were considered to be demanding.

**Table 4:** Challenges for new teachers

	Mentors	New Teachers
Curricular Knowledge	assessment; differentiating; challenging, fostering; spontaneous substitution for colleagues	assessment; differentiating and individualizing; annual teaching plan; national educational standards
Pedagogical Knowledge	pupils displaying behavioral problems; classes with many pupils; pupils' social behavior; spontaneous reactions to unexpected situations	pupils displaying behavioral problems; implementing a code of conduct; pupils with low German language skills; mixed-level classes; classroom management
Organizational Knowledge	sourcing of material; local school administration and organization; field trips and school events; school regulations and codes of conduct	material for fostering low- ability learners; local school administration and organization; school laws

Social Skills	parent-teacher meetings; relationships with colleagues and heads of schools; intergenerational conflicts	parent-teacher meetings; relationships with colleagues and heads of schools; expectations of principals and superintendents
Personal Skills	time management; work-life balance; personality development; developing professional attitudes and values in a lifelong learning process	time management concerning planning and preparing materials; work-life balance; living up to one's own expectations of being a teacher

These results coincide with findings by Lipowski (2003), Martinuzzi (2007) and Keller-Schneider (2010) and illustrate the broad range of professional challenges new teachers face.

This representation, again, reveals and confirms the necessity for a guided entry to the job.

During the following school year 2012/2013, expert interviews at three schools, group discussions with new teachers, mentors and heads of schools as well as a final survey with new teachers and mentors were conducted. According to the study's research interests, the most important results are presented below.

### **Establishing successful mentoring: conducive factors on different levels**

After a year of mentoring, analyses revealed that 92 per cent of the new teachers and 100 per cent of the mentors acknowledged the importance of providing a mentor for the initial year of teaching and reported on successful mentoring-relationships. Various significant factors were identified by new teachers and mentors. They were visible on three different levels: a personal level concerning the willingness to communicate, trust and respect, sympathy and the interest in another person's perspective; a structural level referring to having enough time and regular meetings; and a systemic level, which emphasizes the importance of the mentors' official positioning

in the schools. The latter proved to be of significant importance for the new teachers – in contrast to the general willingness of teachers to support new colleagues – because before the implementation of official mentors, new teachers had been reduced to asking willing colleagues for help and advice.

On the one hand, the guarantee to have officially appointed mentors who feel responsible for the new teachers, encouraged the first year teachers to ask questions and minimized embarrassment. On the other hand, in their official role, mentors felt much more obliged to care about the new teachers’ worries and developments and to facilitate permanent reflection processes. Here, the factors of time and the regularity of meetings were of utmost importance. In this project, mentors and new teachers organized their meetings themselves. Once their times and ways of meeting (flexibly or regularly scheduled) were established, the team stuck to this structure throughout the year with peaks at certain times like assessment periods or before parent-teacher meetings.

As far as trust and respect are concerned, it has to be pointed out that they were not only related to the personal skills but also to the mutual acceptance of expertise, pedagogical knowledge, interest in excellent teaching and further professional development. The three participating groups agreed on various advantages related to educative mentoring, as displayed in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Advantages of educative mentoring

New Teachers	Mentors	Heads of Schools
mentors’ official appointment	expertise in guiding and counseling	increased communication among colleagues
prevention of excessive demands	reflective approach	valid argument in working with parents (new teachers are supported)
smooth start with shared responsibilities	social skills training	integration of new teachers in school development processes
social integration at school	team work and co-operation	lightened work load
more communication, collaboration, development		
reduction of mistakes in curricular, pedagogical and administrative matters		

However, new teachers, mentors and heads of schools mentioned a few negative influencing factors they had experienced during the pilot project year. Due to the special situation in the three participating districts, some problems arose, for example, when there were up to five new teachers at the same school and not enough mentors available. Moreover, it was difficult to establish smooth mentoring relationships when new teachers were assigned to more than one school. As pointed out earlier, schools in the rural outskirts are rather small with a low number of teachers. There were also schools in which principals acted as mentors, which resulted in a higher workload for them and in an unsolvable situation in case of conflicts for the new teachers.

As was evident in the findings, successful induction and mentoring programs rely on principals who strongly reinforce the educative mentoring concept by providing structural and systemic necessities facilitating mentors' and new teachers' professional development, mentors who act as responsible role models and new teachers who accept and use the offer of mentoring.

### **Educative mentoring as a means of building professionalism in teachers**

While exploring the value of educative mentoring for new teachers' professional development, it became evident that during the mentoring processes, most of the earlier expected challenges (as illustrated in Table 4) turned out to be central topics of discussion in structured professional conversations and reflections. 56 per cent of the new teachers asked for assistance concerning organizational and administrative matters. 48 per cent discussed subject-related and pedagogical questions, especially assessment and testing, with their mentors. It was indicated in the current research findings that mentors, as well as new teachers, particularly enjoyed teaching in classes of the same age level, so there was the advantage of working on the same content matter, developing material together and exchanging it. Ideally, the mentoring process resulted in a professional learning

community with mutual interests, shared attitudes and values about teaching and a lightened workload for all participants.

Meeting on a regular basis was considered to be essential to institute and pursue a permanent professional learning process of setting goals, trying things out, reflecting and improving. Co-operation, for example in planning and testing, did not only lead to increased subject expertise but to contemplating about the pupils' needs.

Regarding communicative skills, 16 per cent of the new teachers asked for their mentors' assistance. Here, it has to be pointed out that the teachers concerned were faced with severe problems, which they had 'inherited' from former local staff. Thanks to the mentors' and principals' support, massive difficulties were overcome. Such dramatic examples especially show the need for support at the beginning of a professional teaching career, protecting new teachers from unrecoverable damage.

However, some new teachers made a few notable critical statements, stressing some important points for successful mentoring: Mentors have to agree on their new position, have to act voluntarily and cannot just be appointed by the principal. Moreover, additional in-service training for mentors should be provided in advance, not parallel to their mentoring duties. This is already the case after the initial year of the project. Measures for the induction are being taken in the new teacher training curriculum, by means of the in-service training at the master's level.

The mentors commented on their new experiences of being a role model, and reflected on the fact that their inherent knowledge about school and teaching matters had been taken for granted and had gone unnoticed for some time. This group was also in agreement that they were open to the new teachers' ideas and views hoping to further enhance their knowledge and skills. They reminisced about their own initial years in teaching, too. It became evident that most of them had had to cope with threatening, almost traumatizing situations at the beginning of their careers, which was the main reason why they strongly supported the project. Some mentors were also confronted with a lack of understanding from teacher colleagues

who did not comprehend why the mentors had agreed to that unpaid extra duty.

Principals observed various developments during that first year of educative mentoring. From their points of view, mentors were not often supported by their colleagues in the schools, as previously mentioned. School staff generally showed great empathy for new teachers and cooperativeness in assisting them if necessary, so the need for official formal mentoring was not clear to them. Some heads of schools regarded it as their responsibility to point out the advantages of mentoring more vehemently in the future. Besides, they recommended a set time structure for serious professional discussion to protect mentors from feeling overwhelmed and to be able to keep track of professional developments. The principals were in agreement that successful mentoring would only work if new teachers and mentors were given time for it. If school authorities did not provide time resources for new teachers and mentors, for example by reducing the overall working hours, a structured induction program with mentoring would be impossible and unachievable. Heads of schools advocated professional development of their staff but referred to the school authorities' responsibilities in this respect. Finally, the implementation of educative mentoring led to the principals' reviewing of their own role, behavior and job profile. They discovered insecurities as to when to involve themselves, when to interfere and when to withdraw. Reflecting on their own understanding of leadership and necessity to monitor developments in their schools, they found the new situation to be enriching, relieving but also unusual at the same time.

Mentors as well as principals discovered that many new teachers had severe shortcomings in the field of curricular and pedagogical knowledge as well as a lack of responsibility for their own learning process. This triggered stimulating discussions about what pre-service teacher training is able to achieve and which aspects can only be learnt through actual teaching during a longer period of time in schools. The difficult transfer from theoretical training to practical work, despite phases of teaching practice, contributed another reason for the necessity of induction programs with mentoring at schools.

## **Assessing the value of in-service training in the mentoring program**

In the first project year's final survey in June 2013, new teachers and mentors were asked to evaluate the provided in-service training. The new teachers acknowledged the seminars' suitability concerning the choice of topics, which added to their pre-service training. They stressed the value of courses especially designed for them, because it reassured them to be in a peer group of people with similar questions and problems. Feelings of embarrassment were reduced to a minimum and they had the possibility to communicate with colleagues in the same situation and even exchange material. Most new teachers tried to attend all the seminars, which amounted to a total of six as well as one joint seminar with mentors. They suggested offering the same course twice in case they were not able to participate on the only set date. Moreover, this participant group asked for more courses dealing with the initial phase of the school year, planning, challenging behavior as well as testing and assessment. However, they felt that some courses took place too late in the school year and therefore voted for earlier dates and suggested starting the preparatory workshops in the last week of the summer holidays. Some new teachers proposed joint seminars with mentors and principals to foster communication.

All the mentors gave positive feedback about the relevance of the topics in their in-service training. They called for even more seminars about communicative strategies and collegial monitoring. As mentioned above, the participants enjoyed working in a peer group. Besides, new mentors as well as new teachers reported that topics dealt with turned out to be starting points for discussion in their regular mentoring meetings.

As articulated by the heads of schools, whose further education program comprised two annual meetings, they were pleased with the contents of the seminars and their communicative structures. They would appreciate a new teacher's handbook containing general organizational and administrative topics, a first-steps-guide for the initial weeks in a new class and a collection of helpful addresses

and web links for support. Their meetings were mainly welcomed as opportunities to confer in the peer group, too. This important effect, the value of social networking within the peer group, is described in detail below.

### **Social and digital networking in in-service training**

In this project, two ways of networking were provided and fostered. On the one hand, the formation of peer groups in in-service training was encouraged by the lecturers' course structures. On the other hand, the project management had installed an online Moodle course, which had to be used for registration and offered possibilities for interaction as well as course material download.

All three participant groups strongly welcomed the possibilities of formal and informal ways of interaction during the in-service training and even suggested offering more of these network meetings; it was proposed to organize discussions especially dedicated to the purpose of sharing experiences. Interestingly, this was not about exchanging teaching or testing material, but about the need to communicate with colleagues in similar professional situations. Some teachers also recommended joint meetings of all three participant groups to get to know new teachers, mentors and principals from other schools. Despite the participants' strong feelings towards the necessity of social networking, they hardly established any relationships with colleagues apart from their meetings in in-service training. Only a few new teachers sent e-mails to each other or talked on the phone, even though many of them had studied together a year earlier. Some mentors and principals pointed out that they had met colleagues from former times and re-established relationships, but not in a work-related way. These findings support the view that additional in-service training has to include various possibilities and sufficient time resources for participants in order to communicate effectively and to provide an established framework, otherwise participants will not interact as intensely.

In the project, an online website offered another channel for communication among participants and with lecturers. It had to be

used for course registrations. Only 12 per cent of the new teachers used the online resource for material download from the in-service training. They criticized the complicated layout and structure. It has to be indicated here that the new teachers had been familiarized with the used tool during their pre-service training. More than 80 per cent of the mentors did not use the website for anything else than registration, either. They explained that they did not want to spend so much time in front of the computer learning how to use the tool. It can be concluded in this respect, that the material provided online was not attractive enough for the mentors, or that they had asked lecturers for further information using e-mail services. The situation with the Moodle online tool is similar regarding the principals; they only used it for registering and otherwise preferred e-mails to keep in contact with colleagues.

Interestingly, when it comes to networking, the project initiated a few accidental developments – positive side effects, which pointed out the importance of mentoring even more clearly. On the one hand, the newly established mentoring relationships triggered interest in teachers who were in their second year, too. So in some schools, these teachers joined the newly formed teams, which resulted in small professional learning groups with the effect that co-operation, exchange of expertise and communication increased. On the other hand, heads of schools used their meetings in in-service training for peer mentoring, too. Younger colleagues new to the job had the chance to be informally mentored by more experienced principals.

### **Changing roles of teachers: concluding considerations**

Regarding the multifaceted information gathered during this first year of the mentoring project, it is evident how the roles of teachers in their various positions change once induction programs are established. As opposed to teachers' changing roles concerning their work in the classroom, changes here relate to personal, structural and systemic levels – with results that finally concern the pupils again. Individual professional development of young teachers, the structured in-depth guidance of an experienced teacher and the

quick integration as a member of the educational establishment by way of mentoring shields new teachers from excessive demands and burnout. At the same time, it reinforces communication and sets up professional learning communities for effective co-operation, taking teachers out of their usual solitary, confined working conditions. For new teachers, being mentored means to be involved quickly in various areas of school life including systemic development. Here, the new teacher's acceptance of the mentor's curricular expertise and pedagogical knowledge as well as his or her counseling skills is vital to successful mentoring. Thus, the new teacher has to understand that professional learning means a lifelong process of interaction.

Mentors acknowledge new roles, too. Taking up their new position, they face a wide range of different duties concerning the new teachers and probably indifferent reactions among their colleagues. Accordingly, mentors cannot just rely on their knowledge but also need corresponding social skills. They have to arrange for a relaxed atmosphere but nevertheless keep communication with the new teacher structured and productive including constructive criticism.

When it comes to dealing with criticism, it is the principals' responsibility to act as facilitators of induction and mentoring. The success of the concept crucially depends on the heads of schools' attitudes towards such a program as well as its reinforcement. For school development, educative mentoring provides various advantages by increasing communication and co-operation of the staff. Necessarily, all participants have to become team players involved in professional conversation. Accompanying training facilities, offering guidance, supervisions, peer meetings and in-service training provide additional support to help teachers succeed. In this regard, the focus in the second year of the project is on developing formats for the guided documentation of professional conversation, on negotiations with legislative authorities about future mentors' profiles, on formal and informal assessment, additional in-service training and the development of a handbook for new teachers.

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(ITALY)

**CHANGING ITE CURRICULA, EVOLVING ROLES  
OF TEACHERS AND TEACHER EDUCATORS:  
INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION REFORMS  
AND DEVELOPMENTS IN ITALY**

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**Abstract**

The 2010 reform of initial teacher education in Italy has meant varying priorities and outcomes for different stakeholders (policymakers, ITE providers, teacher educators, teacher candidates, school institutions): aligning programmes to European standards, shifting focus in ITE curricula, preparing teachers to deal with current socio-cultural challenges and diverse learning needs, facing teacher recruitment issues in an economic crisis, improving pupil attainment, integrating new technologies in teaching. A comparison between ITE programme features before and after the reform can underscore the elements of continuity and change, as far as key aims and outcomes are concerned – ITE curricula and the professional profile of the teacher, against the general background of teacher policy. Reformed ITE curricula for secondary teachers underscore the profile of a subject-savvy expert who can meet diverse pupils' needs, and whose competence development is boosted by the integration of knowledge and experience coming from school practice, workshops and theoretical courses. However, the Italian teacher policy maze, linked with recruitment and labor market issues – many temporary teachers claim rights to qualifications and eventually tenure – has complicated reform implementation. The latter was frozen in 2013, after the first round of new post-graduate annual ITE programmes, to make room for fast-track, annual university-based qualification routes for temporary teachers (due to be offered for three years, until 2016). However, these programmes lack teaching practice, as well as supervision and mentoring by teacher educators. Moreover, the key requirement is three years' teaching experience (even consisting of many short-term assignments), downplaying the importance of entry selection filters. This poses a challenge – how to ensure updated subject knowledge requirements and the build-up of a reflective mindset in these teacher cohorts – which represents the tip of

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the iceberg in the teacher quality issue, for Italian policymakers and ITE providers. University Ca' Foscari in Venice represents an interesting case study, as an ITE provider both before the reform and afterwards.

Key words: initial teacher education, policy reform, ITE curricula, European Higher Education Area, teachers' professional profile.

## **Introduction: the why and when of ITE reform**

The 2010 reform of initial teacher education in Italy joined the global flow of European member states aligning with Bologna process requirements for transparency and compatibility, working towards the construction of a European Higher Education Area – with challenges arising from the mismatch between national teacher qualifications and general higher education requirements (Zgaga, 2013). In fact, the idiosyncratic nature of ITE, deeply embedded in national context traditions and regulations, makes for a tricky policy field (González and Wagenaar, 2005). The Europeanization of ITE, in most national contexts, boosted desirable policy reforms, overcoming the resistance of ingrained local traditions, regulations and cultures; inevitably, in a number of cases the side effects of reform developments also entailed disconnecting local good practices.

In Italy, a decade of work by inter-university ITE providers (secondary schooling) on a regional level (*Scuole di Specializzazione per l'Insegnamento Secondario*) had built up fruitful inter-institutional collaboration, debate and action research on teaching and learning (Caena, 2010). Indeed, the set-up of regional SSIS institutions in 1999 had come after two decades of debates and experimentations on teachers' quality and professional profiles, involving political, university and school stakeholders. It had been a novel, ambitious endeavour, establishing a collaborative, professionalizing academic institution bridging school and university, teaching and research – bent on overcoming attitudes of scepticism or superiority in actors and settings concerned (Luzzatto, 2001).

The 1998 reform law that had laid out SSIS structure and features (DM 26.5.1998) had also aimed at giving a comprehensive answer to the complex policy issue of teacher education, selection and recruitment: SSIS entry selection was linked to teacher

demand forecasts, and final SSIS examinations awarded teaching qualifications, a place in regional candidate lists for temporary teaching assignments and eventually tenure. This was especially meaningful in the Italian context, characterized by decades of uneven policy actions in the field. Before the law that introduced academic specializations for teaching in 1990 (Law 341/1990), a fully developed, national teacher education system had been missing, especially for secondary schooling. Prior to SSIS, teacher recruitment had been based on national examinations for tenure posts taking place at random intervals that could exceed ten years, alternating with ad hoc legislation recurrently awarding tenure to temporary teachers on the basis of teaching experience only.

However, Bologna process implementation in the Italian higher education context soon highlighted a fatal flaw of SSIS ITE programmes: Italian initial teacher education for secondary teachers had become the longest in Europe, since SSIS biennial programme came after 5-year master-level studies. There were also heated debates in academic contexts about the weight of transversal curricular areas (educational sciences) versus subject didactics, and of the latter versus subject studies – reflecting rooted academic habits that foregrounded subject and theoretical knowledge over subject didactics, practice research and reflective competences (Crivellari, 2002).

Finally, political choices by subsequent governments weakened links between teacher qualification and recruitment; the regional lists of qualified SSIS graduates were originally meant to give access to tenure by means of national competitive examinations, but these were not held regularly along the decade of existence of SSIS institutions.

Consequently, reform laws between 2003 and 2010 closed down SSIS institutions and placed initial teacher education for secondary schooling back into university subject departments, aligning Italian ITE with the European trend towards master-level qualifications. The lengthy implementation process of the 2010 ITE reform, after a two-year interval with no initial teacher education available, finally resulted in the first postgraduate ITE programme (secondary), *TFA/Tirocinio Formativo Attivo*, being offered by universities across Italy in the a.y.2012/13 – with entry selection exams linked

to teacher demand forecasts. The implementation of the first stage of the ITE route (new master degrees for ITE designed by the reform, with different programmes for lower and upper secondary teachers) is planned to be effected further on.

However, the Italian teacher recruitment maze has got in the way of reform implementation once again, foregrounding the burning issue of temporary teachers demanding acknowledgement of their experience for teaching qualifications. The ministry, following trade unions' requests, thus froze reform in 2013 and set up a three-year plan of annual, fast-track qualification programmes (*PAS/Percorsi Abilitanti Speciali*) for temporary teachers with at least three years' teaching experience, who could thus skip teaching practice and supervision, and did not have to undergo high-stakes entry selection processes. At the same time, national competitive examinations for tenure started to be held again in 2013 – but offering very few places.

For a fuller understanding of the policy context, a few further factors ought to be mentioned, because of their impact on teacher demand and recruitment, and thus on the provision of ITE programmes linked to staff forecast needs: the frozen teacher turnover after recent welfare reforms putting off retirement for an ageing teacher population, and dwindling teaching posts, due to secondary school reforms and regulations increasing class sizes (side effects of the economic crisis).

### **The how of reform: ITE structure, providers and routes**

In the wake of the Bologna process, the key institutional change sweeping over Italian ITE in 2010 was somewhat similar to what happened in France, where IUFMs lost their independent status as ITE providers and were merged with universities, while initial teacher education was raised to second-cycle degree level.

The Italian reform, too, has raised ITE programmes to masters level for all teachers. ITE for kindergarten and primary teachers is now entrusted to appointed university providers within each region; the five-year concurrent programme includes 600 hours' teaching practice, entry selection linked to teacher demand forecasts, and awards teaching qualifications with the degree.

For secondary teachers, instead, ITE is split between master studies and an annual postgraduate qualification programme with teaching practice – which seems to counter the advocated importance of fully integrating teaching practice, reflection and university courses throughout ITE (Korthagen et al. 2006). On paper, the 2010 law does include teaching practice experiences even before postgraduate ITE, during master studies; however, there are no detailed regulations yet about its structure, organization and delivery.

There are different ITE programmes for lower and upper secondary teaching: after BA subject studies, lower secondary teacher candidates are to enter a specific MA ITE course (not implemented yet), with entry selection tests linked to teacher demand forecasts. Upper secondary school teachers' university pathways, instead, are to be further defined, with reform still in progress.

The foregrounding of a subject specific perspective in reformed secondary ITE can be expected, as a consequence of subject departments' responsibility for postgraduate ITE provision, against the background of many academic subject specialists' limited interest in didactics and educational sciences. This attitude can be detected across European university contexts, with a status issue for teacher education programmes and staff, if compared with mainstream subject teaching and research activities (European Commission, 2013). As for the reformed ITE curriculum, balance could easily tip towards subject knowledge, with subject specific studies more likely to replicate degree courses, while the possible overshadowing of reflective activities might result in a weaker integration between theory and practice.

Related consequences of ITE institutional changes can concern staff selection, induction and collaboration, heightening issues which had already surfaced in SSIS programmes. ITE staff selection criteria can now risk downplaying teacher educators' knowledge and experience in didactics and teaching, privileging subject knowledge and expertise; consequently, induction into the teacher educator role, of key importance for guaranteeing curriculum integration and promoting teacher competence development, might be overlooked (European Commission, 2013).

Likewise, the added value of collaboration and exchange between professionals and experts from different universities, which

characterized SSIS institutions as regional consortia of universities, is now missing. Liaising between staff from different university departments and schools about curriculum, course design, programme management and assessment can also be less likely.

### **The what of reform: developing and revising ITE curricula**

Policy reform choices about ITE mirror underlying politics (ideologies and opinions about aims and objectives of schooling, teaching and education). These, in turn, have an impact on key issues in initial teacher education curricula and programmes – knowledge, teacher learning, teaching practice, learning outcomes, programme consistency, teacher recruitment and selection, diversity and social justice (Cochran-Smith, 2006).

ITE biennial curricula for secondary teaching provided by SSIS before the 2010 reform gave equal weight to four areas – transversal pedagogical studies, subject studies, subject didactics workshops, and teaching practice – which were to be recursively integrated and interconnected. According to an overarching perspective of the professional profile of the teacher, ITE curricula for primary and secondary teachers had common key objectives as learning outcomes. Teaching practice in schools was meant to be complemented by reflective seminars and activities, both in presence and virtual modes, coordinated and monitored by university teacher educators. This curriculum feature was designed for student teachers to develop their own flexible models of professional practice, recursively tailored according to changing needs, contexts and ongoing self-evaluation processes (Luzzatto, 2001).

The design of a concurrent, simultaneous model for teaching practice within initial teacher education curricula is recommended by evidence, experimentation, experiences in initial teacher education systems across Europe, as well as higher education training models for other professions (e.g. medicine). Embedding professional teaching practice as simultaneous to theoretical courses within ITE routes – like in medicine degree programmes – is crucial, as it reflects a systemic view of the role of higher education providers and other institutions in the process of training and qualifying professionals. This simultaneity is viewed as beneficial for teacher

learning and development; the alternative model, instead, separates theoretical training in higher education, and professional preparation/certification to be carried out afterwards, as a pre-requisite for professional qualification (like in the law). The latter pattern had characterized the professional preparation of Italian teachers, before the introduction of SSIS ITE routes.

Didactics workshops represented further aspects of innovation in SSIS ITE provision, as ‘boundary curriculum areas’ where pedagogical and subject knowledge were deployed to develop practical theories, together with transversal competences for planning, teaching and assessment. The law about SSIS programmes also suggested pedagogies, activities and roles for this area – highlighting the importance of cooperation between teacher educators, student teachers and practitioners from university and school contexts, in order to design, analyze and deliver subject specific teaching activities which tapped on knowledge from other curricular areas (Scaglioni, 2014).

However, SSIS curricula soon became the targets of criticism by different stakeholders: in fact, regulations only outlined general guidelines about programme structure and length, credits, curricular areas, expected outcomes and professional profile. University autonomy and the lack of quality coordination or monitoring thus resulted in widely diverse programmes across providers, often missing the innovative potential of a shift from a knowledge culture to a competence culture (Bonetta et al., 2002). Other issues were also connected to the weak structure and regulation of school-university partnerships for teaching practice, since the participation of schools and mentors turned out to be on a voluntary and predominantly free basis.

Interestingly, the 2010 ITE reform (postgraduate TFA routes) gave additional importance (at least in policy discourse) to two curricular areas mentioned as pivotal by stakeholders and experts for teacher competence development – subject didactics workshops and teaching practice (Caena, 2010). The name itself of the postgraduate ITE route (TFA – *Tirocinio Formativo Attivo*) sets teaching practice at the heart of the annual programme, with the support function of morphing theoretical learning, practical experience, cooperative and reflective activities into professional competences. The reformed curriculum sees a dwindled educational sciences area, and subject

didactics studies viewed as linked with subject didactics workshops and teaching practice.

Indeed, this development seems to acknowledge the crucial functions of teaching practice, which go far beyond professional training and socialization, defining it as the context for the following key actions:

- providing the first opportunity for future teachers to display professional behaviours, underpinned by theoretical knowledge and didactics workshops;
- providing opportunities for observation and reflection, supported by teacher educators, to develop professional awareness and attitudes;
- catalyzing the transformation of student teachers' knowledge and learning into professional competences, linking contexts and roles (across school and university) by a collaborative approach;
- providing opportunities for synthesizing knowledge, practical theories and experimental practices that have been discussed, developed and tested by different learning activities (didactics workshops, reflective seminars, school teaching sessions) and actors (university teacher educators, subject teacher educators, school mentors) along the ITE programme;
- providing opportunities for student teachers' guided experimentation of practices in a safe context, followed up by mentoring and reflection with peers or experts;
- supporting the student teacher's route towards professional autonomy;
- promoting reciprocal learning and innovation involving all actors (student teachers and teacher educators), in integrated school-university professional communities;
- catalyzing the development of collaborative attitudes within professional communities, by means of reflective and mentoring activities, both in university and school settings (Scaglioni, 2014).

The reformed ITE postgraduate programme's curriculum makeup (teaching practice and supervision activities, subject didactics plus subject didactics workshops, educational sciences) clearly reflects a shifting focus from pedagogical and theoretical preparation (educational sciences, subject studies) to workplace learning and subject didactics. In fact, teaching practice and related activities are placed at the core of the programme and total 19 ECTS (475 hours), one third of overall credits. Interestingly, mandatory courses on

dealing with special learning needs (e.g. dyslexia) and diversity have been introduced. This seems to tally, to some extent, with what many teacher candidates had indicated as priorities in their preparation to the classroom – at least taking the case study example of the University of Venice, where SSIS courses' evaluations often highlighted the need of additional training on behaviour management, special needs and cultural/linguistic diversity.

If teaching practice has indeed acquired pride of place in the preparation of Italian teachers in the reformed postgraduate TFA programme, as recommended by theoretical underpinnings and European policy recommendations, the curricular choice of fast-track ITE qualification programmes (*PAS – Percorsi Abilitanti Speciali*), which leave out teaching practice, does not seem to tally. The access requirement of three years' teaching experience, in fact, does not guarantee the development of reflective habits and attitudes, nor does the route grant the key professional learning opportunities linked to teaching practice.

### **The who: shifting focus in the roles of teachers and teacher educators**

The 2010 ITE reform law draws a profile of the teacher which is composed of five key competence dimensions (common to teaching across all school levels), which represent the foundations of professional action aimed at pupil learning, and are all fully activated and developed within teaching practice:

- subject competences;
- pedagogical competences;
- methodological competences;
- management competences;
- interpersonal competences.

This professional profile is complemented by four more competence requirements:

- competences required for supporting school autonomy (e.g. cooperation, leadership, research...);
- English language competences (B2 level CEFR);

- digital competences;
- competences required for promoting inclusion and meeting special learning needs.

Before the ITE reform, the professional profile of the teacher in the SSIS syllabus was very ambitiously drawn, considering a multiplicity of dimensions. In addition to those mentioned before, it spanned competences related to assessment, collaboration, innovation and intercultural dialogue, stressing the roles of teachers as social actors and lifelong learners. The professional dimensions of the profile could be viewed as integrated in a ‘cognitive hexagon’ – as implemented and delivered in the SSIS Veneto institution – which underlined the key value of reflection (linked with dialogue, creativity and self-assessment within a team of practitioners) and management skills in different settings and on different levels (Caena, 2010).

As for the quality of entrants, the ITE reform sets high stakes entry selection filters for the TFA postgraduate programme. National written and oral examinations gauging subject specific and cultural knowledge are aimed at screening candidates among a surplus of applicants – in a similar way to the selection previously operated by national entry exams by SSIS institutions, which functioned as quality gatekeepers.

However, in the fast-track qualification programmes (*PAS/Percorsi Abilitanti Speciali*), later set up to meet trade unions’ and temporary teachers’ requests, the only entry filter is represented by a non-selective, diagnostic multiple-choice test about logical, comprehension and language skills, whose score only determines the year of access to the annual qualification route, which will be available in the academic years between 2014 and 2017.

The roles and features of teacher educators, who are in charge of student teachers’ supervision in reflective activities, are described as central in both past and present ITE programmes. The reform acknowledges and underlines (at least in policy discourse) teacher educators’ pivotal function in helping student teachers integrate input from school teaching practice, reflective activities, didactics workshops and theoretical courses at university. This represents an aspect of continuity with previous SSIS programmes, where it was considered as a valued quality feature.

Like before, teacher educators are required to work in both university and school, for an updated knowledge of school realities and teaching experience. The requirements about their professional profile and preparation have become more specific and ambitious: teacher educators are now selected for their previous professional experience in teacher education institutions, relevant research activity, publications, and advanced academic qualifications at PhD level.

### **A case study: University of Venice, Ca' Foscari**

University Ca' Foscari in Venice represents a paradigmatic case study, because of its involvement in ITE provision (secondary schooling) both before and after the reform. Between 1999 and 2010, it was a partner in the regional ITE institution SSIS (*Scuola di Specializzazione per l'Insegnamento Secondario*, similar to French IUFMs). Furthermore, the department of Modern Foreign Languages was selected as an example of good practices on a European level. In fact, the European studies by Kelly and Grenfell (2002, 2004), which resulted in the European Profile of Language Teacher Education, highlighted the best practices of SSIS Veneto's Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) Department ITE programme. In particular, the studies praised the roles and activities of teacher educators supporting student teachers' reflective practice, professional portfolios and competence development, by means of online and presence workshops, as well as careful supervision of teaching practice experiences by liaising with school mentors (Bertin, 2007).

Moreover, teacher educators in SSIS Veneto's MFL department had a key function in promoting the build-up of professional communities that could span school and university settings, by professional development seminars and conferences that stimulated action research, dialogue, debate, and a reciprocal exchange of knowledge and expertise between researchers, school practitioners, university teacher educators and school mentors. The MFL department of SSIS Veneto also experimented and piloted a mobility programme that allowed student teachers to experience a period of teaching practice abroad – a precious opportunity to develop future teachers' intercultural, reflective competences and attitudes (De Matteis, 2007). Finally, teacher educators themselves took responsibility for their

own professional development, by taking advantage of European grants to explore and compare ITE practices in other countries – with a focus on reflective teacher education (Guazzieri, 2005).

After the closure of SSIS, Ca' Foscari university carried out the first year of ITE reform implementation in the a.y. 2012/13, with post-graduate annual programmes (*TFA/Tirocinio Formativo Attivo*) providing training practice at school, alternating with courses, workshops and supervision at university. In the a.y. 2013/14, on the other hand, it is offering only the annual fast-track qualification programmes (*PAS/Percorsi Abilitanti Speciali*) for temporary teachers, which feature university courses and workshops, but neither teaching practice nor teacher educator supervision.

Some best practices that still feature in the new ITE programmes offered by Ca' Foscari university reflect innovative aspects of previous provision that were foregrounded by reform. The most valuable one consists in the personalization and individualization of training/learning activities, by means of blended courses in virtual learning environments, supported by trained online tutors. This delivery mode can be particularly effective in promoting the development of competences in future teachers – not only digital competences applied to the subject specialism (TPACK, Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge), but also professional attitudes and habits of reflection, research and collaboration (Mishra and Koehler, 2006). Indeed, the interaction and collaboration of groups of student teachers in virtual environments, carrying out tasks, sharing reflections and discussions on their teaching experiences, can be valuable catalysts of their identity development as teaching practitioners, in professional learning communities – providing emotional support as well, in a tough, sensitive professional journey. Teacher educators' scaffolding action, providing reflective activities and promoting the construction of a professional portfolio, represents another quality element of continuity between the previous ITE programme and the new one in the Venice institution. An interesting element of novelty, which builds on the research expertise of the local higher education institution, is represented by the possibility of tapping on the ongoing knowledge and research development of university experts working on the personalization and individualiza-

tion of foreign language teaching, as related to dyslexia and learning difficulties.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, some downsides of the reformed postgraduate ITE route (TFA) can be highlighted. The shortened, intensive route does not ideally fit the times and structures needed for scaffolding reflection in student teachers, who are pressured to prioritise course exams and the final report, which is meant to synthesize and integrate knowledge and experiences from university and school settings. The triangulation of perspectives by meetings and discussions between teacher educators, mentors and student teachers (a regular feature in SSIS Veneto programmes) is now made more difficult to accomplish, given the fast pace of the programme activities.

### **Conclusions: dilemmas and issues about teachers and teacher education**

The reformed Italian postgraduate ITE programmes (TFA) for secondary teachers have been advertised by policy makers as an endeavour to prepare more knowledgeable teachers, somewhat shifting emphasis from pedagogical to cultural preparation – which could induce some to recall the traditional assumption ‘the teacher who knows, also knows how to teach’ (Cappa, Niceforo & Palomba, 2013). However, a critical element in Italian ITE reforms (especially for secondary teachers) can be found in the weakening of the principle of integration between school and university training contexts, actors and activities – between teaching practice, reflection, training workshops and foundation courses on education sciences – consequent to subject-specific institutional perspectives (Caena, 2010).

Developing quality assurance concerning ITE and teaching, ownership and attractiveness of the profession can be underscored as key priorities, against the background of an ageing profession that faces a frozen turnover, the rationalization of teaching posts and the increase of teacher/pupil ratios. A growing focus on special educational needs (e.g. dyslexia) with a recent law that allows for personalized curricula, instruction and tests requires deep subject content knowledge as well as specific training. On the other hand, a

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<sup>19</sup> [http://www.istruzione.lombardia.gov.it/mantova/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/02\\_Dislessia\\_lingue.pdf](http://www.istruzione.lombardia.gov.it/mantova/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/02_Dislessia_lingue.pdf)

long-term policy strategy about teacher recruitment, quality assurance in education, teacher feedback and evaluation seems to be required, in order to guarantee equity in teacher selection and recruitment, beyond firefighter policies tackling short-term education issues.

Teacher educators' status represents another critical element; their part-time secondment to universities, which is meant to promote a fruitful integration of practice and research perspectives, is opposed by school leaders, who tend to view it as a subtraction of human resources, rather than as an added value). Also the weak role and status of school mentors pose other issues. The latter's specific training is optional, they are selected by school leaders and they perform their delicate role on a voluntary, free basis, without incentives of any kind.

Italy's ranking in 2012 PISA survey marks improvements since 2009, but it remains quite low; for the first time, the inclusion of regional data underscores huge differences between the north and the centre-south (with results in regions of the north-east, such as Veneto, equaling those of Asian countries at the top). TALIS surveys highlighted the key issues of missing evaluation and feedback, linked in turn with optional CPD provision and teacher status issues. This backdrop scenario underscores even more the need for a comprehensive, systemic policy strategy on teachers and teacher education, in order to enhance the quality of learners' outcomes, teachers and teacher educators – building on precious best practices so as to avoid previous pitfalls. Above all, the first monitoring report after the first year of ITE reform (about TFA routes) has pointed out the need for care and attention in policy implementation, since the effectiveness of such an intensive route can be endangered by delays and administration issues – for instance, about the selection and appointment of teacher educators, or the interpretation of school practice features and organization (ANFIS, 2013).

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(AUSTRIA)

## “LERNDESIGNERS” AS CHANGE AGENTS FOR SCHOOL REFORM

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### **Abstract**

In the context of the Austrian lower secondary school reform *Neue Mittelschule* (NMS), which was mandated in 2012, a new teacher leadership role, *Lerndesigner*, was initiated. Lerndesigners are teacher leaders with specific expertise in areas of curriculum and instructional development (*Lerndesign*) related to the reform goals of equity and excellence. Ideally Lerndesigners act as change agents in a shared leadership dynamic with school principals and other teacher leaders (subject coordinators, school development teams, etc.). The rationale for working with, qualifying and networking change agents was clear and focused: effective school reform occurs on the school level and change agents require networking and communities of practice in the context of school reform.

As a result, the teacher leadership role of the Lerndesigner was a massive system intervention which continues to be met with some resistance in each new generation of NMS. Nonetheless, the Lerndesigners were and are important change agents for school reform. Each Lerndesigner creates his or her own role in the context of his or her school through processes of role-taking and role-making. The effectiveness of Lerndesigners as change agents in a teacher leadership role depends to a significant degree on the culture and leadership in their schools. Although school autonomy is relatively restricted in Austria, the mental model behind the NMS reform pilot was one of diversity rather than uniformity. This diversity reflects the general tendency of schools to think and act locally, rooted in the federalist structure of compulsory education in Austria.

**Key words:** teacher leaders, change agents, school reform, system transformation

## **1. The Change Agent Initiative Lerndesigners in Austria's Lower Secondary School Reform**

The Austrian school reform initiative “New Secondary School” (NMS), which began in 2008 in 67 pilot schools, has since led to a mandated school reform, which will be completed in phases by 2018. The initial goal of the NMS pilot was to foster innovative learning environments and increase equity in lower secondary education. An external consultant group for guiding the pilot phase (NMS-EB: *NMS-Entwicklungsbegleitung*) was hired by the Ministry in 2008. The NMS-EB initiated and implemented networks and communities of practice on all system levels, whereby the focus was on school principals and Lerndesigners, a new teacher leadership role which should provide leverage for school reform, i.e. the role of change agent.

Lerndesigners are teacher leaders with specific expertise in areas of curriculum and instructional development (Lerndesign) related to the reform goals of equity and excellence. Ideally Lerndesigners act as change agents in a shared leadership dynamic with school principals and other teacher leaders (subject coordinators, school development teams, etc.). The rationale for working with, qualifying and networking change agents was clear and focused: effective school reform occurs on the school level and change agents require networking and communities of practice in the context of school reform (Schley et al., 2009).

The effectiveness of Lerndesigners as change agents in a teacher leadership role depends to a significant degree on the culture and leadership in their schools. Although school autonomy is relatively restricted in Austria (Schratz & Westfall-Greiter, 2010), the mental model behind the NMS reform prototype was one of diversity rather than uniformity. This diversity reflects the general tendency of schools to think and act locally, rooted in the federalist structure of compulsory education in Austria. For the NMS, which was mandated in April of 2012, general regulations, curricula and standards are centralized at the federal level while school

administration, inspection and development are governed on the state provincial (*Bundesland*) level. Players in school development include local town councils, district school inspectors, school inspectors as well as *Pädagogische Hochschulen* which provide federally funded school development services and continuing professional development for teachers. Budgets for school-specific staff development are also allocated to and administered by the *Pädagogische Hochschulen*.

The Lerndesigners are not alone in their role as change agents. As a result of educational reform efforts throughout the system, several new teacher leadership roles have emerged since 2008 which have had an impact on the social architecture of the schools. In the NMS these include contact persons or coordinators with specific agendas required by the Ministry (eLearning, gender issues, culture and arts programming, standards and school quality) for the NMS as well as school development team members and learning coaches or NMS coordinators required on the *Bundesland* or school level. Compensation for the roles varies according to whether it is regulated by union agreements and/or legislation. Of these teacher leaders, Lerndesigners are the most visible, in part due to their two-year qualification program comprising national networking events and symposia, but also due to their name. Lerndesign was a new word that received some media attention early on and has become part of NMS everyday vocabulary on all system levels, in part due to the national networking efforts as well as the new curriculum legislation which redefines instructional design as Lerndesign (clear assessable goals and criteria).

Each NMS designates a member of the teaching staff to be the Lerndesigner, who attends national and regional network meetings and qualification programs (Lernateliers) as well as local networking events. The role of the Lerndesigner was a massive system intervention in a school system in which schools have a flat hierarchy and the autonomy-parity pattern (Lortie, 1975) dominates. At the same time, the Lerndesigners were and are important change agents for school reform. Each Lerndesigner created his or her own role in the context of his or her school through processes of role-taking and role-making. To strengthen the role and foster innovation, school

principals were also invited to a national network meeting each semester in which they could address their own leadership issues and shared leadership with the new Lerndesigners as a change strategy on the school level.

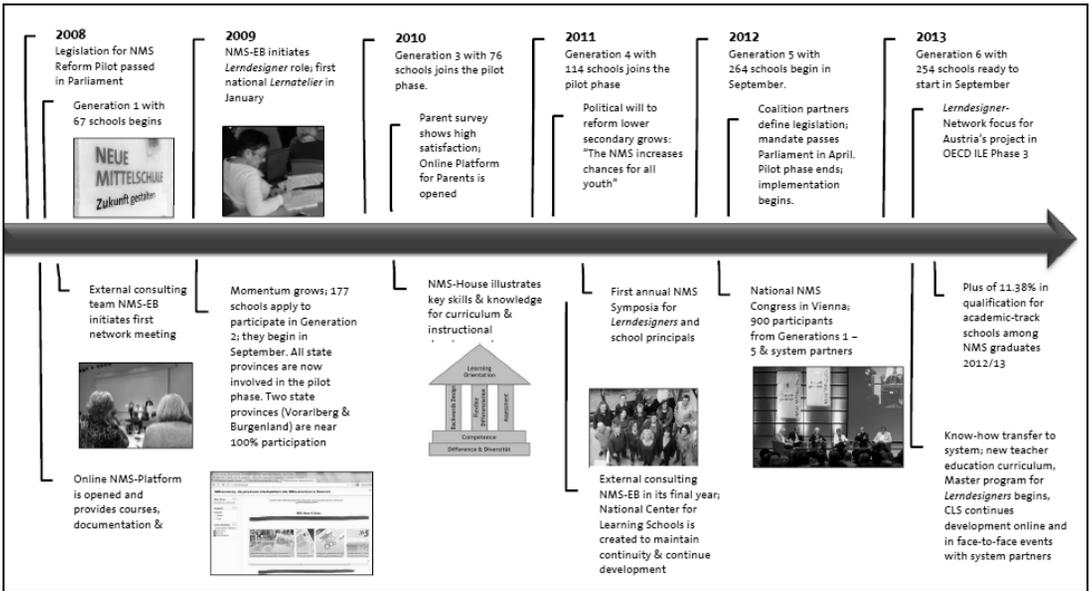
## **2. From Prototyping to Transformation**

In April 2012 the NMS was mandated by the Austrian Parliament and a new phase of system transformation began with the 2012/13 school year. To sustain positive change and foster learning environments which are equitable and challenging for all NMS lower secondary pupils, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Arts has launched a National Center for Learning Schools (CLS). The primary objectives of the CLS are to:

- sustain and foster school networks and communities of practice,
- develop change agents through qualification programs, symposia and networking,
- integrate findings from current learning research in the NMS environment to development strategies,
- disseminate next practice insights and examples online and in print,
- support change processes in teacher education to meet the goals of the NMS,
- exploit system-wide synergy potentials,
- provide support for policy and program development.

As the timeline below shows, four generations of pilot schools began with the process of prototyping. The transition into the mandated system began in 2012/13, in the middle of Generation 4's program, which seems to have been a relatively easy transition for this generation, whereas Generations 1 – 3 struggled and are still struggling to adapt the new imposed changes more or less willingly. Generation 5 began according to the new law, resulting in clarity and stability for their development from the beginning.

**Figure 1: Timeline from prototyping to transformation**



**Table 1: The NMS Generations by Bundesland**

	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Vienna	-	22	2	-	47	49
Lower Austria	-	45	3	28	72	49
Burgenland	9	19	-	8	4	1
Styria	30	5	2	16	55	60
Carinthia	4	19	13	9	6	4
Upper Austria	1	21	26	29	49	52
Salzburg	-	10	5	-	13	15
Tirol	-	8	25	24	17	24
Vorarlberg	23	28	-	-	1	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>254</b>

The fundamental aim of the *Lerndesigner*-Network is to foster the development of effective learning environments at each school, driven by the principle of school-specific reform (Marzano, 2003) and focused on the goal of equity. The strategy lies in qualifying teachers to become teacher leaders, thereby enabling them and their

schools to realize effective shared leadership. DuFour (2002) argues that the central task of school leaders is to foster the disposition and structure of Professional Learning Communities (PLC). More than ever before, school leadership needs to focus on student achievement and foster a culture of learning throughout the school.

While a profile for the role of the Lerndesigner is distributed to school principals, the actual nomination for the role is not formalized, in large part due to the fact that the function is not yet secured in the system. As a result, teachers come to this teacher leader role more or less informed, more or less personally motivated and more or less with the mandate of the whole school. Nonetheless fluctuation is relatively low (under 10%), possibly indicating that the selection process itself is most effective when handled according to a school's specific needs and culture. On the other hand, low fluctuation is not necessarily an indicator of job satisfaction. Lerndesigners may be committed to the reform and have ambitious goals in regards to their impact on their school's development but be restricted by a lack of leadership or hierarchical leadership styles, as the following vignette from a Lerndesigner Online PLC focused on teacher leadership reveals:

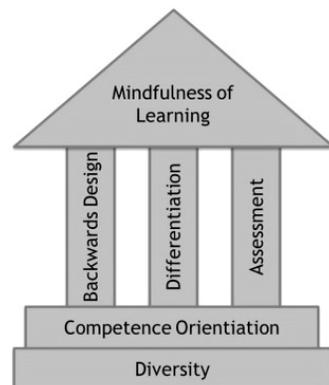
*Anne is furious. Everyone else in the PLC is reporting that although „teacher leadership“ isn't part of their school vocabulary the role of teacher leaders is nonetheless central. Neither is true for her school. Her principal delegates responsibilities when there is need. There is even constant fluctuation in their School Development Team! How did she become a Lerndesigner? She just happened to be in the principal's office when the form arrived to register a Lerndesigner and got the job. She wants to know if teacher leaders also have authority so they can, for example, call for team meetings. And she also wants to know what benefits others see in their teacher leader roles and who would put themselves through all of that under the given circumstances. Actually she's not really thinking about teacher leaders in general; she's really thinking about herself at her school. Anne is growing impatient. She wants answers to the question of what processes are necessary to introduce teacher leaders in a school. (TLS1 V3) (Westfall-Greiter, 2014)*

The lack of formalization in selecting Lerndesigners on the school level is primarily due to the fact that although it is

considered by all to be essential and it receives the support of the local school authorities the role of the Lerndesigner is not firmly established in the national and local salary schemes. Solutions for paying Lerndesigners for their work vary according to the state province (*Bundesland*) and the school. The willingness of school principals and local authorities to ensure payment varies significantly and the Federal Ministry can only do so to a limited extent without the agreement of teacher unions to reform salary schemes in such a way that teacher leadership roles are acknowledged. This is an open issue which has yet to be satisfactorily resolved. Nonetheless, the Ministry has attempted to provide modest supplementary payments for Lerndesigners by revising regulations regarding which functions qualify.

### 3. Qualification and Professionalisation

Lerndesigners attend a two-year national qualification program, which enables them to gain theoretical and practical insights in the six areas of the NMS-House, to develop with one another the knowledge and skills necessary for them to be effective in their own schools as teachers and teacher leaders, and to network with other Lerndesigners. The qualification program focuses on equity and excellence in curriculum and instructional development and evolved during the pilot phase in response to pilot schools' needs. It comprises six development areas represented in the so-called "NMS-House" that are deemed essential for fostering change in the learning culture realized by each teacher in each subject in each lesson of the NMS:



- mindfulness of learning (Schatz, 2009);
- diversity;
- competence orientation;
- “backwards design” curriculum development (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, Tomlinson & McTighe, 2009);

- differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2003; Tomlinson & Imbeau 2010);
- assessment.

The two-year qualification program consists of 12 ECTS credits and occurs parallel to the implementation of the school reform at their schools sites. The program consists of national and regional Lernateliers for networking and qualification purposes as well as self-study which is coordinated online and includes practice-based tasks for exploration in school-based PLCs. To structure and strengthen shared leadership, school principals are invited with their Lerndesigners to one national Lernatelier per year. Inviting these “dynamic development duos”, as they come to be called, to work together in a learning atelier has been recognized as key for the Lerndesigners to become effective change agents at the sites.

As of the 2012/13 school year, the qualification program became a joint effort between CLS on the national level (responsible for national Lernateliers) and the *Pädagogische Hochschulen* (responsible for regional Lernateliers). The new structure of the qualification program called for prototyping on several levels because there was no model for such a joint program. To foster the evolution of the program and support the transition, the Ministry provided financial start-up incentives to the PHs for program development. Five PHs agreed to participate in the prototyping phase. Program directors and their teams of trainers and online tutors meet in a national coordination meeting with CLS twice a year. The curriculum, which had been finalised with system partners in 2011/12, was the common basis for program development, but each program director had to find solutions for offering the program within the structures of their institutions. In addition, CLS established an online module on the Onlinecampus VPH, another eduMoodle platform for all PHs, for the new generation. Technical solutions for managing groups within groups had to be found with partners at the Onlinecampus VPH so that each PH could manage its group separately and nationwide exchange could still take place for this generation in one and the same course module.

Several other challenges arose during this prototyping stage:

- Boundaries between national CLS and regional PH work were only loosely defined,

- Lack of clarity regarding responsibilities and roles of CLS and the PHs inhibited development activity,
- Lack of curricular coherence on the regional PH-level created differences at national Lernateliers (CLS), which led to a greater need for coordination and alignment,
- The online module on the Onlinecampus VPH was handled additively rather than integratively, which increased the complexity of the virtual environment for all.

#### 4. The Virtual Environment

Beyond face-to-face events, communication and feedback occur online, a strategy which has been developed closely with Thomas Nárosy of Education Group, a private company contracted by the Ministry to provide digital infrastructure and system development initiatives in the field of eLearning, digital media and digital competence. The NMS development is supported by an online platform, [www.nmsvernetzung.at](http://www.nmsvernetzung.at) comprising some 200 eduMoodle courses which is operated by the National Center for Virtual Teacher Education (Onlinecampus VPH) in cooperation with CLS. In addition, the NMS Online Library, [www.nmsbibliothek.at](http://www.nmsbibliothek.at), was implemented in autumn 2012 and serves as a portal for NMS-related resources, including dissemination of the newest resources for curriculum and instructional developed by CLS, a biweekly newsletter for school principals and insights into the NMS experience through personal anecdotes and a series of online events and publications called “NMS Insights” (*NMS-Einsichten*) conducted by Education Group.

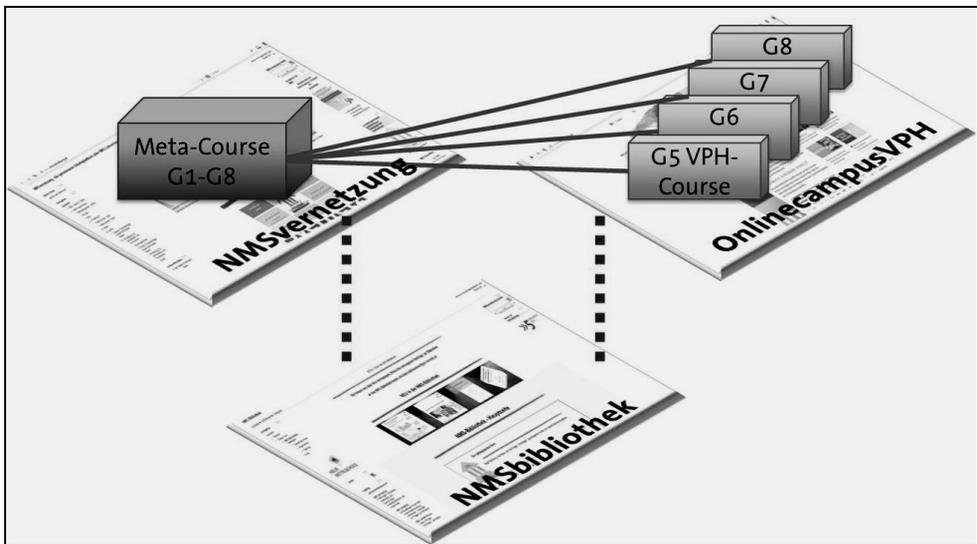
The “Meta-Course”, the virtual networking and learning space for all Lerndesigners, is located at [www.nmsvernetzung.at](http://www.nmsvernetzung.at). This space is closed to visitors so that Lerndesigners can safely exchange ideas and receive feedback on their development work. The goals with this designated digital space were to:

- Connect Lerndesigners across generations;
- Promote exchange, learning and development;
- Foster identity;
- Provide a location for materials;
- Enable direct communication between the national development team and Lerndesigners;

- Provide up-to-date information;
- Conduct interschool PLC work.

Both the platform and the portal have grown so rapidly that they have become difficult to manage and navigate. The Meta-Course for Lerndesigners enables communication, exchange, regular contact, access to expertise and support as well as relationship-building.

**Figure 2:** Lerndesigners' Digital Environment



The program package developed with the first five PHs in the prototyping is now available to other PH who wish to offer the qualification Program directors and CLS addressed the issues, clarified roles and responsibilities and defined an overall strategy for reducing the effect of scattering. The strategy includes:

- Ensuring that each Lerndesigner in each new generation registers in both the Meta-Course and their VPH-Course at the first nationwide learning atelier in their program;
- Communicating clearly and consistently the function of the Meta-Course (nationwide networking & updates across generations) and the VPH-Course (certification program) in all learning ateliers and online activities;

- Anchoring the online library as the resource center for both the Meta-Course and the VPH-Courses by one-time uploading of content materials and linking them in the respective course;
- Anchoring the Meta-Course as a place for cross-generational networking, exchanging and learning;
- Anchoring the VPH-Course as a place for earning certification;
- Closing the VPH-Course at the end of the 2-year qualification program so that the Lerndesigners remain only in the Meta-Course as their “home base”.

Alignment with the curriculum was also addressed; the cooperative development strategy and networking of program directors has proven successful in attaining curricular alignment. The alternating regional and national Lernateliers also have had a positive impact on alignment, because the Lerndesigners themselves noticed differences. There was general agreement at the meeting that the curriculum not be modified on the regional level, in particular because any such change affects the role of the Lerndesigners. In addition, the virtual environment is being standardized and woven together to decrease complexity and improve navigation and user-friendliness. The growing body of online learning materials in the Library are useful if they are effectively packaged for the qualification program. Currently, the CLS provides handbooks in three forms:

- *Orientierungshilfen* (Orientation Guidelines) focused on NMS regulations and directives developed in cooperation with school inspectorates;
- *Praxiseinblicke* (Practice Insights) developed by CLS members in cooperation with practitioners to explore new practices in subject teaching;
- *Werkstätten* (Workshops) developed by CLS to guide teachers through each of the 6 development areas in the NMS-House.

In addition, the CLS will begin development of webinars (eLectures) and courses related to the NMS-House for Onlinecampus VPH in 2014/15, and databases for easy uploading of Lerndesigns (curricular designs), learning and assessment tasks and assessment rubrics developed by practitioners are in the planning stage.

## 5. Success Factors and Status Quo

Although the history from prototyping (2008-2012) to launching the mandated school reform (2012) is very young, table 1 offers a time of manifold interventions in the novel approach to system-wide change. When the NMS-EB external consultant team<sup>20</sup> was hired by the Ministry in 2008, it looked for a suitable theoretical underpinning for organizational change. Claudia Schmied, the minister who initiated the reform initiative, was convinced that conventional top-down reform approaches would not succeed in creating a new mindset of change necessary in a system-wide transformation process. She therefore turned to Scharmer's "Theory U" where he argues that "downloading" patterns of the past prevents actors from creating a new future. In his "Theory U. Leading from the Future as It Emerges" (2007) he develops a systemic theory of change which centres on "Presencing", a term which he co-constructs from "Presence" and "Sensing". For him the essence of change builds on the capacity to feel in the here and now emerging future possibilities pressing to evolve without "downloading the patterns of the past".

To activate this vital potential, Scharmer argues, three preconditions are necessary: an *open mind*, an *open heart*, and an *open will*. Opening the mind is based on our intellectual capacity which allows us to see things "with fresh eyes", calling for a new perspective on leadership practice. Opening the heart relates to our ability to access our emotional intelligence, requiring sensitivity and empathy to feel the field. Opening the will "relates to our ability to access our authentic purpose and self ... It deals with the fundamental happening of the letting go and letting come" (Scharmer, 2007, 41).

For Scharmer, the greater a system's hyper-complexity, the more critical is the capacity to operate from the deeper fields of social emergence. The educational systems and institutions "face three types of complexities: dynamic complexity (defined by cause and effect being distant in space and time), social complexity (defined by conflicting interests, cultures, and world-views among diverse

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<sup>20</sup> The NMS-*Entwicklungsbegleitung* from 2008-2012 consisted of Christoph Hofbauer, Wilfried Schley, Michael Schratz & Tanja Westfall-Greiter.

stakeholders), and emerging complexity (defined by disruptive patterns of innovation and change in situations in which the future cannot be predicted and addressed by the patterns of the past” (ibid., 242-243). Taking these complexities into consideration, the NMS-EB as well as the Minister were looking for a system approach which would allow stakeholders in the system to see and act from the emerging whole and link it with leadership as a leveraging factor, which has been missing in the Austrian school culture, namely “the capacity to collectively sense, shape, and create our future” (ibid, 352).

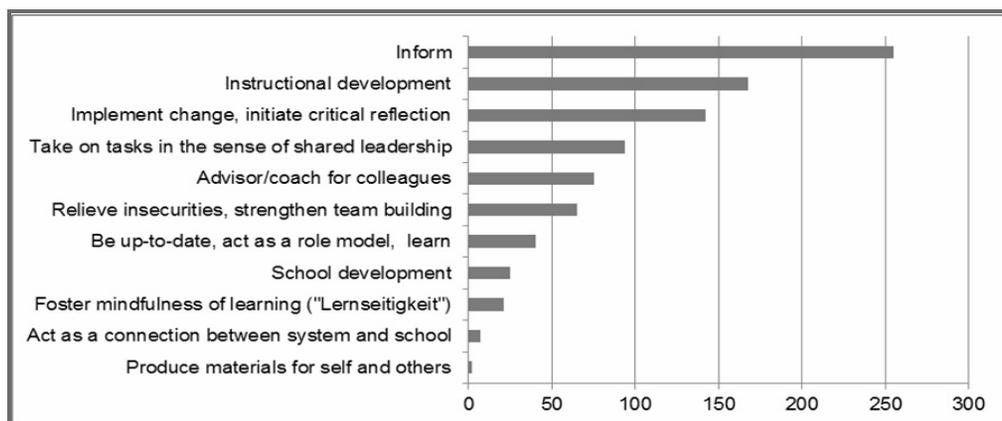
Five years later Scharmer uses Claudia Schmied’s NMS development to showcase how she succeeded in overcoming the disconnect between the education innovators at the school level and the national political discourse by describing how “the minister and her team managed to first prototype and then scale her concept of the New Middle School, one among several key initiatives that she used to bring the Austrian education system into the twenty-first century. She also focused on building individual and collective leadership capacity throughout the system” (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013, 211).

In the following subsections we offer some insights into what helped to make the nation-wide organizational development process for all of us a transformative experience. We first present an early survey on what Lerndesigners actually do, then we reflect on the impact of the qualification program, before we discuss activities and trends in the online community. We asked the Lerndesigners to analyze the innovation capacity at their sites and found out about high-potential innovation clusters. In the final section we present a novel way of evaluating processes of change and innovation with a view towards a new meaning of school reform.

### ***5.1. What do Lerndesigners do?***

An informal survey of Generation 2 and 3 Lerndesigners June 2010 revealed how the role was developing (Westfall-Greiter & Hofbauer, 2010). Second and third generation Lerndesigners were asked to write a one-minute essay on the question, “What does a Lerndesigner do?” Responses were clustered and revealed their roles as that of teacher leaders acting in shared leadership with school principals as well as that of change agents:

**Figure 3: What does a Lerndesigner do?**  
 (Westfall-Greiter & Hofbauer, 2010, translation T. W.-G.).



As one Lerndesigner of Generation 2 put it, “The Lerndesigner prepares the soil upon which the seeds of the new learning culture and assessment are planted.” At the same time, the newness of the role brought with it uncertainty. By the end of the second year of the reform pilot, Lerndesigners had become important partners in school for asking questions and solving problems. As a Lerndesigner in Generation 3 at the beginning of the qualification programme advised others: “Listen when colleagues come with problems. Try to find solutions. Don’t give up or get tired of asking questions. (Has something changed for the better? If not, why? – How can that work?)”

Nonetheless, the new role was not easy for some Lerndesigners, as a Generation 2 teacher indicated: “The Lerndesigner is a difficult role at my school. I see my role in being a good example. Slowly the term is no longer being laughed at. Slowly the colleagues see that I do things differently. Slowly even questions are being asked – ‘How do you do that...?’” (Westfall-Greiter & Hofbauer, 2010, translation T. W.-G.)

As indicated above, the results of a qualitative survey conducted by the independent testing and research institution BIFIE were released in November 2012 (Svecnik 2012). A questionnaire targeted the issues of working conditions, role and development opportunities from the Lerndesigner’s perspective. The questionnaire was sent to

all 434 NMS active in spring 2012; 324 Lerndesigners responded. Cooperation with school principals, the concept of Shared Leadership and the available freedom to work as teacher leaders in the school context were seen as important and positive aspects of being a Lerndesigner. In contrast, lack of interest and skepticism on the part of colleagues were frequently mentioned as a source of frustration for Lerndesigners. Approximately one fifth reported being frustrated. This frustration could be in relation to the lack of clarity regarding the role and function. The majority also criticized a lack of time for development work at their school. Many called for an appropriate form of compensation for their work and criticised the differences among the state provinces in if and how they compensate.

In short, there is evidence that the “creative disturbance” created by the Lerndesigner role enhanced innovation and there is system-wide acceptance for their work. Nonetheless, to be effective change agents it is essential that their role continues to be strengthened, their qualifications recognized in compensation structures and their networking sustained so that new NMS sites have access to the experience and innovation of the first generations.

## ***5.2. Impact of the Qualification Program***

The structural changes and formalization in the qualification program have had an impact on the Lerndesigner-Network. After the initial scattering and lack of curricular alignment that occurred during the first year of prototyping, the cooperative strategy among PHs with CLS has stabilized the qualification program. In addition, a new Master degree program for Lerndesigners is being piloted by two PHs in cooperation with a university. Lerndesigners receive credit for their qualification program and students without it attend the national program to acquire the credits, which has opened the program to other teachers outside of the NMS.

The cooperation between CLS and PHs has also revealed the lack of qualified staff developers in the system. As a result, the CLS began offering compact qualification programs for acting and potential staff developers. To date, some 60 teacher trainers and educators have participated. A third group will begin in September 2014.

### 5.3. *Activities and Trends in the Online Community*

In general, the hits at the online platform [www.NMSvernetzung.at](http://www.NMSvernetzung.at) have increased dramatically since 2012/13, averaging nearly 700,000 per semester. The Meta-Course remains strongly anchored as the place for cross-generational nationwide networking and is an integral part of the Lerndesigners' qualification program. During the 2012/13 school year, the first year of the NMS mandate, several patterns were identified in the Meta-Course. Some Lerndesigners formed small communities of practice. Others took on specific roles in the online community: as mentors, provokers, protesters, coaches, contributors. Others grew weary of the high-tension forum entries in the heat of the first confrontation with the new legal requirements of the school mandate and retreated to lurking. At the end of the school year, a cluster of innovators and early adopters suggested that the forums be cleared and a fresh start be made in the coming school year.

As a result, the Meta-Course, "Online Lernetelier", for Lerndesigners, was redesigned and relaunched at the beginning of the 2013/14 school year. Like the platform as a whole, the intensity of activity surged. Approximately 10% of the Lerndesigner community (numbering just over 1.000) actively contribute in the Meta-Course. Many Lerndesigners emphasize that they appreciate the networking, even if their own activity may comprise mainly reading and downloading. Because all forum entries are sent to each user via email, all Lerndesigners can keep up-to-date whether or not they are currently in the qualification program. The Meta-Course is also a key virtual space for new colleagues who are learning to create and live their role as teacher leaders and change agents.

At the point of relaunch, four new forums were established, all of which are used regularly. From September 2013 to June 2014 there were over 57,000 hits in the forums; particularly the "Contact" forum mainly used for networking was very active with 34,000 hits:

**Table 2**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Hits</b>
Forum "CLS-Updates"	5332
Forum "Learning Impulses"	4993
Forum "Contact"	34197
Forum "Develop"	12117

Threads tend to focus on instructional development (Lerndesigns, assessments and rubrics) as well as the struggles Lerndesigners have in their roles. A recent posting captures the quality of the community as a resource and support for individuals, some of whom are met with a high degree of resistance at their schools:

*“Problems with Colleagues“*

*Unfortunately the NMS mindset hasn't established itself at my school. In particular the math teachers are still mourning the ability groups. I can't hear it anymore. Am somewhat frustrated because actually no one wants to develop with me. My question for the community: Could someone imagine (math teacher) to do instructional planning with me, to exchange with and motivate one another? I'll be teaching a 7<sup>th</sup> grade and a 5<sup>th</sup> grade class next year. (Translation T. W.-G.)*

Because the forum discourse is often rich, insightful and honest as Lerndesigners struggle to transform their own praxis and lead others, the CLS will be preparing a fourth issue of “NMS-Insights” in which discussion strands focused on central issues for teaching and learning at NMS schools will be compiled and anonymised so that it can be made accessible to the entire NMS community.

In addition, the monthly newsletter “CLS-Update for Lerndesigners” was started at the relaunch and serves as a valuable communication tool in the Meta-Course. Special topics for NMS development are highlighted, along with news and tips for online learning opportunities (“eLectures”), events and recommended books or videos.

#### **5.4. Innovation Potential in Generation 4**

In the final national Lernatelier with Generation 4 in May 2013, the Lerndesigners were asked to analyze innovation beyond the NMS-House at their sites. Each listed all innovations that had been initiated on their sites and then identified the one innovation they personally expected to be most effective in its impact on student learning. This “high-potential innovation” was written on a card and pinned to the S-curve as a status-quo assessment of its spread in the school. The results were photographed:

Figure 4: G4 High-Potential Innovations on the S-Curve, May 2013



The CLS then clustered the innovations and analysed them according to frequency:

**Table 3: G4 High-Potential Innovation Clusters, May 2013**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Innovation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Teaching</b>	Team-Teaching	11
<b>Teaching</b>	Differentiation	9
<b>Teaching</b>	Formative assessment	9
<b>Teaching</b>	Mindfulness of learning	7
<b>Learning</b>	New learning instruments (portfolios, skills inventories, etc.)	6
<b>Curriculum</b>	Curricula (cross-curricular projects and courses)	6
<b>Assessment</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> Chance Culture	5
<b>Assessment</b>	Student-Parent-Teacher Conferences	5
<b>Learning</b>	Learning Methods	5
<b>Instruction</b>	Instructional forms (open learning, atelier, cooperative learning)	5
<b>School</b>	Teaching teams	4
<b>Teaching</b>	Backwards design	4
<b>School</b>	Teamwork (class teams)	4

It is interesting to note that few of these innovations arise from efforts on the school-level. Rather, they indicate the spread of innovations from other schools or the school system in general. Team-teaching, a requirement in the NMS legislation, was the most frequently identified high-potential innovation and its spread (relatively high in the S-curve) is related to the fact that it is mandated. The same is true for student-parent-teacher conferences, which are also mandated and in most cases take place mid-year. Some added conditions for effectiveness to team-teaching, such as individualization and differentiation. Although Lerndesigners were asked to focus on innovations over and beyond the NMS-House, several noted these elements (flexible differentiation, assessment, mindfulness of learning, backwards design); in most cases, these were placed lower on the S-curve. Innovations arising on the school

level seem to focus on learning methods and instruments as well as instructional forms.

Curricular innovations arose during the pilot phase in which this generation began. The pilot models included the development of school-specific cross-curricular courses (*Lernfelder, Flächenfächer*). In some cases these are no longer part of the development work because the NMS legislation is more restrictive in terms of curricular innovation but also because local authorities reduced innovation in this area. Teamwork refers to changes in the social architecture of the school; small teaching teams are assigned to a class and work together across subjects. Curricular innovations such as cross-curricular projects are probably related to this new architecture. It is important to note here that these teams remain stable throughout the four years of lower secondary, a potential weakness in the structure if the class teams are ineffective. Grade-level organization of teachers does not exist in the Austrian school system.

The results of this analysis raise interesting questions regarding the speed and spread of innovation on the school level. It seems that mandates have impact on both, which indicates the importance of evidence-informed policy making. Team-teaching is a good example: the team *per se* is not the most effective factor but rather their instructional practice that has a strong impact on student learning. In other words, putting two ineffective teachers together will not lead to effective teaching. For this reason, the CLS agenda includes team teaching in the 2013/14 school year linked to the most-researched instructional factor, formative assessment, which is the cross-generational development focus for the first semester.

### ***5.5. Experimenting with Vignettes as an Evaluation Method***

The overarching question in the on-going transformation process in the present lower secondary school reform in Austria is how learners experience the learning trajectory of an environment as part of an emerging pattern echoing Michael Schratz' attempt to steer attention to learning by coining "*lernseits*" in the German-speaking world, Hattie's (2012) plea for making invisible learning visible through self-evaluation, and Tomlinson's (2008) call to "disaggregate 'the student'" in the context of differentiated instruction. In order to

assess the effectiveness of any practice in education, whether from the inside or outside, information about learning results via standards testing is simply not enough – or rather, too little too late.

In this regard, we are currently experimenting with vignettes as an evaluation tool both for external evaluation and assessment of innovation as well as for internal self-evaluation on the part of the teacher. Learning experiences in the Lerndesigner-Network have already been researched by CLS staff member Michael Kahlhammer (2012) using the vignette research methodology developed at the University of Innsbruck. Kahlhammer published the following vignette and reading in an article focused on dimensions of professional learning communities as a development strategy in the NMS learning ateliers.

### ***Vignette***

*In a light-flooded seminar room there are various tables around which the participants have grouped themselves. Metaphor posters are hanging around the room: Soaring Eagle, Crazy Horse, Lame Duck, Pecking Hen, Dancing Wolf. Herbert, an older participant, is sitting at a table in the middle of the room and listening to the facilitator. He folds and unfolds his hands while listening. When asked to choose a metaphor that best suits his school at the moment, Herbert looks around perplexed. He hesitates and remains seated while others are already up and moving from poster to poster. “Not so easy,” he murmurs and stands up.*

*Slowly he looks around with wrinkled forehead and goes to “Crazy Horse,” reads the description on the poster and shakes his head. He puts his hands in his pockets, pulls his head back and looks around questioningly. He goes to the next station, shakes his head and moves on. At the next station, “Soaring Eagle,” he raises his eyebrows and begins to nod, but he doesn’t remain standing there. The facilitators announce it is time to make a decision. Herbert pauses and remains still. Slowly he turns his head to look behind him and squints. Then he turns abruptly and goes to “Soaring*

*Eagle.” Nodding, he says to himself, “That could happen, depending on how you see it.” His posture relaxes.*

*During the following exchange with the others who have chosen this metaphor, Herbert talks a lot, hands in pockets or arms crossed in front of him. “A lot of the older colleagues are already emigrating in their minds, but they’re not hindering. That could be a chance for us,” he explains. “Step by step and with both feet on the ground – that’s important for me.” The discussion revolves around freedom and scope for development, steadiness and the comment “if you have nothing to lose.” During the exchange Herbert often leans forward and confirms others’ comments with a nod or a smile. When most of the others have already gone, he stands quietly contemplative in front of the poster. Together with a few others he tries to find keywords to summarize their discussion and writes them around the poster.*

### **Reading**

*How does learning reveal itself in this vignette? Herbert does not stand up with everyone else. He remains seated, seems to be perplexed. With the words “not so easy” he expresses his irritation, something that is dissonant. What isn’t working for him? Wherein lies the challenge he seems to be sensing? Irritation and dissonance initiate a reflective process. Is it the slow and deliberate emergence of learning that has been „set in motion, in which the knower becomes, consciously or not, the not-knower” (Schratz et al., 2012, p. 25)? Herbert reacts to the Soaring Eagle, raises his eyebrows and nods. A moment of recognition? Is his body language revealing an awareness of his own experience before his intellect is aware of it and can begin to analyse? Herbert moves on and pauses. The call to make a decision brings him to a standstill, as if he is suspended in air. Which sound will be louder for him? The harmonious one or the dissonant one indicating that something is resisting? Which experience will be spoken to, which will lead to*

*an insight, a reflection, learning? Learning seems to be initiated by an interruption and disorientation, involves tolerating dissonance. Professionalism reveals itself in the “way one deals with inner resistance” (ibid., p. 24). Herbert seems to recognize what is right, what is best for him. His body relaxes. He gains a new awareness. He seems to have found a personal frame in which he can capture and grasp his own self-knowledge (Burow, 2011, p. 113).*

*In the ensuing exchange with colleagues, Herbert’s behavior changes. He seems to open up and engages fully in the dialogue. The need to share and exchange is palpable. Commonalities and shared resonance are confirmed by nods. Herbert often smiles to re-enforce what others have said. They are able to “connect knowledge distributed across many and work out common ground” (ibid., p. 133). The essence of their experiences becomes clearer, doors open to the new and the contradictory as Herbert emphasizes “step-by-step with both feet on the ground” in front of the soaring eagle.*

To explore how Lerndesigners experience the learning trajectory of online PLC-work, the CLS team has adapted and applied the vignette methodology as an evaluation method for innovation as part of the OECD’s Innovative Learning Environments project, phase 3. The vignette methodology was initially developed to conduct foundational research into the experience of learning in a nation-wide grant-funded research project at the University of Innsbruck (Schratz et al., 2012; Westfall-Greiter & Schwarz, 2012). The research was presented for the first time to an international audience at the ICSEI Conference 2013 in Chile. In the symposium, Michael Schratz, Tanja Westfall-Greiter and Johanna F. Schwarz presented and explored the methodology with discussants Lorna Earl and Louise Stoll. Both discussants read a vignette through their particular lens of system development. Lorna Earl’s central question was, “How can this research be used to support practitioners?” She raised important questions on several levels:

- Is the experience in this vignette a regular pattern?
- What would others (the principal, the student’s classmates, the inspector) say?
- How can the reader open up to the vignette?
- How can vignettes be used to unpack what is going on in schools?
- How can we research lifeworld sensitively to gain insights into adult learning?

This last question is of particular relevance to the Lerndesigner-Network. As Lorna Earl noted at the symposium, innovation is highly contextualized, small-scale and messy. The need to understand what is going on when an innovation has been tried is essential, as is understanding its impact – in particular before it is scaled up or spread. High-quality tools are needed for this endeavour. The vignette model seems to be a viable alternative for describing without judging and can enable exploration of “what I think I understand” and help to reveal layers of meaning.

Louise Stoll also emphasized the power of vignettes as a research tool and emphasized the implications for leadership of a school culture oriented to the experiences of teaching and learning. A fundamental question is how leaders can create and foster conditions for trusting *and* challenging. Vignettes could be an integral part of such a culture, “the way we do things around here.”

While the initial results of the pilot of vignettes as evaluation tool are currently being compiled, the following insights were presented at the OECD Seminar “Evaluating Innovation” in Paris on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2014:

1. Vignettes are an appropriate method for accessing learners’ experience.
2. Vignettes are specific and qualitative and therefore an expensive evaluation tool.
3. Vignettes provide rich data on both the innovation in focus *and* other innovations in the broader context.
4. Vignettes as an embedded tool can help innovators adapt the innovation while it is happening.
5. Vignettes reveal participants’ innovations in the innovations.
6. Vignettes provide multiple perspectives and constitute a narrative of events over time.

7. Vignettes alone are not enough; post-pilot feedback from participants is also necessary (but relatively cheap).

The vignette methodology has proven to be a valuable evaluation. Initially, vignette writers were concerned about being able to co-experience others' experience online, where perception of non-verbal communication is more or less dramatically restricted. Even in discussions that were limited to real-time written chats due to technical problems, it was possible to co-experience virtually. Clearly, acute perception, openness and writing ability are important skills for vignette writers. In addition, they need (and want) training in the methodology. A validation step, in which the participants were asked to respond to and give feedback to the vignettes was helpful to ensure that nuances were captured well. This validation step is itself an intervention for the participant; often the respondees reflected on the experience and included these reflections on their personal learning or group dynamics in their feedback.

The pilot also made clear that innovators need know-how to synthesize the data in vignettes. It is especially important that they are aware that the evaluation questions (in this case „learning experiences“) direct attention and influence the co-experiencing of the vignette writers. A mixed method approach using other evaluation tools such as questionnaires and/or interviews with the participants are recommendable to ensure that adequate data for the evaluation of an innovation is available.

Key questions which are being addressed in regards to vignettes as an evaluation tool are:

1. What is the best method mix for a comprehensive evaluation?
2. Is there a (more) cost-effective way to access learning experiences? How can vignette evaluation be streamlined without sacrificing quality?
3. Who should synthesize data? When? How?
4. What do innovators need to work with the vignettes as sources of data? Would guided conversations with the vignette writers be useful? Would readings from the vignette writers be a further source of useful data?
5. If the evaluation questions direct the attention of vignette writers, what do the vignette writers perceive? What do they overlook?

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(POLAND)

## **POLISH TEACHERS IN A CHANGING EDUCATIONAL ROLE – THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM**

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### **Abstract**

Social changes demand from school and teachers, influence the targets, the tasks, content and methods of educating. Teachers are facing new and ever-changing situations and that determines their working environment and the content. The role of a teacher is strictly connected to social changes, as they are the ones to prepare the pupils to be part of that society. On one hand, it is the result, on the other, though, the reason. For years the role and function of a teacher in the modern educational systems is suffering a crisis - a serious situation, its roots are deep in the general crisis of school. Fundamentally, the crisis can be seen in the disproportion between growing, complicated educational tasks and teacher's capabilities of fulfilling those. The upbringing, educating function of school (each type and rank) is diminishing, revealing the shortcomings of its organization, didactic processes, but also the shortcomings of a teacher as an individual.

The growing distrust of school system hit the teachers and institutions dedicated to their education. This chapter presents an analysis of how the implementation of new standards in teacher's education in Poland serves to instill in the teachers a sense of professionalism and work ethos. Through a series of case studies – both experienced, working teachers and students of pedagogy – the article confronts the present day model teacher with a day-to-day reality of the job.

**The teacher – profession, mission or calling?** The question which many pedeutologists have kept asking for so long still remains unanswered. The dilemmas it is expressive of ensue from changes in the theoretical and methodological discourse on teachers and teaching, which forever continues redefining teachers' tasks, skills and professional competencies. Historically, the teacher's role has largely been defined in romantic, rather than in pragmatic, terms in Poland so far (Gołębniak 1998). The source of such attitudes is to be found in the looming threats, all too familiar in Poland's past, which teachers, among others, were

supposed to offset: forfeit of national identity, cultural uprooting or, finally, socio-cultural deprivation (Dróżka 2002). Teachers as a group were envisioned as a hotbed of cultural development and facilitators of self-development and self-creation in others. In the interbellum period, a sense of mission was placed at the heart of teachers' social role. Grzegorzewska (2002) highlights the sacrifice and self-denial which were to make up an important dimension of teachers' impact as ethical and moral role models. The tasks assigned to the teaching profession considerably exceeded the strictly vocational scope. (Kwiatkowska 1991). Similar representations flourished also in the aftermath of WW2. Side by side with offering help and support, teachers were supposed to be a moral authority, and that not only to their students, but also to local communities, especially rural and provincial ones.

## **1. The Teacher's Professional Role: A Theoretical Analysis**

### ***The teacher – profession, mission or calling?***

The question which many pedeutologists have kept asking for so long still remains unanswered. The dilemmas it is expressive of ensue from changes in the theoretical and methodological discourse on teachers and teaching, which forever continues redefining teachers' tasks, skills and professional competencies. Historically, the teacher's role has largely been defined in romantic, rather than in pragmatic, terms in Poland so far (Gołębniak 1998). The source of such attitudes is to be found in the looming threats, all too familiar in Poland's past, which teachers, among others, were supposed to offset: forfeit of national identity, cultural uprooting or, finally, socio-cultural deprivation (Dróżka 2002). Teachers as a group were envisioned as a hotbed of cultural development and facilitators of self-development and self-creation in others. In the interbellum period, a sense of mission was placed at the heart of teachers' social role. Grzegorzewska (2002) highlights the sacrifice and self-denial which were to make up an important dimension of teachers' impact as ethical and moral role models. The tasks assigned to the teaching profession considerably exceeded the strictly vocational scope. (Kwiatkowska 1991). Similar representations flourished also in the aftermath of WW2. Side by side with offering help and support, teachers were supposed to be a moral authority, and that not only to

their students, but also to local communities, especially rural and provincial ones.

Civilizational progress and, above all, changes in the socio-political conjuncture gradually curtailed the roles attributed to teachers. According to Drózka (2002), one factor that effectively diminished teachers' social engagement was an increased expectation of school's intellectual stature, which produced growing benchmarks for teachers' professional qualifications. Compelled to engage in constant training, teachers have as if naturally withdrawn from their time-consuming social activism and focused on their in-school work. This, however, is far from a desirable arrangement because teachers' roles are not (or definitely should not be) limited to instruction or education solely. Such definition of the teaching profession seems to be highly reductive.

## **2. Contemporary Accounts of Teacher Professional Role**

A role denotes here a patterned, tolerably permanent and internally coherent system of behaviors and attitudes which a given social group assigns to and expects of an individual who takes up a particular social position.

Given this definition, **the teacher's role** seems to be uniquely dichotomous. On the one hand, we deal with – to use Janion's formulation (1996) – the toil of existential awareness, which in case of teachers entails primary learning and exploring the professional role and its meaning. On the other, we expect observance of rules and compliance with principles inherent in the social understanding of the concept. In both contexts, however, a teacher's work is distinctive. A teacher is an organizer and a manager of instruction and education processes. At the same time, a teacher's professional activity is grounded on specific forms of contact whereby, engaged in an intentional relationship with students, a teacher pursues intellectual, ideological, moral, aesthetic and other values which facilitate creation of human individual and social lives (de Tchórzewski 1998, p. 90). In the former sense, teachers' crucial task is to impart knowledge and skills which students need in order to understand the world they live in, to design their own life paths and to transform the existing

realities. In the latter sense, the teacher crucially treads the realm of axiology since values are the ultimate aim of educational work. As enumerated by de Tchorzewski (1998), the perennial values include a student's individual dignity and a teacher's uprightness, which are on a par with truth, tolerance, justice and responsibility. In educational work, values can be unraveled which should be familiar society and then brought into unison with human dignity. And teachers' role lies precisely in disseminating values so that they could materialize in young people who are formed by them.

Szymański (1988, p. 132) believes that the system of values determines the directions in which individuals and social groups strive, including the directions of educational paths embarked upon and enacted. This unfolds via approximation and concretization of values in role models and model conduct. This is an uneasy task fraught with many dilemmas. Observably, in the new circumstances, the teacher's professional role evolves in two directions. One of them involves a shift away from reproduction (in which a teacher carries out instruction and education tasks based on curricula, scripts and plans at hand) and toward creation (in which a teacher comes up his/her own novel, inventive educational ideas). The other direction involves an alteration in teachers' approach to students: no longer a directive, authoritative manager, a teacher becomes now an empathetic and supportive carer and a facilitator of students' development. Such evolutionary processes place teachers in a somewhat frustrating position. Namely, they must constantly acquire new subject-related knowledge or update knowledge they already possess, and at the same time develop new educational skills, redraw their position within an educational facility, and form new interpersonal relationships, especially with their students. These challenges prove rather taxing to some teachers and are only aggravated by the changing ideas and expectations of what a teacher should be and do.

Konarzewski (2002) lists certain **singularities in the role currently attributed to the teaching profession**, which involves ideals of an educator, a guardian, an instructor and a therapist. These singularities are:

- vagueness;
- inner incongruence;

- incompatibility with other roles
- psychological difficulty.

**Vagueness** of the teacher's role is caused by a lack of definite and even standards of professional excellence for all dimensions of the teaching profession. Konarzewski proposes using school achievement tests to assess the outcomes of teaching objectively. Still, it must be borne in mind that such a criterion of teachers' professional excellence may prove rather confusing. In case of special education teachers, for example, this kind of objectivity is marred by a variety of kinds and severity of disorders in children with whom such teachers happen to work. Special educators' work not infrequently fails to produce readily observable and measurable progress, particularly if they assist children with severe intellectual disability.

**Incongruence of the role** means that in particular circumstances meeting some requirements makes it difficult, if not outright impossible, to meet other ones. For teachers, such expectations could be divided into three groups, as Konarzewski proposes:

- promoting each student's individual development;
- perpetuating the social order in place;
- introducing into spiritual culture.

In promoting individual development, a teacher must establish each student's assets and shortcomings and, accordingly, provide suitable external conditions which will enhance the strengths. Therein, a teacher must approach each student on individual basis and help him/her overcome or compensate for his/her deficiencies and inadequacies. At this plane, the student occupies the central position in the school setting with all its remaining components subordinated to his/her needs.

Perpetuating the existing social order, as Konarzewski observes (2002, p. 155), is bound up with economic, political and cultural inequalities which produce class hierarchies and stratifications within modern societies. To sustain these disparities is one of the major functions of the education system. Better and worse school types correspond to upper and lower social statuses, respectively. The elitist, expensive, demanding former ones pave the path to privileged positions of wealth, power and prestige. The latter ones, with their

easy accessibility, limited instruction time and meager requirements, diminish, if not preclude, advancement opportunities.

Introducing into spirituals culture involves imparting knowledge of science, art, ethics and life models. This kind of spiritual culture is independent of the current situation and various social groups' interests.

Clearly, the three sets of expectations toward teachers are difficult to reconcile. An individualizing approach precludes selection based on uniform criteria. Teachers' conviction that some students should be given a sense of achievement even at the cost of lowering some standards contravenes the principle of impartial assessment and selection. Similarly, indoctrination, development facilitation and ushering into spiritual culture practically seem mutually exclusive. As Konarzewski's analysis implies, the teacher's role is internally incongruent, with the incoherence inherent in it ensuing from teachers' locatedness at the intersection of various claims and, thus, being largely irremediable.

**Incompatibility with other roles** surfaces when fulfillment of expectations relevant to one role makes it difficult or entirely impossible to meet requirements of (an)other role/s an individual is assigned. For teachers, the clearest example at hand is incompatibility of roles in female teachers. Their professional role of teachers may easily come into (possibly irresolvable) conflict with their non-vocational roles of wife and mother.

Furthermore, Fontana (1998) lists various roles a teacher performs at school, with their relative dimensions being potentially contradictory. A teacher is an instructor who helps students in learning. A teacher is an educator who directs, assists, and corrects the development of students' personalities within all their diverse spheres. A teacher is a care-provider in various activities outside classroom. And, finally, a teacher is an administrator answerable for supervising the class. Moreover, a teacher represents the school authority as a form teacher, a school council member or a school head. Each of these roles is time-consuming and requires a different kind of preparation and training. Unsurprisingly, the roles tend to refuse to synchronize fully, which may be mentally and physically costly.

**Psychological difficulty** depends on the specifics of a vocation. Teachers are exposed to a considerable mental strain. They tend to

sense that their efforts significantly surpass their rewards. Usually they “run full capacity” (Janowski 1995) and daily perform numerous meaningful, taxing duties. They repeatedly engage in various relationships with students. They must smooth conflicts and intervene in tense situations. Teachers in general, and special education teachers in particular, have a sense of inferiority. Furthermore, teachers complain that students are not interested in school and learning. notes that teachers are frustrated and disappointed when they work with students who do not seem to care about learning. Additionally, special education teachers are underpaid, which aggravates their mental strain. All the more so as the schools they work in are underfunded and, consequently, lack sufficient therapeutic equipment (Sekułowicz 2002).

The teaching profession is also exposed to close scrutiny and on-going, and frequently scathing, social criticism. The disparity between expectations inscribed in the teacher’s role and teachers’ actual social and economic status seems to be growing. In recent years, Polish teachers’ situation has changed as a result of sweeping socio-economic and political transformations. Originally, teaching was a “secure” vocation. Teachers rarely faced lay-offs, which arguably was a factor in their stagnation, but definitely buttressed their wellbeing. Yet, the educational reforms underway and a concurrent continuing decrease in birth rate are contributing to closing down of schools, which makes many teachers confront a very palpable risk of redundancy (Sekułowicz 2002).

Importantly, for special educators the teacher’s role carries one more difficulty with it. Namely, special educators distinctively strive to support all their students. Fengler (2000) notices that teachers are unable to fully meet the requirement of approaching each student individually and comprehensively. The major obstacles in their way are limited time and overpopulated classrooms (this problem is reported especially by teachers in common schools attended by disabled students which do not employ assistant teachers).

The dilemmas or, as Konarzewski phrases it (2002), singularities inherent in the teacher’s professional role breed fatigue and disaffection. Effectively, they are stressors which can trigger professional burnout symptoms.

Still, despite ample ambiguities of theoretical endeavors to describe the teacher's professional role and despite role difficulties observable in practice, a sound account of the role is a prerequisite for defining a contemporary model teacher.

### **3. Contemporary Model Teacher**

*At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, analyses, assessments and conclusions pertaining to exemplary personal features in teachers were essentially inferential in that desired personalities were deduced from educational tasks prioritizing the students' good, from socially endorsed cultural values and outlooks, and from political conjuncture at that particular moment in time. The then researchers (Dawid, Mysłakowski, Kreutz, Szuman, Baley, Kerschesteiner) emphatically sought to devise a theoretical model of the ideal teacher as such. They put forward a certain exemplar that all teachers should aspire to embody (cf. Korczyński 2002). However, the takes on inquiry into and analysis of the model teacher have evolved and come to rely far more on the data derived from actual teaching practice. Currently, in constructing models for the teaching profession, postulatory (semantic) or normative models increasingly tend to be abandoned for the sake of an empirical (isomorphic) model. The inductive, empirical, interpolatory framework focuses on an actually existing teacher serving as a starting point for defining relevant personal characteristics. Korczyński (2002, p. 27) points out that research has produced, in parallel, a realistic and an ideal account of the teacher. The ideal image was deemed indispensable for teacher personality formation since it provided a basis for constructing the ideal "self" in relation to the actual "self". This, however, begs serious questions. Is it viable to create an ideal model of the teacher? Is it possible at all, given that every teacher is a "living human being" formed in a particular environment and equipped with specific personal traits which develop through various and often significantly differing experiences? Bohucki (1965, p. 14) contends that an ideal teacher figure does not exist as such, yet it is relevant as a model – an unattained and possibly unattainable one – which all teachers should aspire to and which induces them to pursue ever more concerted training and development. The ideal*

*model of the teacher could be said to establish an exemplary teacher.*

Teacher-focused research offers one more perspective in which to assess teaching professionals. Relying on methodologies of personality psychology and social psychology, researchers inquire what a contemporary teacher should be like, pointing thereby in three directions, which Kwiatkowska labels as technical, functional and humanistic.

**The technical framework**, which resorts to “technical rationality” bound up with behavioral psychology (Schön 1983), construes a teacher as passive, inert and devoid of comprehensive vocational qualifications. In its focus on a teacher’s work rather than on a teacher’s personality (cf. Czykwin 1995), it distinctly prioritizes narrow practicality, postulates supremacy of the method, and entirely neglects any axiological dimension. Treated with one-sided instrumentality, the teacher is seen as liable to be directed and the teacher-student relationship as asymmetrical, with statuses within it clearly differentiated. It is pervaded by rationalism (Mizerek 1998, p. 40).

Admittedly, if we were to name one distinctive feature of current inquiries it would in all probability be the discarding of **the rational-technical model of the teacher**. No longer is it postulated that a teacher should act based on formal knowledge and seek, as Kwaśnica puts it (1987, p. 36), to expand technical mastery and command over objects (including people if they are conceived in categories of strategic thinking) or to sustain control over them. In such a model, the teacher’s role consists in providing ready-made instruction and steering development toward clearly specified goals, which entails adjustment to dominant tendencies. Ordering information without in-depth analysis or interpretation, such a teacher is a narrowly specialized expert who executes already fixed programs and operates on the level of rituals. This model breeds passivity and inertia in teachers, who have neither a sense of agency nor even an influence on the teaching content and methods (cf. Mizerek 1999). The empirical analysis below will show that this model, though obsolete, has not disappeared entirely from Polish education yet.

**The functional framework** in research on the teaching professionals relies on cognitive psychology to produce the teacher’s

image. In cognitive psychology, a human being is distinguished as an exploring subject which inquires into reality. As Mizerek (1998, p. 41) states, such assumptions are manifest in a particular account of the teacher which highlights deliberate action designed to achieve an anticipated final outcome and a qualification surfeit, which means that knowledge and skills are only partially employed. This model takes into account the teacher's exploratory tendencies, recognizes the teacher as an acting agent, and attends to axiological issues. Neither a "puppet" nor an "instrument" (as Mizerek puts it), the teacher is not envisaged as a mere executor of supervisor-imposed rules and principles. Though this framework emphasizes the importance of teachers' professional competencies, the teacher image it produces is still contained within methodologies which prefer quantitative, empirical analyses. That clearly stands out when axiological themes are tackled, whereby, as Czykwin (1995, p. 203) rightly observes, they are approached in highly formalized categories, overlooking any personal, singular or emotionally colored evaluation modes.

**The humanistic framework** in research on teaching professionals draws on humanistic psychology and produces a distinct account of the teacher. A teacher is a unique personality and a facilitator rather than an expert in a particular discipline. The postulates of authenticity in personal relations with students, empathetic understanding of their respective situations, and unconditional acceptance of "difficult" behaviors occasionally displayed by students toward peers or adults, all require not so much an aptitude to obtain and apply procedural knowledge as rather, crucially, psychological education (Gołębniak 2005). Teachers' professional development involves discovery of vocational self-identity rather than mastering fixed, universal modes of conduct (cf. Mizerek 1999).

The model of the teacher upheld in the humanistic discourse entails **cognitive self-reliance** (Kwiatkowska 1997, Rutkowiak 1997, Czerepaniak-Walczak 1997). The discourse puts forward concepts of transformative intellectual (Giroux 1988) and professional artist (Fish 1996), whose common denominator is to be found in the concept of reflective practitioner (Schön 1983). It crucially advocates also an emancipatory model of "post-positivist practitioner" (Kincheloe 1993).

**In the transformative intellectual model, the teacher** is consciously and professionally engaged in social, educational, and cultural activity at school and in the community. The “intellectual” dimension does not mean that the teacher is just a thinker, pointing rather to the notion of a public intellectual in society’s service. Such teacher’s work essentially combines reflection and action (Mizerek 1999), is a driving force behind social change and fosters wisdom and social sensibility in students (Kwieciński 1993, Leppert 1998). The model of the teacher as a transformative intellectual accommodates abilities and skills necessary to grasp the social contexts of education, to combine critique and opportunities in devising action plans, to comprehend theory beyond its technical aspects, to be sensitive to others’ needs, and to improve fundamental social and systemic conditions of teaching interventions (Rutkowiak 1995). Giroux (1988, p. 125) claims that teachers as transformative intellectuals are performers who are professionally equipped with skills of effective goal achievement. Yet at the same time they should be treated as emancipated men and women dedicated to intellectual values and instilling aptitude for critical thought in the young generation.

The **professional artist model** is informed by the idea that educational change originates in a human being (a teacher) and his/her self-development through introspection and interrogation of his/her own values, priorities and actions. It emphasizes teachers’ responsibility, judgment and remaking of the system “from within” (Gołębniak 1998, p. 134). In Fish’s concept (1996), teaching entails solving practical – unique and unpredictable – problems, with the teacher supposed to constantly seek an understanding of past and present occurrences so as to act creatively when confronted with another unexpected situation. Upon this model, the teacher is an **explorer** who independently carries out research projects. Nowak-Dziemianowicz (2001) believes that, epistemologically, the role is underpinned by Stenhouse’s claim (1989) that knowledge is a man-made product and not just a reflection of the world. Hence, a human being (specifically, a teacher) must be creative. With a bureaucratic approach to the teacher discarded, teaching professionals should be perceived as investigators bent upon discovery and inquiry, which also trigger cognitive involvement of participants in learning/educational events.

Bauman (1994) sees the teacher as a guide and an interpreter. In his view, the **teacher-guide** knows the journey's destination and can answer why we are going there, where we are heading and where we want to or should go. Knowing the ways that lead to a desired end, such a teacher is able to choose the best one and remembers that what the best way means depends on a particular traveler. The guide does not impose the destination, the route or the marching technique, preferring to offer them, safeguard them, and invest them with new meanings. The teacher-guide must be capable of coping with ambivalence inherent in the role, ambivalence bound up with a new sense of leadership specific to this role.

**The teacher-interpreter's** duties involve clarifying, explicating and mediating between the world and the individual. Capable of detachment from culture and its co-participants, the teacher-interpreter explains various opportunities encountered in individual pursuit of full development (Kwieciński 2000). Also, the teacher-interpreter knows the listeners' language and interpretive modes since his/her competencies are comprehensive and inclusive of multiple viewpoints, references, and outlooks.

**The reflective practitioner model** occupies a prominent position in the humanistic discourse on the teaching professionals. Its starting point is examination of interdependencies between teachers' theoretical knowledge and practical performance. The reflective practitioner concept (Schön 1983) originates in the theory-vs.-practice opposition. The teacher's role involves perceiving own experience as a source of knowledge which enables the teacher to meet professional obligations and carry out teaching tasks. "Know-how" must be accompanied by "know-what" and "know-why" since only such a combination guarantees repeated reflection on and interpretation of educational situations (Kwiatkowska 1997, Nowak-Dziemianowicz 2001). Conscious decision-making on how to play one's role is a basis of consistent and responsible designing of one's work and its systematic assessment (Czerepaniak-Walczak 1997, p. 25). That is facilitated by a teacher's reflection grounded on reliable, complete, professional knowledge. As a result, the teacher constructs his/her own educational theory. Schön (1983) proposes a novel notion of professionalism, insisting that professionalism should not be reduced to a rationally analyzable ensemble of skills and knowledge. The

utility of principles, rules, and guidelines is rather circumscribed since knowledge they are grounded on is neither permanent nor uncontested. Practice does not ensue from theory; nor is practice a stage on which theory can display its achievements (Mizerek 1999, p. 51). Thereby, the objectifying approach to practitioners' vocational role inscribed in the technical framework is effectively relinquished.

Barell (1991) expects reflective teachers to:

- be confident in their ability to solve problem situations;
- persevere in action;
- control their emotions;
- be open to others' initiatives and ideas;
- collaborate and cooperate with others;
- be good listeners;
- have high ambiguity and complexity tolerance;
- examine problems from various perspectives;
- analyze problems scrupulously;
- recognize various options of problem-solving;
- plan, monitor and assess their own thinking.

According to Czerepaniak-Walczak (1997) the teacher-educator's reflective action is a prerequisite of dismantling stereotypes in all participants in an educational situation. At the same time, it is a crucial factor in expanding and organizing one's own knowledge and skills. As well as in forming one's working style. A working style, in turn, could be seen as a particular capacity for individual self-creation. It entails original action, ingenuous thinking, critical attitude to the world, and a distanced outlook of a detached observer (cf. Szkudlarek 1991, Rusakowska 1995).

The "reflective" paradigm which prominently features in modern pedagogy offers one more account of the teaching professional. Emancipatory pedagogy proposes a model of emancipatory teacher and post-positivist practitioner, whose tasks include altering the traditional teaching engagement by including a series of new factors and relinquishing a number of formerly endorsed aspects. With the most spectacular changes pertaining to attitudes to students, numerous stereotypes and limitations are dismantled. Emancipation unfolds when people find themselves oppressed and identify a factor to rebel against, which marks the emergence of certain typical competencies. If the student subjectivity is conceived in such terms, educational

permissivism, in which freedom stands either for a necessity of for a coercion, can be dispelled. If in organizing the educational process, a teacher takes the idea of educating in freedom for granted and fails to comprehend the essence and role of resistance in human life, s/he runs the risk of students' rebelling against such a construal of freedom or of emotional rejection. Through negotiation (which emancipatory pedagogy frames as an important educational method), resistance, protest, or rebellion may time after time lead to delineating the scope of subjective freedom of participants in educational interaction (Nowak-Dziemianowicz 2001).

According to Gołębiak (2005, pp. 3-4), this framework promotes teaching for transgression, that is for the completeness of mental aptitude, and refuses to account for human intelligence and abilities in psychological categories merely. Attention to harmony of *logos* and *mythos* – uniquely revisiting the concept of education as informed by wisdom and responsibility – provides underpinnings for the project which underscores the dynamic and transcendental nature of the teaching process, appreciates language as a tool of thought and a medium of communication, emphasizes self-knowledge and insists on critical dialogue, intuition and, aesthetic rationality. To teach in this way takes not only tact which combines reflectivity and responsible care but also a capacity for a holistic overview and insight into one's own practice. "What am I doing here? How do I treat the school curriculum? Whose agenda do I take into account when I execute it?" – these are but sample questions that a wise teacher asks. As a consequence, the category of "being-in-the-world-of-education" supplants the modernist category of "teaching activity". Education for teaching thus comprehended is never a completed process contained within conceptual or temporal frames. Nor is there a possibility to construct linearly an internally coherent professional identity model. Constructing professionalism inevitably entails discursive research on practice – in its local dimension – outcomes of which provide grounds for emancipatory projects.

The models of the teacher outlined above imply the scale of research field we are tackling here. The point lies in "working out" a model which would live up to contemporary requirements and, at the same time, go beyond a purely theoretical construct, becoming first and foremost a practically verifiable, real image of a teacher.

One would wish such a model could induce development of particular characteristics ascribed to an exemplary teacher, facing up simultaneously to increasingly difficult tasks which teachers cope with in violently unstable times (unsettled by, for example, technical progress and, in Poland, radical political changes). As multiple models are currently being advanced, the dispute on the model teacher still continues with each particular proposal inviting as much support as criticism.

#### **4. Teacher Competencies: Meanings, Dimensions, Categories**

In defining the term “competencies,” we must consider two semantic senses. One of them – the inner one – comprises components of competencies, while the other – the outer one – delineates the scope of their application. In the “internal” dimension, “competency” is described as a subjective potential of depending on something, whereas in the “external” sense “competency” is depicted as a capacity for something (Męczkowska 2002). In the former, “competencies” denote a set of conscious, trainable, satisfactory, though not necessarily outstanding, skills and abilities which make a teacher’s conduct and action effective (Czerepaniak-Walczak 1997). An individual – in our case, specifically a teacher – is able to realize what skills s/he possesses and in what conditions s/he can display them.

In their “internal” sense, vocational competencies are related to vocational functions and challenges posed by new realities, which involve formation of transnational cultural identities, critical thinking and dialogical communication. Kwiatkowska (1996, 1997) especially emphasizes: competencies involved in preparing the young generation for proper existence; competencies involved in fostering cognitive and existential self-reliance; competencies involved in arranging and ordering information; competencies involved in ushering students (participants in the education process) into the world of knowledge; competencies involved in the function of offering.

In this sense, teacher competencies refer to a particular vocational field bound up with an individual’s specialization and position in the vocational hierarchy. They enable the individual to perform in given conditions and in compliance with the originally endorsed

standards. They are measurable because the effects of applying them are observable (cf. Wiatrowski 2003).

In the internal account which defines a particular professional's abilities and frame of mind, M. Czerepaniak-Walczak (1997, p. 90) distinguishes four categories of competencies:

- Initial competencies, which are a prerequisite for taking on and performing professional teaching tasks (their level determines the choice of further training and self-development);
- Mature competencies, which influence a teacher's on-going professional performance;
- Competence for change, which is tantamount to effective coping with difficult situations and external pressures;
- Core – or essential – competencies, which are fundamentally underpinned by openness and readiness to change. At the same time, they foster sustained effort in continuing actions already embarked on and critical assessment of the current performance. In and by themselves, these competencies do not designate a person's professional expertise. Only when integrated with other competencies enumerated above can they be analyzed in terms of teaching professionalism.

The competencies distinguished above can be located in the following contexts:

- A teacher's interactions with students, other educational actors and him/herself;
- Students' emancipatory competencies. The core dimension of this context resides in interactions respecting students' subjectivities and their right to choose and to err as well as engaging students in creative activities and creative problem-solving. Teacher competencies for self-development tie in with a capacity for self-reflection, which promotes self-analysis and overcoming of the constraints in place. According to Czerepaniak-Walczak, without these competencies a teacher fails to open up and develop innovativeness, and thus to effectively fulfill the postulates espoused in this concept of education.
- Conditions necessary of emancipatory competencies to arise (Czerepaniak-Walczak 1993).

According to Czerepaniak-Walczak, readiness to change – openness to change – is a fundamental factor in teachers’ professional competencies. It is so because teachers repeatedly need to modify educational situations, cope in diverse circumstances, assess reality critically, rationally and adequately, and, first of all, make responsible, substantive decisions.

When defined as a capacity for something, competencies can denote five different things, as Męczkowska proposes (2002, p. 123). In each of these denotations, competence serves as a basis for subjective engagement with the world, but the nature of the engagement is framed in different terms, depending on how an educational situation is understood and, primarily, what methodological standpoint is adopted. Hence, competencies as viewed by Męczkowska could be located in different discourses, with their two categories referring to the functional model of the teacher and the remaining ones – to the humanistic discourse with its figures of reflective practitioner, transformative intellectual and postpositivistic practitioner.

On the basis of such theoretical-methodological criterion, Męczkowska distinguishes the following definitions and meanings of the notion:

- Competency as a basis of effective action; to be competent means to be effective;
- Competency as a condition for constructing individual psycho-social identity; it means (as articulated in Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development) not only a technical ability to apply an acquired skill, but also a social identification which allows for constructing the social component of identity;
- Competency as a capacity for reflective action which ensues from the conviction about interconnectedness of thinking and action (*knowing-in-action*), as proposed in Schön’s concept of reflective practitioner (1987). Simultaneous with action, reflection (both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action) entails perceiving a particular situation as a “riddle,” “inventing” a way to solve it and applying the solution. This involves a series of “particles” – experimentation, testing, and calculated ramblings, which trigger critical interrogation of

assumptions and structure of knowing-in-action (Gołębniak 1998, p. 121);

- Competency as a condition of detached understanding, which serves as a tool of reflection dissociated from an agent's active engagement in the world of action. The essence of competence conceived of in such terms is a distance from the world of culture, and in particular from those of its aspects which offer certainty and clarity. The distance is a resultant of understanding, which in itself is by no means perfect or complete. The capacity for self-distancing reflection is predicated upon a critical attitude to all forms of the obvious (Szkudlarek 1999, p. 123).
- Competency as a potential for emancipatory action defined by Czerepaniak-Walczak (1997, p. 138) as a subject's dynamic preparedness acquired in social interactions and manifest in perceiving and comprehending deprivation and limitations to one's agency, in conscious expression of protest against them, in devising ways to overcome them and to gain new spaces of empowerment and freedom as well as in using them responsibly so as to improve oneself and one's environment.

The list above provides but a starting point for broader considerations. It signals that teacher competencies tend to be approached from various points of view pertaining to their structures and/or functions. This is by no means an all-inclusive account. It leaves out many other possible ways of interpreting competencies, insisting only that description of competencies should be subordinated to the model of the teacher and vocational role/s attributed to teaching professionals.

The most comprehensive account of competencies is provided by R. Kwaśnica (1994), who distinguishes two basic groups of competencies: practical-moral competencies and technical competencies. He subdivides **practical-moral competencies** into:

- Interpretation competencies,
- Moral competencies,
- Communication competencies.

**Interpretation competencies** include the perception, reception and understanding of the world. They enable us to see the world as a reality which demands constant interpretation. Interpretation

competencies prompt us to pose questions, whereby the deciphering of the world turns into an unending task..

**Moral competencies** are expressed in a continuing interrogation of the moral legitimacy of our actions and behaviors. They include inquiring into how one should act, what a teacher should be like not to constrain anybody and how one can remain faithful to oneself.

**Communication competencies** include an ability to sustain dialogue with others and with oneself, which, as Kwaśnica insists, is not limited merely to discussion skills. It is rather a capacity for an empathetic understanding and unconditional acceptance of another person; an ability to offer criticism which is not disparaging but exploratory, i.e. intent to unravel the premises behind one's own and others' views, ideas and behaviors; a dismissal of directive attitudes for the sake of presenting one's own point of view as a conceptual offer on a par with other possible, provisional answers rather than a ready-made, closed and irrefutable answer.

Communication competencies involve three different positions which a teacher may adopt. The first position is a position of the knowing one. It is informed by the conviction that events and people are subordinated to the rules of probability. The rules determine the search for order based on universal knowledge which identifies what is right and describes "the self" (Witkowski 1997).

The second position is a position of an interlocutor. Underpinned by philosophical pluralism which authorizes alternative thinking modes and aware of decentering, it entails receptivity toward otherness, which it tolerates, accepts and does not try to correct by persuasion. As such, it opens up a space for discursive engagement of otherness, alterity and minority (Witkowski 1997, p. 28). In this position, the teacher gives voice to others, lets them make their mark, and promotes dialogue which respects otherness. At the same time, the interlocutor position foregrounds one more position – that of a listener.

The third position is a position of a listener. Regarded as one of essential competencies of contemporary teachers, the listener position presupposes a lack of knowledge about the speaker and attends less to and individual as such and more to the language this individual uses. Listening makes it possible to undertake the least invasive educational interventions which steer clear of excessive projection

and utopian attempts at understanding another human being to the full. Adopting the listener position, a teacher acts so as to entice students to “recognize their own store” without offering ready-made solutions, obvious hints and evident answers (Stepniewska-Głębnik 1998, p. 219).

The other group of teacher competencies distinguished by Kwaśnica (1994) includes **technical competencies**. He subdivides them into:

- Postulatory competencies,
- Methodological competencies,
- Execution competencies.

**Postulatory competencies** include a capacity for selecting and endorsing instrumentally defined goals. These competencies advance attainment of goals set by others and help designate one’s individual goals.

**Methodological competencies** result from a conscious observance of rules or from creative action based on the rules which define the optimal sequencing of activities. The activities are called methods, though as Kwaśnica argues, methods in the strict sense of the term denote only those activities which guarantee replicable effectiveness.

**Execution competencies** comprise a skilful selection of means and a creation of conditions which promote the attainment of the set goals. Execution competencies help devise the conditions which productively correspond to the selected method/s.

All the competencies enumerated above are, clearly, important and necessary in the teaching profession. Indisputably, however, practical and moral competencies reside at the very top of the priority list (at least in the contemporary educational discourse within humanistic pedagogy) since they imply on-going insight into the role a teacher fulfils, continued search for ever better vocational solutions and, finally, sustained reflection on the essence of education. At this point, we should inquire whether this substantial list of competencies is complete and comprehensive. Hardly so. Teachers’ situation, namely, keeps changing. And the point is that not only organization and policies of educational machinery change, relocating teachers’ position in it. This, in fact, is the least significant thing. Far more importantly, teachers themselves change. And this change affects their attitudes to their own profession and students, ways of

thinking, (self-)communication modes, and capacities for exploring and experiencing the world. This is, predominantly, why the competence list is not and probably will never be complete. The moment we are able to draft a tolerably stable repertory of teacher competencies will mark the end of school as an institution responsible for development in the broadest sense of the term. Although we do not wish to live and see this futuristic “black scenario” come true, we do seek to crystallize desirable and optimal competence standards. This is an effect of changes in thinking about the contemporary teacher.

Competencies can also be looked into in more details and grouped into categories of:

**Praxeological competencies**, which pertain to didactic and educational skill and are showcased when a teacher is able to:

- devise a general outline of work with a class and an individual student as well as of parental collaboration;
- identify a student’s initial level of knowledge and organize environment for learning new information;
- operationalize instructional and educational goals and design the learning content;
- use basic instructional means and measures, including various methods and forms of classroom teaching, learning and coursework, adjusted to both the educational goals and educational setting;
- foster and sustain students’ positive motivations for development;
- develop and use various methods, forms and means to identify, monitor, analyze and evaluate students’ school achievement;
- interpret and assess a student’s performance relative to his/her individual capacities;
- identify the causes of educational failures and devise remedial measures accordingly;
- identify typical developmental disorders in students (neurosis, aggressiveness, substance abuse) and refer them to relevant helping specialists;
- assess the effectiveness of his/her own work and devise corrective interventions accordingly;

- develop his/her own concept of professional development and self-training.

**Communication competencies**, which are displayed in a teacher's capacity to:

- think dialogically and foster the development of dialogical thinking in students;
- use various discursive techniques and non-verbal language in communication in educational contexts;
- communicate his/her emotions and teach this skill to others;
- understand and accept students' language codes and use them to promote their development;
- stimulate linguistic sensitivity in students, revealing to them the values of cultural heritage and the functions of language as an instrument of thought and communication;
- adjust his/her instructional style and management of students' activities to their level of development and maturity as well as improve the correctness, intelligibility and transparency of his/her own language behaviors (ethics of speech).

**Cooperation competencies**, which are revealed when a teacher:

- understands the interdependences between his/her professional attitudes, personality, and preferred interactional style on the one hand and the social processes in classroom on the other;
- prioritizes the responsibility principle over the obedience norms in interpersonal relations and acts upon this preference;
- negotiates and accepts a compromise for the sake of solving problem situations;
- inspires and uses students' initiative to promote developmental processes in classroom;
- supports students by appreciating their agentive possibilities and orients them toward collaborative learning;
- builds and sustains contact with students, employing various techniques (e.g. communicating emotions rather than evaluations);
- develops and implements his/her own original concepts of integrated education;
- forms students' pro-social attitudes.

**Creative competencies**, which are expressed in a teacher's

- consciously motivated preference to stimulate students' developmental processes (by encouraging interests and fostering learning aptitudes) rather than to instruct them;
- activation of creative behaviors and independent thinking in educational processes;
- employment of research techniques to explore educational phenomena and create subjective knowledge;
- critical thinking and promoting critical thinking in students;
- knowledge and application of creative problem-solving techniques; advancing the professional autonomy of educational actors.

**IT competencies**, which include effective:

- communication in foreign languages;
- computer literacy
- application of IT to support one's own and students' learning (e.g. use of databases, the Internet, e-mail, etc.);
- development of one's own curricula and making them available on-line.

**Moral competencies**, which are manifest in a teacher's:

- capacity for an in-depth moral reflection upon assessing any ethical action;
- recognition of his/her own ethical obligations toward students and earnest wish to live up to them in practice;
- ability to think and act preferentially for the sake of students;
- readiness to inquire about (the limits of) ethical legitimacy of professional performance, moral co-answerability for students' development and teachers' agency.

For teachers, the idea of complete preparation for the job and, hence, complete vocational competencies contradicts the very core of teachers' work. The competencies it requires keep changing and need adjusting. A teacher definitely needs to be critical toward both the existing and the emerging realities, because the teaching profession demands relinquishing standardized routines and unfolds in communication (Korczyński 2002). Firstly, schematic action can indeed affect things and objects, but a live organism defies any straightforwardly defined rules of conduct. Students themselves make up a unique, non-standard and unconventional, individual whole. What questions students will ask, what problems they will report,

what challenges they will pose to the teacher can hardly be predicted. Secondly, the teacher is constantly affected by imperatives of communicative rationality bound up with the ethics and logic of dialogue (Kwaśnica 1995, p. 32).

In discussing teacher competencies, it is vital that we understand the notion correctly. This is particularly pertinent as we deal with a variety of positions on teacher competencies outlined above. Gołębniak (1998) emphasizes this point, crucially distinguishing competent teaching from teacher competencies. **Competent teaching** means just effective action which complies with endorsed standards. It includes narrow dispositions (Carr 1993) which, when showcased, are supposed to prove a teacher's relevant professional education (Gołębniak 1998, p. 143). **Teacher competencies**, she claims, comprise comprehensive, holistic capacities of professional pedagogical judgment, including both rational knowledge and personal understanding. Consequently, in their narrow sense, competencies are trainable, while comprehensive and holistic competence tends to be produced in comprehensive and holistic education (Carr 1993, p. 257). Thinking in such terms, philosophy of reflective practice proposes that reflective practitioners, even though possibly lacking one skill or another and perhaps being less effective or slightly inadequate, are able to reflect on their deficiencies and, consequently, keep improving their action (teaching). This, however, is not the case with teachers who – as Rousell notices (Gołębniak 1998) – failing to explore their own practice keep lingering at the level of ritualistic knowledge.

## **5. Characteristics of the Contemporary Polish Teacher: A Postulatory-Empirical Perspective**

The model I propose below combines postulatory and empirical frameworks. In the empirical sense, the model draws on Dróżka's research findings (2002, p. 297) concerning young Polish teachers' autobiographies. The findings imply that the teachers clearly discern features and values necessary for modern teaching professionals. They include: individual autonomy, agency, independence, personal dignity, moral courage, authenticity, credibility, self-reliance, responsibility, truthfulness, moral sensitivity and kindness. These

values add up to a unique teaching personality and are at the same time expressive of the deep-running essence of education and vocational philosophy. Given these characteristics, the model of the special educator, it seems, should be located within the humanistic paradigm, with the reflective practitioner bidding probably the most suitable option. Regarding their experience as an important source of knowledge, reflective practitioners rely in their work partly on theoretical knowledge acquired at university and partly on skills which could be defined as a specific intuition developed in their practice. This is an outcome (particularly for special educators) of working with people with disabilities, who are exceptional, sometimes highly challenging educational clients. As Nowak-Dziemianowicz (2001, p. 17) puts it, a reflective practitioner is a teacher who “knows what,” “knows how,” “knows why,” “knows who,” and knows “why me,” with all these dimensions of knowledge – far from being mutually exclusive – enabling necessary reflection.

In constructing the model, I built also on Korczyński’s postulatory proposal (2002). As a result, the following **characteristics of the teacher** could be put forward:

1. Reflectivity and flexibility of thinking which contribute to creative teaching. Reflection helps correct action and implement effective educational interventions.
2. Awareness of the role and responsibility for educational processes and care for children
3. Patience and perseverance in difficult educational work when performing the most important tasks.
4. Authenticity, which entails being one’s true self instead of acting a part depending on circumstances.
5. Fairness, which means approaching and assessing students based on clear standards adjusted to their abilities and skills.
6. Organizational skills both in instruction and in facilitating children’s other activities and involvements. Forming children’s interests and stimulating their development relative to their abilities and skills.
7. Apt collaboration and cooperation with parents, which improves opportunities for developing better educational strategies.

8. Understanding a child's needs and adjusting tasks to its developmental abilities.
9. Resistance to difficulties inscribed in work with children, effective coping and perseverance in overcoming them.
10. Psychopedagogical diagnostic skills with regard to developmental disturbances in children.
11. Adaptability to technological transformations, rapid and creative assimilation of new information. Openness to innovations, particularly educational and therapeutic ones.

These are skills and characteristics which contemporary teachers are expected to display. Formulated in 2012, teacher training standards provide for all of them, which can be taken as a promising harbinger of formation of teachers' vocational skills in the future. It was imperative to design teacher education standards because social transformations produce new requirements for schools and teachers, alter educational goals, and re-draw teaching and education outcomes, contents and methods. With the conditions and aims of teachers' work in constant flux, teachers repeatedly find themselves facing novel and mutating circumstances. The teacher's role is closely interconnected with social life changes as it is social life that teachers prepare their students for. The teacher's role is on the one hand produced by social processes and, on the other, is a factor fostering these very processes. For many years now, we have witnessed an escalating crisis in the teacher's role and function in contemporary education systems. The crisis is severe and socially detrimental as it fuels a school crisis as such. It stems from various sources, depends on many factors, and manifests itself in diverse ways. Basically, it can be seen in a growing disproportion between multiplying and increasingly complex educational tasks on the one hand and opportunities for teachers to perform these tasks effectively on the other. At the same time, irrespective of its type or level, the school's educational and instructional function is being undercut and circumscribed, which reveals deficiencies in its institutional and organizational structures as well as in organized educational processes together with impotence of teachers' interventions. As a distrust of school grows, it comes to include also teachers and teacher training institutions. Society is clearly dissatisfied or even disappointed with school's – and primarily, teachers' – enactment of educational and

personality-forming functions. Social perception of teachers affects also teachers' self-perception. In the following, I present teacher figures which in different measures reflect the current vocational situation of Polish teachers. The picture emerging thereof is far from agreeable. We can only hope that future studies – carried out when outcomes of new teacher training and education standards are felt and assessable – will render a different image to the advantage of children, parents and teachers themselves.

## **6. Research Method and Results**

For the purposes of this chapter, crucial elements of teachers' work were analyzed with particular emphasis on teachers' experience of their own vocational competencies and their perception of vocational roles. In classifying these roles, my take on them is metaphorical. The qualitative research included case studies based on narrative interview. The research was driven by the central question of *“In their self-formulated vocational biographies, how do teachers perceive their own competencies and vocational situation?”*

Analysis of individual teacher biographies construed as singular human experiences provides grounds for interpreting their vocational roles and describing their vocational competencies comprehensively.

The research rendered a peculiar map which pictures specifics of work performed by teachers employed in facilities for children with developmental disorders and integrated schools, where, except comprehensive knowledge, also perseverance, patience and advanced educational reflection are required. Because this account is but a part in a collaborative monograph, it cites five synthetically described figures which illustrate the respondents' subjective perspective on vocational skills and the teacher's professional role.

### **Figure one – a content teacher**

The first teacher is a female of long and diverse teaching experience. She has worked in an array of educational facilities for over forty seven years, including twenty six years in one special school for children with severe developmental disturbances. She

chose her vocation fully consciously, and her attitudes to work imply that she is satisfied with her choice of job.

*I think that if one decides to become a teacher, one should realize fully what difficulties one is likely to bump into. If you treat the job as God's curse, you'll get stuck in trouble. If you treat it as vocational fulfillment, you'll overcome the difficulties. I try to explain it to my younger colleagues that they should not be discouraged by the difficulties they come up against. It's not a job that'll make you stinking rich, it's a job that'll give you satisfaction. It's more of a mission than a job. For me, it's a calling. Love, care, attention to the children – that's the most important thing.*

With more than forty years in the profession which gives her satisfaction, she does not see any particular difficulties even where difficulties undeniably appear. She is fully aware of the extent of her responsibility.

*I realize that this work demands commitment and considerable knowledge. In this very sequence. I can't even think of not being committed to children I work with. They trust me, and that's the most important thing. What is my role? Well, of course, to teach, to educate, to take care of them. These are not empty words. I truly believe in it. That's why I've been in this vocation for so many years. Surely you don't think I'd have managed without believing in it.*

As this story unfolds, we get a glimpse of Teacher-Guardian and Guide of students. Her belief in the power of knowledge underpinning vocational competencies implies that she is fully aware of her professional role. She keeps developing her experience and skills through life-long learning, a veritably distinctive component of current realities in the teaching profession. Induced purely unconsciously by the sheer inner need of self-development, she has pursued life-long learning throughout her vocational career.

*You see, I've trained all the time, now perhaps less quickly, but it's the matter of age. I am tired, but tired by my age. My health fails more and more often. But I've always tried various courses, to learn something new. It's really useful. Children are ever smarter. Take computers, for example; I had to learn a lot to keep up with them, although the kids also have to put more effort into it because of their developmental difficulties. Just like me. That's what always comes to my mind – the kids inspire me to keep learning.*

The respondent does not discern any difficulty in relationships at workplace and contacts with her colleagues and supervisors. She finds the collaboration with them smooth. Admittedly, convergent operations and mutual help positively affect formation of self-image and foster self-development in teachers.

*I don't think there's anything to thwart my work. Of course, there are always financial problems. We have scarce funds, while many things would come in handy. My colleagues, well, each of them has one problem or another, but we try to support each other. And the school-head helps us, too. Yes, all in all, we are a good team.*

This biography, so briefly outlined, showcases considerable engagement, role awareness and competencies required in the teaching profession. It reveals a responsible teacher who attends to the needs of children in her care. This is a rare example of vocational maturity and substantial reflectivity.

### **Figure two – a transformed teacher**

The second teacher is a male with teaching experience of 25 years. He is the head of a special education facility. He took a different vocational path than the woman described above. His original job had nothing in common with education. Only when his family matters got complicated and he had to move house did he find it necessary to shift jobs. His choice of the teaching profession was thus not informed by a sense of mission or calling.

*When I decided to take that job, I didn't think I was in for so much toil. It was a sheer necessity. I had to provide for my family, and that job in special education offered better money because of all the benefits involved. It seemed to me that it would be easy. But when I first walked into the school building I got terrified. Will I manage? I've no knowledge, have I? I'm only starting to learn how to be a teacher. And what does that mean in the first place? What is my role? Am I even up to it?*

Interestingly, the biography suggests that the respondent had a considerable awareness from the start even though he did not think so himself. What is it that suggests his consciousness? As soon as the respondent took up the job, he started to study and learn in order to acquire additional vocational skills. This testifies to his considerable responsibility and self-reflection on competencies. The current teacher training standards preclude such situations. All students must have proper academic knowledge of the subject/s or discipline/s they will teach to children as well as be aware of psychological, educational and sociological mechanisms behind social functioning. Additionally, they must also be trained in teaching methodologies. In all these dimension, knowledge must be improved through practice at school.

*Only later, when I took up further studies did I realize how irresponsible I'd been in taking that job in the first place. I had no idea of the responsibility it entailed and of what I'd be supposed to do actually. I thought that teaching was an easy way to make money without putting much effort or time into it. I don't think so any more. I know that you need proper education because without it you can only harm children. You need to know methods, to know not only what to teach but also how to do it.*

In this case, the teacher was not conscious of the vocational role because the choice of job was dictated by non-professional factors. His work credo was: little effort and time – big (financial) effects. With the purely technical, dehumanized perception of work,

this biography features a negativist story of choosing a vocational path. Of course, in the course of time, the respondent realized that competencies must be improved and his need of self-development grew.

*I don't think that any more. When I completed a degree in special education and then did a series of courses in various therapeutic methods, I realized how much harm I might have done working without proper preparation. Now I know how much one needs to know to avoid mistakes which could gravely affect children in our charge. I wish I'd been told earlier what a demanding and serious job that was.*

The respondent's biography reveals unreasonable and rash vocational decision-making, though at the same time it best conveys how one "matures" into the educator's role. It shows how one comes to realize that knowledge must be augmented, how one's educational awareness develops and how one starts to reflect on and in action.

*In years to come, I had to improve my vocational qualifications, which I did. It wasn't smooth. To study, I had to commute to town and that was really exhausting. But I don't regret anything. At university I expanded my knowledge. The degree program made me realize how much affection and care my students needed. How much effort it took to work with them and how skilful one had to be to attend to each of them. I believe a mass school wouldn't have given me such hard time, but neither would it have given me so much satisfaction. Now I am the head of that school, but that doesn't mean I don't teach any more. Every day I have lessons both in classroom and on individual basis. I keep coming up with new ideas, sports events, cake baking championships, the-most-beautiful-postcard contests, things like that. And I manage to get most of my teachers engaged.*

This utterance shows the long way the respondent has walked heading for professionalism. And he has been largely successful in his pursuit. He has acquired many competencies needed in the teaching profession, which enable him to play the role of Teacher-Guide both for his students and for the teachers in the educational facility he is head of. He is also an Animateur of various educational undertakings which makes him popular with students and teachers, especially the young ones. In performing his educational duties, he seeks first of all to promote the good of his disabled students.

The respondent feels that his decision to work in a special education facility was a right one. He finds work with disabled students a source of satisfaction and fulfillment rather than of difficulty and oppression. He is aware of many challenges, but at the same time he faces up to them reasonably and matter-of-factly. He identifies mistake he has made and still makes, but draws conclusions from them for the future. Reflecting on his work and combining theory with practice, he emerges as a conventional teacher who has adapted to the vocational role of special educator and even attempts to creatively re-make it. Because currently he is a school-head, he perceives his vocational role as bound up with relationships among education process actors, including engagement in contacts with students, as mentioned in the above utterance, as well as appreciation of relations among his teachers and other staff. His story implies that the relationships are smooth, which largely depends on his leadership skills. He finds work with relatively young teachers more rewarding than cooperation with teachers of considerable vocational experience. The latter resent his advice, convinced that they know better and reluctant to listen to commentaries. This is an alarming observation, which implies their negative attitude to work and, simply, considerable fatigue. Young teachers are better motivated to learn, more willing to pursue self-development and better prepared for changes. This suggests that vocational attitudes are transforming and awareness is growing that not only far-ranging training but also lifelong learning is necessary.

### **Figure three – an embittered teacher**

The third teacher's vocational choice was rather coincidental as she chose her major simply because her school friends did. She did not think about any implications of working in the teaching profession. She thought of her future job optimistically and was not afraid of it. As she admits herself, *it was adolescent idealism, stupid and downright infantile.*

Having taught in a special school for over ten years, she has had time enough to think back on her decision and take a detached look on it.

*First I worked with children with severe intellectual disability. Initially, I thought something could be done with those kids. And so it went time after time. Each year I did the same thing. At the beginning of the school year I came to school brimming with optimism, I thought I'd do plenty of things with them, but then a moment would come, somewhere in mid-year, when all this zeal simply burned out.*

This observation suggests how important it is to make right educational and vocational decisions. Work with (especially severely) disabled people requires proper practical and moral competencies which facilitate making sense of one's own life and making right choices. The respondent's utterance shows how inconsiderately decisions tend to be made, how (teachers') activity tends to eschew "contemplating real problems" (Mizerek 1995), and how little reflection there is on and in action.

Only having worked nearly 11 years in the profession does the respondent begin to grasp the essence of the problem:

*Teachers always strive to teach one thing or another and see that as a proof of success, but with kids like that you don't stand a chance of it working this way. The severity of disability, and everyday routine, repeatedly exhausted me and my enthusiasm would run out after a while. It was hard to go to school and know that I'd change diapers*

*again, feed kids again, that one of them would have an epileptic seizure, and that nothing could be done about it all.*

Working with severely disabled people, one must not expect spectacular achievements. The respondent's situation shows how quickly one's resources are depleted if one does not possess effective tools, that is knowledge of the world, knowledge of the I-reality relationship and self-knowledge.

*Organization of work, monotony, lack of ideas, all that was killing me. And lack of individual work possibilities confused me entirely. I had no idea how to organize my work. No idea how my work could make sense. Total confusion. I couldn't think what to do to be satisfied with work. How should I go on? Nonsense. I wouldn't like to work with children with severe disability again.*

This excerpt reveals a deficiency of technical skills, that is methodological and execution competencies. "I don't know how, I don't know why." It showcases educational helplessness and implies a lack of awareness of the role assigned to her within valid rules and principles of conduct. No individual understanding of the role has been developed. The respondent executed her educational tasks because she had to and treated that as a kind of coercion. Her job, involving the roles of the educational and instructional process organizer/manager, did not give her any satisfaction. Specific student-teacher bonds failed to emerge, as the respondent did not have perseverance, which is instrumental in forming student-teacher interactions. Worse still, she did not display any openness to change, which as Czerepaniak-Walczak (1997) claims, is one of the crucial dimensions of teacher professional competencies. Hence, the respondent decided to change jobs and started working with regularly developed students, expecting better outcomes. However, difficulties and problems appeared also in her new job, which evidently does not bring her satisfaction, either.

*I'm not happy with my job, my keenness is gone. Problems all the time – with the school-head, having to deal with parents, their complaints, their demands. Enough!*

*Bureaucracy is an obstacle. All this paperwork is giving me a hard time. I'd like more contact with specialists, a psychologist for example. I consulted a psychologist, but didn't receive any help. When you've worked so many years and there's no one to help you, this clips your wings. After all these years, you feel you have no rights whatsoever, not for anything better.*

*I know I won't get anything even if I ask for help. I see no point, nothing makes sense. Whatever you do, nothing changes. That's the matter of organization. The authorities don't understand anything. What I see around is but a makeshift arrangement. I'd like to have a nicer classroom and more teaching aids for children with disorders concomitant disorders. But we've no teaching aids, haven't had any for ages.*

The respondent sounds clearly embittered. She sees work as a source of permanent problems. She does not feel competent enough to work at school, in particular with children with developmental disorders. We could wonder whether choosing the major based not on her interests and knowledge but on others' persuasion is a factor in her negativist attitude to work. Likely, it has been instrumental in her vocational failures.

An important issue thematized in her utterance is a lack of specialist diagnostic and therapeutic support. This, however, does not justify deficiency of praxeological competencies. Work planning and implementation lie at the core of reflective practitioners' vocational obligations. The respondent's example shows how practical performance diverges from theoretical postulates. She is an educator who on the one hand finds her work a source of failure and disappointment, but on the other has no skills necessary to change this situation.

#### **Figure four – an ambivalent teacher**

The fourth teacher is a forty-one-year-old female who has worked for 17 years, including five years in an integrated school. Her versatile experience is, undoubtedly, the respondent's asset connected with opportunities of acquiring diverse and broad vocational competencies.

*I graduated from early education college and got a job at a kindergarten. I was the only one there – teacher, steward, and manager in one, so I was thrust into deep water from the very start. It was a kindergarten at a state-owned farm, and that meant a difficult environment. I worked seven years there and you could say I created this kindergarten from scratch, technical infrastructure and all.*

*The atmosphere there was actually very nice, we felt a family. I worked with one group of 15 to 18 students. The kids were from rather difficult backgrounds with parental alcohol abuse. But when I think back on it, it was a good time.*

*Later on, I did various jobs which had nothing to do with my trained vocation, but financial circumstances forced me to do so. I worked at a factory, where I took care of students who did internships and vocational training there. In the meantime, I got a university degree.*

*I feel responsible for what I do. There are those kids I take care of and guide, I must give them instructions and show them how to do things. That is a heavy burden. Sometimes I'm afraid that I might do something wrong, but I just try to fend off those thoughts.*

Having worked in various educational facilities, the respondent has had opportunities to modify and verify her knowledge. That might have stimulated cognitive competencies formation through “creative response to observed educational experiences of other teachers and educators” (Czerepaniak-Walczak 1997). The multifaceted knowledge acquired in various facilities has contributed to communication competencies development. At the same time, the respondent seems

a rather vulnerable, confused, lacking in self-esteem and doubtful of her social utility. Although possessing considerable store of cognitive and communication competencies, she cannot utilize them in practice fully, suitably and effectively. She feels at ease in children's company, which indubitably is a commendable trait worth imitating. Work with children provides her with ample vocational satisfaction. Nevertheless, to function in the education system effectively and correctly, one needs to operationalize cooperation skills in co-creating school realities. Such skills, unfortunately, are not possessed by everybody in equal share. In this respect, the respondent is rather receptive to others' influence than able to exert hers. Her position is further complicated by mounting paperwork and changes enforced by the education reforms in Poland.

*Paperwork is so tiresome. I keep lagging behind with it forever. I take documentation home with me and fill it out. There's far too much of it, I believe. I think it's ridiculous that we have the same type of class registers as mass schools; our children are slow on progress, but we need to note down their achievements every month. Why should one kind of children and the other be assessed on the same basis? People who know about this work know very well that you might not achieve anything within a month, not to have any progress whatsoever with a disabled child, especially one with an intellectual disability. I have my own charts, too. But when a teaching staff meeting is approaching and all those papers should be completed – I get terrified. As for observation charts, I agree, they should be filled out conscientiously because they are handed over to other bodies.*

*Teachers are having a difficult time now, because the education reform is absurd. All these promotion stages – it's absurd. Though I've been through all of them and am a certified teacher now. When I wasn't a certified teacher, I was more eager to do things, but the moment I found out I was going to be assessed, I got less keen. Now, with the certification formalities behind me, I am eager to do things again. I really resent this kind of promotion procedure. The*

*only thing it does is relegate children to the margin of teachers' work because all they are after is just promotion.*

As regards creative action and constant improvement of knowledge, so important to the teaching profession now, the respondent does not seem to cope well in her vocation. It is not a good predictor of her vocational future as a teacher. Teachers are now obliged to develop their knowledge continually and adjust it to requirements at hand. The teacher education standards in force at present include training in new technologies utilization and IT literacy, which is supposed to meet current demands posed by educational realities. Unfortunately, many teachers do not possess skills of creative self-transformation, which may detrimentally affect their vocational competencies and currently imperative vocational expertise. The respondent is a perfect case in point here since she believes that she has already gone through all the levels of vocational performance and does not need to develop her skills further. The idea of lifelong learning does not seem to appeal to her.

#### **Figure five – a frustrated teacher**

The fifth teacher is a thirty-four-year-old female who has been a teacher for over ten years now. She chose her educational path and vocation fully consciously.

*I got a job as a school counselor when I was still a student. I did that for financial reasons rather, and work and studying didn't interfere, I had a lot of free time. I was a full time school counselor and I taught two people on individual basis. I taught them one after another, the two did not overlap. I liked the job very much, so the collaboration developed. And, besides, I studied rehabilitation, so the job tied in with my degree. At that school, there were many kids from backgrounds vulnerable to delinquency. And there were also kids from rural areas from the city's vicinity there. Rather unsavory neighborhoods, many deprived kids. That year of working there gave me a lot of satisfaction. I had many colleagues at that school. I worked*

*with another, already experienced school counselor, who helped me a lot so that I could improve my performance. And all the time I went to counseling services to attend various courses also in order to improve my qualifications. Unfortunately, after a year I had to quit because the lady I was a replacement for came back. So that was the end of my work. Later I only taught children on individual basis, kids from that school, from those communities, too.*

With increasing frequency, students combine studies and work. In most cases, they are motivated by financial necessities, and their jobs rarely correspond to their majors. This was not the case for the respondent. In her biography, she had an opportunity to confront an adolescent ideal of a teacher – an admirer of a child’s soul – with school practice and realities. Evidently, the early experiences induced her to work on and seek additional indispensable skills. She engaged with the role of the special educator as a teacher on a quest, aware of her own shortcomings, and acquiring vocational experience in practice. The specifics of her job enabled her to develop, in particular, technical vocational competencies in group work and individual therapeutic interventions. The latter gave her an opportunity to find out not only about working with disabled children, but also about engaging with their parents, which undoubtedly contributed to the growth of her communication competencies and, in particular, to her self-understanding and understanding of the world around her, as Kwaśnica (1994) puts it. She filled gaps in her technical (methodological and execution) competencies by attending training courses, a typical device resorted to in order to develop expertise.

*Then I got a job in the facility I still work for. Because I had a degree in rehabilitation, I had enough qualifications to continue for a year, but then I had to start a course in intellectually disabled education. It took me two years to finish it. And in the meantime, I had two kids. I used only maternity leaves. I never took out a single day of parental leave. I had to go back to work, simply to keep my job. And, as you can see, I still have it.*

The utterance addresses an issue which is highly pertinent the present social position of teachers and the image of school. School, namely, has ceased to be a secure workplace. The education reform currently underway combined with plummeting birth rates make teachers anxious about losing their jobs. Their livelihood is at stake here. The respondent's vocational path has also been determined largely by a fear of redundancy. This affects teachers' enactment of vocational obligations, their self-perception in the professional role and (lack of) vocational satisfaction.

*I'm rather anxious about my future. The truth is that I don't know what will happen with my school and I'm afraid I'll have nowhere to work. I can't sleep for fear of failing to provide for my family. The situation is tight now that we're speaking of it. I'm stressed out because of it. And on top of that, I'm not on the best of terms with my supervisors. The school-head does not talk with me. Unfortunately, I'll have to work on with this person. It's not that we're in conflict, it's rather a distance of sorts. That person does not tell anybody about anything. He does not consult decisions with the teaching staff board. All the decision-making goes on behind the closed door. If something goes wrong, he simply does not show his face to us for some time, and we just don't know what's up. He's never clear about things. I know that he has some objections to me, but I don't know why. I just do my job as fit, I organize things for children. When he comes to evaluate my classroom work, he never criticizes anything. Everything's just ok. But even if I bent over backwards, I won't be appreciated anyway. I've never got a bonus. When these bonuses are awarded it looks as if I were not there, as if I didn't work there and were not on the school's payroll. That's also the case with parents, occasionally I can hardly find it in me to go on working, but I still have to face up to their sense of entitlement and lack of understanding. I don't know why my students' parents are forever dissatisfied. Perhaps it's a sign of times. Everybody's in a*

*hurry, but it can't justify their attitude to me and to my colleagues. That's what frustrates me and makes my job difficult. I can't cope with that. I haven't been taught what to do in such situations.*

The respondent's experiences illustrate the impact of atmosphere at workplace and the way it affects teachers' wellbeing, thereby indirectly influencing also teacher-student relationships. Teachers who fear for their livelihood cannot perform their obligations vis-à-vis students properly. Teachers' vocational competencies and educational skills must be suitably assessed and buttressed by capable supervisors. School-heads are not merely administrators, but first and foremost facilitators of school life for both students and the teaching staff. Although the example cited here is but a particular individual's experience, it effectively suggests that such circumstances should be covered in teacher training and education. Communication skills and ability to strike a compromise are vocational competencies which help individuals cope with various taxing situations occasioned by school operations. Teachers need to collaborate extensively with parents and take their needs into account as well as to sustain proper working relationships with colleagues and supervisors. The respondent's story shows that not all teachers are suitably prepared for engaging in diverse social relationships. Hopefully, the new teacher education standards will make sure that teachers are equipped with knowledge conducive to efficient and diversified problem-solving at work. After all the standards seek to induce creativity and reflectivity in everyday school practice.

## **6. Conclusion**

The research aimed to answer the questions: "In their self-formulated vocational biographies, how do teachers perceive their own competencies and vocational situation?"

Answering this question, however, proves challenging not least because the outlines of five respondents' biographies are necessarily shortened to fit into the chapter format. Still, they suffice to suggest a handful of conclusions. The knowledge which the respondents

possess is inharmonious. Clearly, the gravest shortcomings are revealed in their self-knowledge. Deficiency of reflection and insight into their own values may sound alarming. Very few teachers are able to assess adequately the extent and areas of their ignorance. They tend not to be self-critical. Most of them do not have a sense of agency. Afraid to make decisions on their own, they feel merely an instrument deployed by the education machine:

*I'm not able to make a difference anyway, why should I exert myself then?. It's better to keep a low profile. Whatever I do, it doesn't matter anyway.*

That is why they are hardly creative and do not find self-development imperative. The lack of creative approach results from what the perceived necessity to imitatively apply particular educational methods. They reproduce certain interventions without going beyond fixed conventions. Their specialist knowledge of the subject/area they teach is at the same time quite considerable, because they see it as a prerequisite of conscientious instruction. And this is what the respondents cited here actually do – they perform their duties conscientiously, which is an outcome of their considerable responsibility.

This produces a highly paradoxical image of the teacher. On the one hand, the teacher seems not fully competent, coerced to work and shunning reflection on and in action. On the other hand, the teacher emerges as active, energetic in action and engaging in comprehensive educational reflection. This ambivalence results from a confluence of various actual factors and contexts, which produces multivalent and divergent portrayals. These factors and contexts crucially include personal characteristics which predispose (or not) for the teaching profession and, particularly perhaps, organizational arrangements. Work tends to be a source of discontent because it fails to bring the expected satisfaction, which is largely caused by a disparity between substantial effort invested in it and low earnings combined with low social prestige.

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(ROMANIA)

## “TEACHERS AS RESEARCH PROMOTERS ...”

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### **Abstract**

Romania is going now through a complex process of teachers role's change, mainly as result of the new Law of Education enacted in 2011. One of the key challenges of this process is related to research designing, implementation and development, namely integration of research results in teaching and learning levels of educational processes and correlation with cognitive and emotional development of the students, through classroom management strategies.

We present the results of a research (“Educational research impact: linking research-policy and practice funded by the Romanian Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding) that aims to analyze the role of postgraduate students and teachers in secondary schools in terms of their contribution to the total research activity, the breadth of research undertaken, and the linkage between schools and research. Developing an integrated approach of research, across educational processes, but also throughout learning cycles and stages of teaching should be a complex area for reflection and contribution in the near future in Romanian educational system. In line with this specific area of approaching the new role of teachers could be explored, as part of the school improvement and institutional development strategies.

**Keywords:** higher education Research- based education, researchers, teaching, teacher education

### **1. Introduction**

The teachers' profession undergoes important changes in the contemporary society and especially in the new paradigm of education. This context marks the shift from the teachers' position as “knowledge users” towards a more complex position, as “knowledge makers”. Yet knowledge making still remains in the interest scope of

researchers and university educators and is further from the actual needs of education; this state of facts needs to be reviewed if we want educational reforms to produce real effects on all the education players. According to Kincheloe (2012) “teachers must join the culture of researchers if a new level of educational rigor and quality is ever to be achieved” (p. 18).

In this new professional culture adapted to a changing society, teaching as a profession is understood as undergoing a continuous transformation and innovation process, while the education professionals appear to be researchers and knowledge users able to think thoroughly upon their own professional needs and upon the new topics arising in their professional field. There is therefore a shift from a passive to an active position enabling educators to become aware of how complex their field is and to understand that this field cannot be acknowledged and managed from outside the social, cultural, historical, philosophical, and psychological context shaping it. Teachers thus become aware not only of the students’ immediate needs and of the facts occurring during their own classes, but also of their own training and professional needs. According to authors like Kraft (2001) and Beretter (2002), the teachers become the researchers of their own professional practice.

When teachers accept and appropriate their position as researchers, they take a critical attitude towards the real problems of the educational context in which they carry out their activity and thus they become active players in the teaching innovation process.

## **2. Research-based education**

An impressive number of papers have been written on research-based education over the last years, to make it a core topic of the educational policies and practices in many countries, those holding top positions in the international rankings in terms of education quality being the same countries which have helped the most develop this paradigm.

When the teaching activity is based on research, the entire educational process helping to train future experts in the education field is designed around knowledge, producing it, and the skill of using it effectively.

The starting point of this process, as in the case of any change process, is obviously the initial training system for education professionals. In a research-based educational system, all training courses are in keeping with the investigation and are related to solving real problems issued from the professional field. Krokfors et al. (2011) consider that training the teachers to be autonomous and reflexive professionals, able to act as researchers and characterized by a high level of self-reflection. The aim is not merely producing researchers, but also endowing students and future professionals with enough competences and knowledge to empower them to apply what they have learnt, to observe the students, to analyze what they think, and to find solutions for the needs identified (Kansanen, 2007; Krokfors, 2007; Toom et al., 2010; Westbury et al., 2005, among others).

Several authors have been studying the educators' initial training, while Griffiths (2004) identifies in this respect 4 approaches of the teaching-learning and research relationship:

1. Teaching and learning as a research-led process
2. Teaching and learning as a research-oriented process
3. Teaching and learning as a research-based process
4. Teaching and learning as a process in which research informs teaching.

Education seen as a research-oriented process means that learning a certain content is as important as understanding it. This approach emphasizes the capacity to investigate, inquire, and explore reality instead of simply acquiring a pre-established content. According to the same author, education seen as a research-led process is mainly defined by teaching a content, which is structured around a topic based on the educators' interests, while education as a research informed process is seen as a conscious action triggered by curiosity and by the systematic study of an independent process.

Krokfors et al (2011) deem that a research-based training process starts by teachers needing in-depth knowledge of the latest and the most relevant scientific data in their teaching field. Meanwhile, they need to be familiar with the latest evolutions in terms of teaching and learning methods and techniques. Interdisciplinary research and

teaching knowledge are the bases necessary to develop methods which can be adapted to various students' profiles. The second important element according to the research-based paradigm is that the teachers' training can be considered an investigation and research topic in itself. This research work must provide the necessary knowledge on the quality and effectiveness of various educational systems and different teaching approaches. In depth, any approach of research-based education aims to make the teachers-to-be appropriate an attitude oriented towards curiosity and research all the way of their activity. This means that those persons learn how to approach their own profession in an opened and analytical way and how to build their conclusions on observation and experiments, while carrying out their work in a systematic and complex manner (Niemi & Jaku-Sihvonen, 2006).

It is obvious that initial training is fundamental when establishing a research-based educational culture, but the process cannot be deemed completed until teachers successfully implement an innovative approach in their school or with their class.

### **3. Research-based teacher education**

The research-based education is not straightforward, but is mediated through personal experience, collegial knowledge and organizational cultures: many studies report that practitioners in every field give greater weight to the views of their colleagues and to their pre-existing practices than they do to research evidence (Hood, 2003; OECD, 2003 among others). In other words whether people are interested in, pay attention to and make use of research evidence depends much more on their organizational setting and social relations than it does on their individual background or dispositions (Levin, 2013). Research evidence, thus, is just one influence on professional knowledge, competing with personal experiences and peers' opinions. Further studies suggest that the capacity to implement research findings in every-day professional practice is dependent upon organizations and systems rather than on individuals (Levin, 2011 and Levin, 2013).

Mc Intyre (2005) suggests three main criteria need to be met by research in order to meet the demands of teachers.

- The research should generate valid new understandings of the realities of classroom teaching and learning;
- These new understandings should provide a basis for clear indications to classroom teachers of how they might be able to improve their practice;
- The new understandings, and the suggestions for improvement to which they lead, should make sufficient sense to teachers to persuade them to take the suggestions seriously and so to engage in dialogue about them (Mc Intyre 2005, p. 380).

When research use is discussed, the principal focus is on the strategies and methods used by practitioners to access knowledge and what hinders and assist them in this process. Rickinson (2003) proposes a classification of the factors that can facilitate or hinder access to and use of research by education practitioners as nature of the research – factors relating to the focus and form of the research evidence; nature of the practitioners – factors relating to the interests, needs and background of the practitioner users; nature of the professional context – factors relating to the institutional context in which the research is being used and nature of the wider context of support – factors relating to the wider context of knowledge transformation, transfer and communication.

Evidence of research use being influenced by the nature of the research has often come in the form of barriers to utilization rather than those factors which facilitate utilization. According to Rickinson (2003) two issues that recur in studies of practitioners' perceptions of research are complaints about the inaccessibility of the language and the challenge of locating work that is relevant. Statements along the lines of 'practitioners sometimes sounded frustrated as they talked about how difficult it was to get information already generated by research' (St. Clair 2004, no page numbers) are common. A study of science teachers found that 'the inaccessibility of many research reports in both location and style [was] seen as a barrier to the impact of research' (Ratcliffe et al., 2004, p. ii).

Levin (2004) adds others aspects to be taken into consideration, when referring to the use of research in education practice as the funding of research process comes from public sources and rarely from external funding sources or that the majority of the research programs are conducted over short time periods and the number of participants is low. He also considers that the research conducted within universities has its motivation deep in university culture and in the reward process, which includes better funding and prestige. Where elements of the research process are developed at governmental and non-governmental levels and another part of the research is developed within by institutions, such as organizations, target groups or professional associations.

The difficulty of decoding the language of research, particularly for practitioners with little previous experience of research, is further highlighted by other recent studies of practitioners (John & Prior, 2003; Rickinson et al., 2003; Williams and Coles, 2003).

A recurring message arising from research on knowledge use within the field of education and beyond is that “users are far from empty vessels to be filled with the wisdom of research” (Huberman, 1994, no page numbers). Practitioners often do not have the capacity and opportunity to make fruitful use of educational knowledge in order to inform their work (Hargreaves, 1996; Hood, 2003; Huberman, 1990). They are rarely trained in how to make use of research and evaluate evidence. It may also be the case that the initial education of teachers places less focus on the importance of research than is the case in other professions (Levin 2013). Many studies have identified the need to involve practitioners in the research process and to incorporate research training into the initial preparation of teachers and school administrators (Kaestle 1993; Mortimore, 2000 and Levin, 2004).

Research concerning knowledge creation, application, and mediation in education is encouraged by the European Commission, and is important for further debate among the member states (Commission of the European Communities, 2007).

The aim of the present study is to analyze the views of teachers in Romania about the research in education and its use in teaching practice.

## **4. Romanian teachers as researchers – Case study**

### ***4.1. The teachers' education (initial training)***

We start from the assumption that the process of training teachers to be researchers is triggered by the continuing education system and it is not accomplished with students completing their higher education, but it is perpetuated throughout their professional evolution. Under those circumstances, the MBA and PhD students is among the groups with the highest impact on society and among the most numerous groups involved in performing research work on the Romanian higher education system. Those students meet a double requirement: on the one hand, they are part of a certain university by the study programmes organized there and for which they have to prepare scientifically grounded papers, which are generally research theses, and on the other hand most of those students are education professionals employed with various public or privately-owned graduate education institutions.

Given this privileged position, this group makes an important source of information regarding the way the educational system is training the group for its members to become scientific research users or promoters, and on the other hand they are directly involved in promoting change and innovation in teaching, in the schools where they work.

Starting from this assumption, some investigation work was conducted between 2011 and 2013 in 5 Romanian universities and 6 MBA programmes provided by the teaching faculties and by the primary and pre-school teaching faculties, to identify the respondents' perception on the role and the place of research in the process of training their teaching activity. 161 students were asked for their opinion using a questionnaire including both closed and opened questions, organized under the following topical groups:

- a) General Information;**
- b) Motivations for choosing studies;**
- c) Information regarding the workplace;**
- d) Information regarding the workplace among educational professionals;**

- e) Sources and the importance of research (for educational professionals);
- f) Research activities during studies;
- g) The transfer of information in the work place.

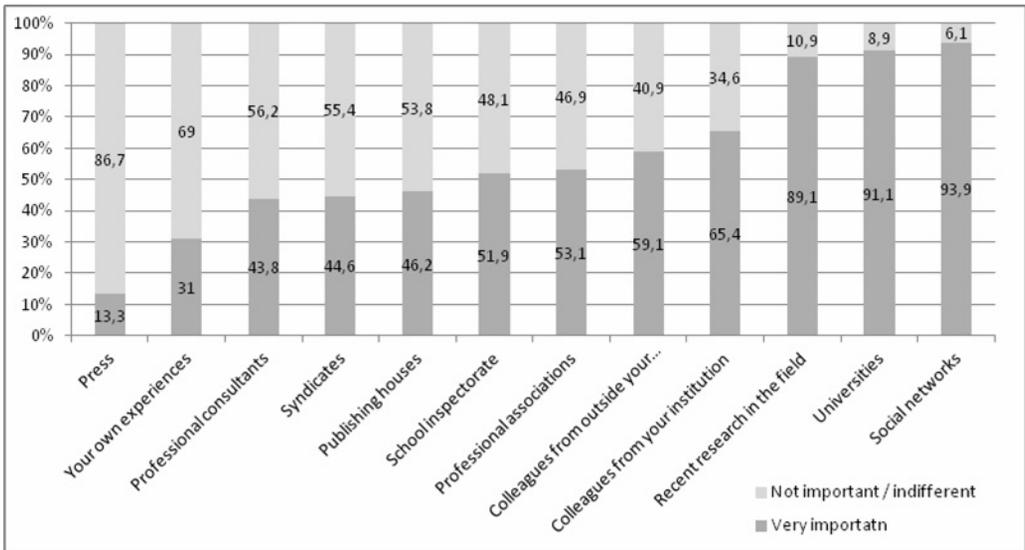
According to the type of studies, distribution among Master and Doctoral students was almost the same with 51.5 doctoral students and 48.6 master degree students. When asked about the year of studies, almost two thirds of the participants reported being at the first and second year of studies (n=107), while the other third (n=54) reported being at the third, fourth, fifth or more years of studies. Given the nature of the postgraduate degrees, implying that masters are limited to two years and doctoral degrees can last until five years, most of the students who reported being at the first and second years were master students. Most of the respondents were females (87.6%) and 73% of respondents were between 25 and 45 years old.

Most of respondents declared to be full time employees (85%) and to work in the educational field as teachers or primary school teachers (75%).

Among the most interesting aspects mentioned by the respondents is their perception of the sources of new ideas to be implemented in their own professional activity. What interests us the most is to find out what role MBA and PhD studies hold in this process and to what extent the scientific sources enabled by universities influence them in making education related decisions.

Participants responded to the importance of potential sources of new ideas at the institution they work in; how receptive are their colleagues to new ideas based on research in the educational field; the extent to which the activities carried out within their master degree or doctorate affect their professional activities and the strategies they use at their workplace in order to make new findings known.

Firstly, the figure 1 shows the importance given to different sources of information and new ideas in educational research. Social networks are the most important (93.9%) source of information according to the respondents followed by the universities and recent research in the field of knowledge, and Press the less important (13.3%).



**Figure 1:** Importance given to different sources of information and new ideas on educational research (%)

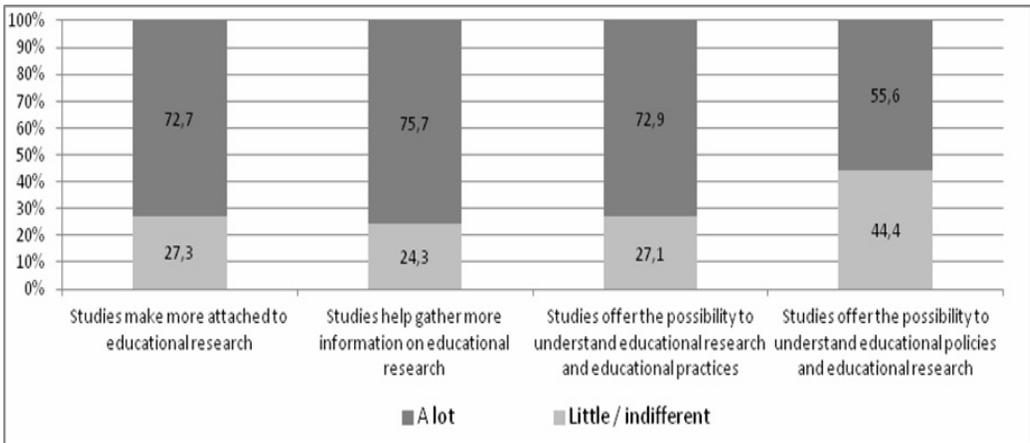
The colleagues from the same institution and the colleagues from outside the institution represent another important source of new ideas and developments for the participants. The importance given to the colleagues from the informants' institution as a source of information and new ideas on educational research was associated with the age of the participants, with 82.9% of the 76 participants aged 35 years or less that considered this source as very important (compared to the 42.1% of the older participants who did it).

As a source of information and new ideas on educational research the publishing houses were associated with the type of studies, with 67.1% of the 76 doctoral students who considered it as not important or indifferent (compared to the 34.0% of the 53 master degree students who did it), and 66.0% of the 53 master degree students who considered it as very important.

We therefore noticed that when faced to decision-making and to making changes in their professional dynamics, the respondents' priority is the opinion of the colleagues and of the closest people,

followed by universities – which proves how significant study programmes and experts in the field are to them.

Another section of the questionnaire includes questions about current or future research activities during the study program. 78.9% of participants reported they are or will start a research program during their study period. In addition, the following four items assessed how the participants perceived the impact of their academic programs on their ability to gather information, their attachment to educational research and how those programs make them more informed on educational research and educational policies (figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Impact of research on education, strategies to get information and awareness of research policies and practices (%)

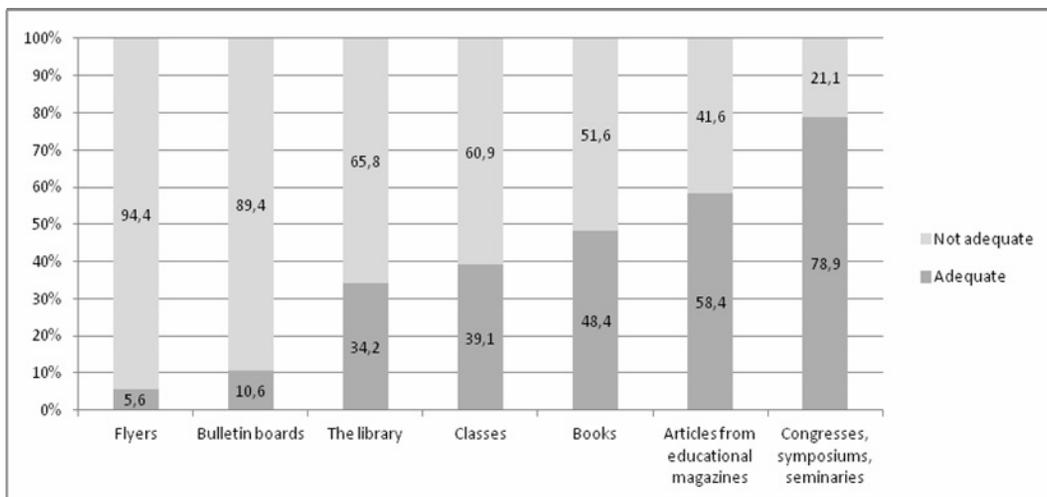
As one can notice in figure 2, the respondents consider that the education programme they are currently attending helps to a great extent building their attachment to educational research and also keep them updated with the latest information produced by research. The fact that they attend study programmes with an important research component allows them to reflect upon their own professional practice and to get familiar with other professional practices, and also to understand educational practices, although to a lesser extent. This information is relevant for understanding the role of research-based initial and continuing education.

Regarding the role of studying a master or doctorate and feeling attached to research, comparisons by age group showed that being 35 years or older makes students more interested in educational research (84.4% vs 63.3%).

Studying a master or doctorate and having more access to information showed not association with the independent variables: gender, age, type of job or perception of encouragement showed differences statistically significant.

Regarding the role of studying a master or doctorate and having the possibility to understand educational research and practices, we have found out that 81.3% of teachers/trainers and school directors found this factor as very important.

Finally, the last item of this module was about the means of finding information regarding the research which takes place at a university level. The figure 3 shows that congresses/symposiums and seminars the most used in order to find information, followed by articles in educational journals and books (78.9%) and flyers are the less adequate strategy to find this information (5.6%).



**Figure 3:** Adequacy of different sources of information at the university level (%)

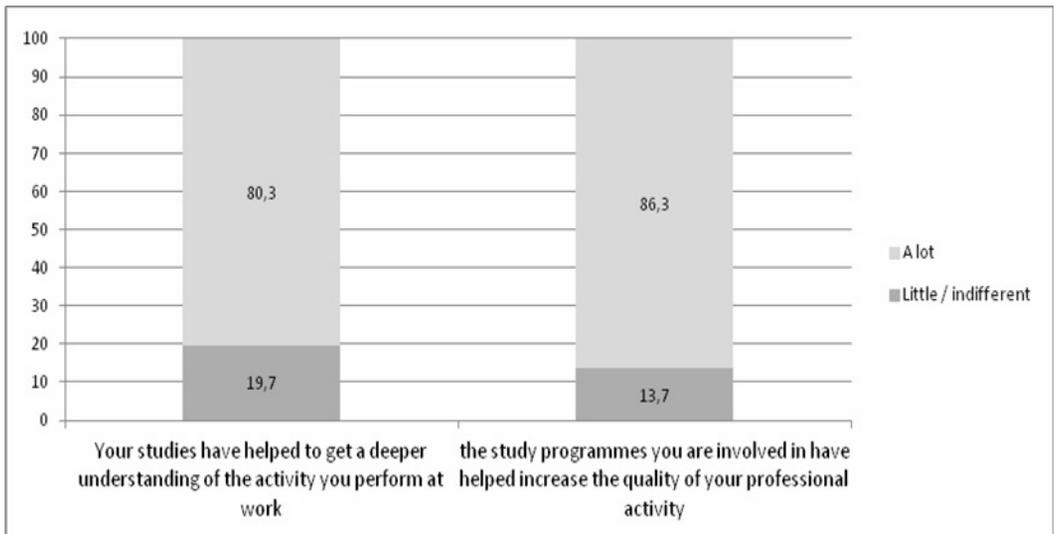
When the three most “adequate” strategies were analyzed, we found out that 90.4% of the doctorate students perceived congresses/symposiums and seminars as adequate while master students did not (66.7%). The same trend is shown when analyzed the perception of adequacy of articles from educational journals (71.1% vs. 38.5%) and books (60.2% vs 35.9%).

Those data bring important proofs regarding the respondents’ perception on what they consider to be the most useful sources of information for the educational process. In this respect, we notice that the knowledge dissemination activities such as conferences and seminars are valid sources appreciated by the students-professionals. Those data can provide researchers with important clues on the most adequate sources for disseminating and spreading knowledge and which may help transfer the findings of their research work at the professional practice level more easily. We thus notice that students keep preferring articles published in educational magazines, while books remain information sources seek by those undergoing the training process in the research field.

As the final part of this questionnaire, this module was addressed to know aspects as:

- How the students of doctorate students perceived that their experience might assist the institution in which they work to get more information on educational research;
- If their studies have helped them to get a deeper understanding of the activity their perform at work;
- The extent to which students think the study programmes have helped them to increase the quality of their professional activity;
- The way they use or will use the studies they are currently following in order to create change in their professional activity;

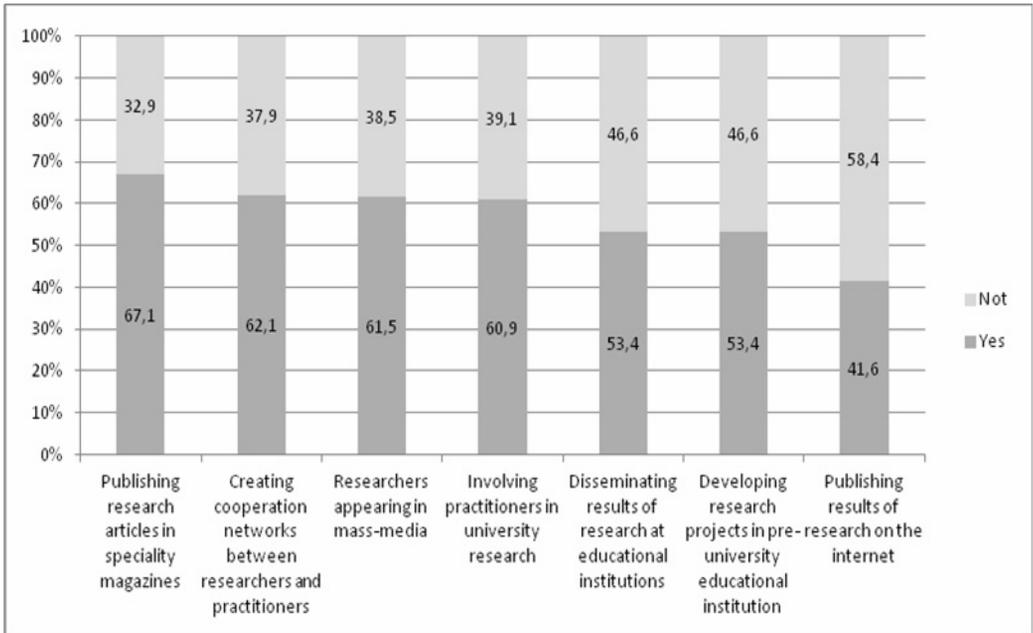
The opinions are very clear: the participants considered that their research experience will help the institution in making progresses and new improvements. Figure 4 shows the perceptions of students about the impact of it on their institution (%).



**Figure 4:** Perceptions of students about the impact of their role on their professional work at their institution (%)

As one can see in figure 4, the respondents agree that the MBA or PhD studies have helped them better understand the professional activity they carry out in schools, while significantly helping them improve the quality of their professional activity, therefore studies have had an outstanding impact over their profession.

When asked how they think the link between scientific research and professional practice can be improved, the respondents put first the knowledge dissemination activities, especially by publishing articles in specialized magazines, followed by the idea of establishing networks between researchers and practitioners, by disseminating research outcomes through the media, and by involving practitioners in the research work performed at the academic level. The data are illustrated in the chart below (figure no. 5).



**Figure 5:** Strategies to improve the relationship between educational practices and research (%)

The perception of MBA and PhD students regarding the initial education process is particularly important for themselves as promoters of their own education process, as well as for researchers, as the latter must help transferring and implementing scientific knowledge into practice.

#### **4.2. The research based practice in schools**

Initial and continuing education is a mere aspect of research-based education. A stage as important as this one is that in which the professionals are able to use and develop professional practices using research work.

An open question questionnaire was sent in this respect to 62 education professionals with experience in the field.

Most respondents are pre-university teachers and psycho pedagogical advisers with an extensive experience in educational matters.

We were first of all interested to see the professionals' perception on the extent to which implementing the outcomes of scientific research can generate changes in their professional activity.

The practitioners admitted that the implementation of research findings produced changes in their professional status or grade. Accordingly, 75% of the respondents agreed with the above statement, while 19.2% of respondents consider that the effect upon their professional status was significantly limited or non-existent (5.8%).

Another set of questions aimed to identify sources of new ideas that practitioners could find useful when implementing new projects in a professional context.

These professionals most frequently saw colleagues within and outside their institution as important sources of new ideas. Universities and colleagues within their professional association were also identified as sources of new ideas.

Slightly fewer saw their education head offices or professional consultants as important, while publishing houses were considered important by only a small number of the respondents. Responses, recorded as percentages, are summarized in Table below:

**Table 1:** Important sources of new ideas

<b>Important sources of new ideas</b>	<b>%</b>
Head or regional office	15.4
Universities	21.2
Professional associations	25
Professional consultants	13.5
Publishing houses	3.8
Colleagues from inside the institution	42.3
Colleagues from outside the institution	46.2
Training centers	11.5
Unions	0

By profile, we can see that, for example, there are differences between educational councilors who prefer to get their new ideas from the head office while upper secondary teachers choose firstly colleagues from outside their institution followed by colleagues from within their own institution.

Regarding the source of information about research findings, practitioners identify colleagues from outside their institution as the main source of information, followed by the universities and colleagues from inside their institution.

**Table 2:** How practitioners got information about research findings

Sources of information about research findings	%
Head or regional office	31.5
Universities	42.3
Professional associations	35.2
Professional consultants	24
Publishing houses	37.5
Colleagues from inside the institution	40.6
Colleagues from outside the institution	44.25
Training centres	21
Unions	0

A further set of questions referred to the ways in which practitioners implemented new developments and introduced innovations in the previous three years in projects that made use of research findings.

As it involved the use of open questions, there was a considerable degree of thematic diversity. Among the most frequently occurring themes were ideas relating to new technologies, aspects of multicultural and inter cultural education, and improving reading competencies.

The next set of questions dealt with the factors that facilitated the application of research findings and obstacles to the implementation

of research amongst practitioners. This section comprised a set of open questions and respondents were able to freely identify, in the light of their own perceptions, the factors that contributed to the application of research findings in their professional practice. The answers can be placed in different categories. At the first level, respondents mentioned an organizational culture focused on collaboration, institutional collaboration and colleagues' involvement in the process (eg. Institution collaboration, Organizational culture and a culture of collaboration, Communication within departments and with specialists from external institutions). At the second level we identified the beneficiaries' needs and their interest in effective solutions, which can be regarded as decisive factors in the implementation of research findings (eg: Research results efficiency, adapting to students' needs, students' interest in finding new things). At the third level respondents placed the factors that best related to their own interests and to practitioners' intrinsic motivation (eg. intrinsic motivation, perseverance, Openness to new practices, interest in professional development, the wish to stay in touch with the new trends), and at the fourth level were identified new technologies that facilitated the research implementation process.

A set of categories cover the factors that have hindered the implementation of research findings into professional practice. Practitioners considered the lack of resources to be an important factor preventing the introduction of new research. Respondents also identified financial resources and lack of time, stressing the heavy load of the school curriculum. Structural elements are ranked last, here comprising aspects such as an organizational culture that tends against the implementation of results, including such things as colleague or managerial reluctance and opposition to change. On a third level, the respondents considered that accessing the research and its results can also be seen as an obstacle to the use of research. Examples of these obstacles are: Lack of information and access to research; Not being able to find out about research and obstacle in accessing research results; Institutions do not communicate the results of the research in a visible way; Lack of information in rural communities In a few cases, respondents mentioned the lack of information and the difficulty of accessing consistent and coherent results that can be translated into practice, and also the fact that the

language is not always adapted to their professional needs. The chart below presents the details of the practitioner's answers, including some concrete examples:

Answering to the question: How can we improve access to research results? Respondents had the opportunity to identify examples of how access to research findings can be improved. The answers can be divided into three categories. First of all, respondents considered that access could be improved by increasing the visibility of research findings, by promoting the results conducted by universities. In this category were included such aspects as: making the results public, dissemination strategies used by universities through the publication of scientific articles that have open access or are publicly available on web pages. An interesting category of answers concerned the issue of increasing trust in research programmes that promote master or doctoral programmes. Secondly, the participants in this survey, considered that access to research findings can be improved by promoting a fruitful collaboration between those institution that provide research and those that use research. In this respect, the majority of respondents accepted the importance of a culture of collaboration between the institutions and removing the barriers – mainly bureaucratic – that can prevent open access to research. Thirdly, the practitioners focused their attention on their own practice, considering that access to results could be improved by stimulating the community's interest in research. With regard to this point the importance of using professional networks and the creation of communities of practice should be emphasized.

The last open question sought to establish practitioners' opinions concerning measures for improving the use of the research findings in practice. The answers were extremely complex. It was felt that the way people perceive changes can stimulate interest in applying research findings. In this line, one of the participants said that: "The experience and the enjoyment derived from working in this field could, for sure, motivate others".

Another category of measures related to management activity, especially the presence of a positive managerial attitude and his/her capacity to motivate the staff: "I think that central administration should put structures in place to make it easy to access and use scientific research in the educational field. That is an essential

condition for success” stated one of the respondents. Other answers referred to communication with universities and concerned improving relations in order to create clear and effective communication. Below are some of the examples offered by respondents:

Teachers in upper secondary education and school councilors are interested in research, as previous studies have already demonstrated (Levin, et.al, 2009 among others) in opposition to other authors which criticize the role of the research in shaping the educational practice in such fields as medicine, for example.

Even though they admit that the use of research results can produce changes in educational practice, respondents identified a series of obstacles that can interfere into the process. The causes are diverse and can vary, but the majority of them have already been identified in previous studies, while others causes identified complement previous research.

The practitioners that participated in this study, ranked on the first level, a combination of obstacles, starting with the lack of resources and extending to the lack of materials, including the fact that they do not have open access to the research results. Educational management, organizational culture or management style are among the obstacles that stand in the way of applying research findings, to which we should add the problems that occur within the research process.

## **5. Conclusions**

This research work brings in a priority topic for any educational system willing to achieve permanent development and improvement, i.e. the initial education and the continuing education of educators. Our data reveal the outstanding importance of research in the process of training the future professionals in the education field, while drawing our attention on the fact that this process is not deemed accomplished when studies are completed, but it is an ongoing process and a constant concern in the professionals’ life. What is worth bearing in mind is that both the initial and the continuing education cannot exist one without the other, as we simply cannot speak about research without retroactive contributions from practice. Our respondents clearly emphasize the fact that the academic

training in the research field has an important impact on their professional practice, preparing them to become reflective professionals dedicated to their own professional practice.

The study presented in this paper also outlines the need to adjust research making at the university level to the MBA and PhD students' actual needs and expectations. In this respect, the data concerning the strategies they use to get trained and informed speak for themselves. For instance, access to information sources is among the most important issues emphasized by all those undergoing an educational process, as well as by those who have already acquired professional experience. Education professionals consider as important sources the specialized magazines and books, yet they appreciate as well the face-to-face activities such as seminars and conferences or the relationship with one's colleagues. Irrespective of how professional got into contact with scientific evidence, success relies on the active dissemination of scientific findings and on the way they are presented.

A series of recommendations may appear to be interesting when it comes to improve dissemination: research dissemination must be an integrant part of the investigation process and all the parties concerned must be involved in that process, including the MBA and PhD students as promoters of research projects and direct beneficiaries of their findings. Another element worth mentioning is the need for researchers and practitioners to cooperate, which might enhance the practitioners' research skills and help appropriating the importance of research in the teaching activity. This appropriated feeling is also favoured by the establishment of peer networks at school level, as teachers admit that the main support and source of ideas is one's own colleagues.

There is no doubt that neither the initial education process, nor the teaching activity can occur in an effective and efficient way unless the entire educational ecosystem brings its contribution: from the system management in charge of promoting research in the initial and continuing education planning, passing through the positive attitudes from one's colleagues and school management, until various contributions by researchers and academics who may make the process of transferring and implementing scientific evidence easier.

This paper outlines the importance of initial and continuing education in shaping the “teacher-researcher” identity. It is obviously a long-lasting and complex process influenced by a large number of factors and circumstances, from the personal one of those directly involved in the process until organizational and systemic circumstances. A certainty is that we cannot simply forget that the students attending MBA and PhD programmes are those running the largest amount of research projects in various applied fields. The cooperation between those students, university researchers, and decision-makers might be the key for ensuring strong ties between their fields and for adjusting research to the needs issued from professional practice and the other way round.

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**TRANSNATIONAL  
ANALISYS MODEL**



# “TEACHERS’ ROLES DYNAMICS IN KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY – A TRANSNATIONAL MODEL”

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## Abstract

In the context of knowledge societies, the issue of teachers’ new roles is rapidly becoming one of the most important features in many European educational policy documents. In the same time, the social and economic status of the teachers urgently needs to be consolidated in order to successfully overcome the challenges of postmodern societies. These challenges, in particular the advances of new information and communication technologies have a huge potential in reconstructing education and teachers’ roles, competences and identities. This paper aims to identify what are the main European mental images of teachers, from a transnational perspective, taking into account as well how these images could be integrated in a possible theoretical model of teachers’ roles dynamics. This model could be used as a common starting point for further operationalization of the teachers’ new roles and competences, especially at European level.

**Keywords:** Knowledge society, European mental images, teachers’ roles dynamics, professional competences, information and communication technologies

## 1. Introduction

We live in a society that values information so much that is often called a knowledge society and indeed, if we think about the progress of human species from the dawn of civilization, everything is related to these rather elusive concepts. However, understanding that knowledge (especially in the scientific discourse) is the keystone of society is a modern concept, with roots in the Ancient Greece, popularized in Renaissance and the age of Enlightenment and incrementally improved over time until the rise of postmodern (re)constructivism paradigms. One of the most important roles in

the transmission of knowledge was historically attributed to teachers who were seen across time as either gatekeepers either initiates in what was known several thousand years ago as theology and later philosophy. But their mission was always closely related to advances of the human technology and the culture dynamics of the society in which they lived. We are now in a moment where knowledge represents power but in which teachers' social status is nothing but powerful. Of course we can't generalize the conclusions to all the European Union states because there is a great disparity between them in terms gross domestic product, investment in education or educational services offered to students. But we can, however, highlight some trends in what are the new roles of the teachers, as they are understood by experts, politicians and educators themselves.

The most important feature of knowledge society, is, in our opinion the fact that it revolves around the information and communication technologies (ICT). Marshall McLuhan coined the term "global village" in 1962 to describe the instantaneous movement of information from every quarter to every point at the same time and how the planet has been contracted into a village by electric technology. Even in his time, it was apparent that the globalization process was imminent and that the new technologies will play a fundamental role in bringing the humanity together. Much progress has been made from the times of McLuhan and education hasn't yet succeeded to integrate such major technological advances like Internet and post-PC devices in the mainstream educational process in order to deserve the title of postmodern education. Education sciences seem to be sometimes perplexed by the torrents of information, knowledge perishability and the difficulty of constructing a solid scientific foundation for pedagogy, especially when someone compares the former with a "strong" science as physics. This difficulty comes, by no surprise, from the complexity of human consciousness and manifests itself plainly in the parallelism between facts and values (expressed by Stephen Jay Gould in the concept of non-overlapping magisteria) in a venerable philosophical tradition that begins with Immanuel Kant and particularly Wilhelm Dilthey and his *Naturwissenschaften* (nature sciences) and *Geisteswissenschaften* (human sciences). On one hand, in nature sciences, the external phenomena are repeatable (and in consequence predictable) and dependent of a

finite variables series. On the other hand, human sciences seem subjective, value-dependent and orientated by their nature to the complex and often mysterious consciousness phenomena, in spite of efforts made to rationalize this area (by Durkheim and many other theoreticians). The confusion arise, in our opinion, from the overlapping between the epistemological and ontological realms in education, highly saturated with moral values and ideologies. This is because the nature of consciousness isn't yet fully understood and seems elusive to measurement instruments. Its effects can be captured in an indirect way and this is why many experts label education sciences (but also psychology and social psychology, among many others) as behavioral sciences. However, as scientists unravel the neuropsychological foundation of human learning, education becomes less of an art and more of a problem of learning engineering, based on evidence-based facts and theories, measurable and directly observable. This will open the possibility of scientific validation of many educational traditions that are used discretionary and without any solid evidence.

In the meantime, the social status of the teachers is continuously eroded by society expectations that are often unrealistic and highly exaggerated. A first step in consolidating teachers' status is identifying the specific roles and competences that are brought in by the knowledge society. In the following paragraphs we tried to highlight several profiles of such roles, developed by European Commission experts, politicians, experts in education sciences and international organizations that view education as a central issue in their activities. This list is by no means exhaustive and it tries to capture teachers' roles dynamics in a world that is increasingly more diverse but also globalized.

The authors of a recent study in the field of teacher training curricula across Europe, assert that the main competence areas are the following (Teacher Education Curricula in the EU, 2009, 53):

- specialization and pedagogical specifics;
- integration of theory with practice;
- cooperation and collaboration;
- quality assurance;
- mobility;
- leadership;

- continuous and lifelong learning.

From our point of view it is difficult to understand why the pedagogical roles and competences are defined sometimes in a rather limited way, focusing on content, since it is obvious that they also include aspects of lifelong learning, the cooperation and communication, etc. We believe it might be more useful a functional approach, which does not confuse cognitive, procedure and attitudinal dimensions of competences.

European Commission, drawing on the findings of a document developed by the Teachers and Trainers cluster (Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications, 2005), considers that the following principles are the underlying structures of the teacher teaching competences development (Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on improving the quality of teachers, 2007, 2-3):

- it is well-qualified profession: all teachers are graduates from higher education institutions (and those working in the field of initial vocational education are highly qualified in their professional area and have a suitable pedagogical qualification). Every teacher has extensive subject knowledge, a good knowledge of pedagogy, the skills and competences required to guide and support learners, and an understanding of the social and cultural dimension of education.
- it is a profession of lifelong learners: teachers are supported to continue their professional development throughout their careers. They and their employers recognise the importance of acquiring new knowledge, and are able to innovate and use evidence to inform their work.
- it is a mobile profession: mobility is a central component of initial and continuing teacher education programmes. Teachers are encouraged to work or study in other European countries for professional development purposes.
- it is a profession based on partnership: teacher education institutions organise their work collaboratively in partnership with schools, local work environments, work-based training providers and other stakeholders.

The same document establishes two categories of teacher competences: a) related to skills somewhat improperly translated in

the Romanian version as aptitudes and b) related to reflective practice and research. The first category includes the following items (Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on improving the quality of teachers, 2007): a) identify the specific needs of each individual learner, and respond to them by deploying a wide range of teaching strategies; b) support the development of young people into fully autonomous lifelong learners; c) help young people to acquire the competences listed in the European Reference Framework of Key Competences; d) work in multicultural settings (including an understanding of the value of diversity, and respect for difference); e) work in close collaboration with colleagues, parents and the wider community. The second category related to reflective practice and research, summarizes a different set of skills (Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on improving the quality of teachers, 2007): a) continue to systematically reflect on their own practice; b) to undertake research pedagogical teaching methodology based on the examination of the reaction of students in their own classroom; c) incorporate into their teaching and academic research results pedagogical teaching methodology based on the examination of the reaction of students in their own classroom; d) evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching strategies and amend them accordingly; e) assess their own training needs.

European Union Council recommends another document development of the following skills in the initial training of teachers (The Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, reunited on 15 November 2007, on improving the quality of teacher education):

- create a safe and attractive school environment which is based on mutual respect and cooperation;
- teach effectively in heterogeneous classes of pupils from diverse social and cultural backgrounds and with a wide range of abilities and needs, including special education needs;
- work in close collaboration with colleagues, parents and the wider community;
- participate in the development of the school or training centre in which they are employed;

- develop new knowledge and be innovative through engagement in reflective practice and research;
- make use of ICT in their various tasks, as well as in their own continuing professional development;
- become autonomous learners in their own career-long professional development.

In another recent European document on the topic of teacher training, “2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)” – “Education and Training in a Europe of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” it is clearly stated that “improving the quality of teachers, as it is a key factor for achieving quality results, focus on teacher quality, attracting and selecting the best candidates in education, continuous professional development of high quality, improving teachers’ competences and strengthening school management” are first order requirements is the complex work of modernizing education.

Despite the obvious attempts at systematization and adaptation to knowledge society values , the teachers’ competences profile – as conceived by the European Commission and the Council of the European Union – remains rather less integrated theoretically, formulated in general terms and not operationalized. This phenomenon reflects a certain confusion in the European mental picture of teacher education.

An OECD document – “Teachers Matter” also noted the need to develop competences profiles in order to align the needs of educational performance, professional and school development. Authors also presented several role changes that reflect the trends of contemporary society (OECD, 2005, 3):

A. At the individual student level:

- initiating and managing learning processes;
- responding effectively to the learning needs of individual learners;
- integrating formative and summative assessment.

B. At the classroom level:

- teaching in multi-cultural classrooms;
- new cross-curricular emphases;
- integrating students with special needs.

C. At the school level:

- working and planning in teams;
- evaluation and systematic improvement planning;
- ICT use in teaching and administration;
- management and shared leadership.

D. At the level of parents and the wider community:

- providing professional advice to parents;
- building community partnerships for learning.

Based on these new roles, we can build sets of competences that take into account the following aspects of educational policy (OECD, 2005, 9-11):

- shifting the emphasis from quantity to quality in the of teachers' training activities and the need to develop competences profiles that align the needs of educational performance, professional and school development;
- restructuring of teachers' professional development based on the principle that there is a continuum between the initial and continuing training;
- assuring flexibility for the professional training of teachers;
- transformation of teaching work in a cognitively saturated profession;
- giving schools more responsibilities in management.

In the literature, the professional skills of teachers are grouped by experts Teachers Training Institute in four categories (Iucu, 2004):

- The first category includes the competences "relative to the polyvalency of job (profession) as educator in teaching various subjects" (Iucu, 2004, 41). It is necessary for any teacher to be well trained in the field he or she is specialized in i.e. to assimilate and restructure his or her knowledge system periodically, entering into resonance with both the new findings in this field and with innovations in teaching methodology. The managers of educational institutions also require the teacher to submit a growing effort towards a better designing the classroom activities. There are also appreciated teacher's spontaneity and the ability to build "classroom activities in which students can have the same

competences at the intersection of more subjects” (idem). Special emphasis is also given to the ability to arouse students’ attention and keep it at a high level during all teaching activities, i.e. experimenting appropriate motivators.

- A second category of competences relates to the independent work carried out by the teacher in classroom, i.e. the ability to correlate the goals initially set with the extremely diverse and dynamic situations, psychologically (and in particular cognitively), that may occur in the classroom.
- The next category of competences relates to the teacher’s skills in assessment and evaluation, differentiating levels of training and the establishment of success standards and indicators.
- Finally, the last category of competences relates to the authority teacher should have, that cannot be reached, except by respecting students’ age, their individual particularities and especially the ability to quickly identify students’ reactions, efficiently resolve interpersonal psycho-emotional or cognitive problems, which can occur at any time during the lesson.

If we want to broaden the perspective on teacher competences, then we can consider some prominent taxonomies and viewpoints highlighted by the American education system. According to the findings of the study “What Teachers Should Know and Be Able To Do” from 1997, conducted by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and with the institutionalized work practices, the most important skills of teachers are focused on the following (Iucu, 2004):

- Commitment to the student; the student is located in the center of the training;
- Correlating learning program to the intrinsic students’ motivations, while respecting the psychological, cultural, religious or racial peculiarities; the deepening of specialization, including training methodology that closely resembles European standards;
- A modern learning management system, which involves both teacher accountability and objective methods for monitoring learning activities;

- The fourth category refers to the self-improvement of teachers, i.e. the accumulation of expertise, especially in terms of the processes used to support student learning effort;
- Teacher's relationships with his or her colleagues, school management, decision-making factors from the locality in which operates their school.

From the analysis of the documents presented above and others (e.g. Schratz, 2009), we can observe a great diversity of ideas about teachers' competence and roles profile, articulated around European mental images of great intensity:

### *1) The mobile teachers*

The importance of increasing the mobility of teachers should be seen as a way of developing multi-, intercultural and also language competences, among others. The teacher of “lifelong learning society” is one that: knows several languages and collaborates with colleagues from abroad, in the framework of programmes such as Erasmus+; is interested in the culture, traditions and customs of other European countries and beyond; harness the diversity in all its forms (especially ethnic and religious) at both school and in the community. We can also discuss and mobility in curriculum through the appropriate use of ECTS and European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

### *2) Teachers as specialists in knowledge management*

This set of competences is from our point of view closely related aspect of metacognitive skills. European mental images are very clear about the fact that we live in a society where the real “currency” is information. The educational imagery promoted and developed in Brussels presents contemporary society as a “knowledge society” fully manifested through the process of “lifelong learning”. In this context, the subject (specialization) competences are rather less important than pedagogical competences (that have a metacognitive quality). These metacognitive skills relate to the identification, selection, prioritization, value, adaptation, evaluation and use of

information and their appropriate communication and transmission, particularly through new technologies.

3) *Teachers as experts in the use of new information and communication technologies*

Using information and communication technologies (ICT) is one of the constants of European mental images in teacher training. By using the computer and internet, spatial distance is reduced, making way for a virtual social proximity. Teachers (and students) from remote states and communities can communicate via email, forums, virtual learning environments, social networks, websites etc. These phenomena open new ways for the creation of virtual learning communities (including groups of experts, advisors, professional associations) encouraging the exchange of best practices among teachers but also innovation and educational research. ITC relevance (particularly of Internet, in the context of Web 2.0/3.0) opens the perspective for creating new types of European curricula accessible to all those who are interested, a phenomenon that will have an impact as important as the invention of printing, from our point of view, especially in the context of computer-assisted instruction (CAI).

4) *Teachers as researchers*

Teacher's pedagogical research competences represented constants in the structure of European and national mental images. In the European Research Area (ERA), training is seen as "evidence-based" (i.e. based on the results of scientific research). From our point of view, this goal is difficult to achieve since many aspects of education are not scientifically validated (they are however based on pseudoscientific traditions and customs accumulated over time). Pedagogy, as a science, is faced with the absence of a European database (with experimental scientific research in recent years), the insufficient standardization of the curriculum (especially in the realm of evaluation) and the disinterest of many teachers in relation to innovation and pedagogical research. Michelle Brendel and Denis Scuto presented in the articolul *Ein Schoul – A reseach based primary school in Luxembourg. An inclusive classroom approach* an interesting and useful perspective on the development of closer

links between education and research (ENTEP, 2009). In this context, competences for active, critical and responsible reflection are very important in the process of professional development.

#### *5) Teachers as lifelong learners*

Teachers' professional development includes three major stages: initial education (pre-service training), practical training and continuous education (in-service training). The mental image points out, in this case, to a more coherent articulation of the three steps in order to adapt the professional competences to the new challenges arising in the educational environment. It is also necessary for us to define them more clearly on all three levels but also to encourage the teachers, trainers, and decisional factors' responsibility regarding the importance of lifelong learning.

#### *6) Teachers as active members of the community*

This is a relatively recent European image existing especially in states with a long democratic tradition, and less in Eastern Europe, that was under the influences of the Warsaw Pact. In this particular case, the teacher is seen as a liaison between the other social actors, constantly preoccupied by the curriculum relevance for students in relation to the knowledge society and the labor market. The teacher starts and also participates in local, regional, national and international education partnerships in order to optimize the educational process and his or her own professional competences. Additionally, in this case, the teacher's professional identity and status in society are very important. It is obvious that a less clearly defined identity will lead to a rather poor involvement.

#### *7) Teachers as leaders*

This is a radical image, which is really essential to a knowledge society. Since information is the "currency", wouldn't be normal for teachers (as people who shape the new generations) to have something to say in social and educational key policy issues? Unfortunately the reality in Romania and in other countries raises questions about this kind of reasoning, and on the advertised importance of education in (and for) society. If education is so valuable, as argued, why, in Romania, for example, the positions of Ministry of Education, general

inspector, specialized inspectors and directors of various other educational institutions are not filled out by specialists in education sciences? This double standard is, in fact, as we argued in another paper, reflecting a low professional status of teachers and pedagogy (Strungă C. and Strungă A., 2008; NESSE, 2008).

#### *8) Teacher as promoter of quality in education*

This role is associated with a mental picture omnipresent in European documents mentioned above. Issues of quality link directly with the professional training, reflective practice, partnerships with the social environment, the use of ICT, but especially with the internal and external evaluation, and also with a much desired “culture of quality”. The term of “quality” together with the related notions: quality circles, quality assurance, quality audit, quality control, quality management, quality indicators, quality labels, quality standards are rooted in industry and were introduced in education science without sufficient conceptual integration in the theoretical scaffolding. Professor Ronald Sultana rejects the ideas of European benchmark as an appropriate assessment tool for measuring the quality of education in favor of following more general principles such as the right to education for all, education efficiency (by focusing on students’ learning outputs), equity, economy (in the sense of supporting the underprivileged, sometimes going up to a certain positive discrimination) and the reinforcement of learners’ potential (Sultana, 2002).

#### *9) Teacher as a role model, life-shaper*

This role is seen as an example in and for life and a representative of the community elite (as was the former elementary school teacher in Romanian villages), one that assures the professional deontology is followed. This trend is determined in no small measure to the large number of studies using the biographical method, both the United States and in Europe. Teacher as a role model is also an eclectic image, emotionally saturated and loaded with ideological elements. It can be approached in several ways: social and civic, religious, cultural, artistic, etc. But there is the possibility that it might come in conflict with the low socioeconomic and professional status of teachers, resulting in a state of anomy

at social level, in some European states. In any case, this picture also strongly irradiates the quality of education field by suggesting new ways of reimagining education.

These clusters of competences derived from the new roles of teachers are of course, overlapping. However, we could try to put them into a theoretical model with two main dimensions:

- teachers as facilitators in the process of developing identities, that take a leadership role in local, regional, national, European and international communities, in order to assure the progress of science and overall culture (clusters 1,6,7 and 9).
- teachers as knowledge managers, that, in a broad understanding of this concept includes the use of ICT, action – research loop, lifelong learning and assuring quality in education (clusters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8).

In order to be operational, this model needs to be detailed and tested in a transnational context and it may be one of the potential starting points in discussing what it means to be a teacher in the postmodern society.

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