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TEACHER EDUCATION POLICIES: MORE THAN A HOBBY FOR ACADEMICS?

The position of ENTEP

The European Network on Teacher Education Policies (ENTEPE) was founded in 1999 with the main aim of developing, discussing, and reflecting on teacher education policy issues in initial teacher education as well as in continuous professional development. As a no-budget network of ministers' representatives that organises its own meetings and agenda, ENTEPE is an independent body and a high-level discussion group. On the one hand, there are more or less direct links to the national Ministers of Education, on the other hand, there is a constructive link to the European Commission. ENTEPE is neither a decision group nor an expert group. It is an advisory group or reference group for individual member states and also acts as a sounding board for the European Commission.

Policy development and implementation

In the space given, I would like to identify a crucial issue in European Teacher Education Policies: In many cases we are articulate and clear in the discussion of problems and we manage to design solutions based on theoretical foundations and examples of best practice, but the implementation stage is often a "limited success". A brief presentation of issues related to the ITE-CPD continuum in connection with the quality of teacher education shall serve as an example to demonstrate that this is not only a private assessment of the situation; in the executive summary of the *Impact Assessment* of the Communication on *Improving the Quality of Teacher Education* (2007) it says:

Progress in improving school education is slow; there is a perceived shortage

of skills amongst teachers; this is currently difficult to remedy because there is a lack of coherence and continuity between different, often separate, elements of teachers' education; and in any case, the amount of in-service training available to practising teachers is very limited. (4)

The connection between learning outcomes and the quality of teaching has been made on several occasions (Common European Principles 2005, OECD 2005, Communication 2007) and evidence-based statements on the changing role of teachers or the high demand for new skills and competences abound in the literature and in European documents. All decision-makers across Europe know that this involves

- redesigning the national systems of teacher education
- systematically interlinking ITE, induction, and CPD
- making CPD attractive.

In short: Spending money on this huge national enterprise of upgrading the teaching force. This is also recognised in the 2006 Interim Report: "Most Governments seem to recognise that the necessary reforms cannot be accomplished within current levels and patterns of investment." (JIR 2006, 6) Looking around for good practice, the Swedish government action LÄRARLYFTET is exemplary:

The Government has set aside SEK 2.9 billion [€ 312.000.000] for the period 2007-2010 to allow teachers to receive 80 per cent of their current pay while studying. [...] Nearly a quarter of all teachers will receive further education over the next few years. Some 30 000 fully qualified teachers will be offered a chance to study at a higher education institution. (Läraryftet)

But this is clearly the exception to the rule. CPD is a highly problematic issue across Europe not because we have failed at policy level, but the transfer of European policies to the national level and the resulting implementation stage at national level have not been successful.

Critical issue: good policy resulting in little action

This point will be elaborated on the basis of two ENTEP papers on the continuous professional development of teachers from 2002 and 2007 and

other European policy papers.

Statement 1 from *Common European Principles*, 2005:

Teachers' work [...] should be embedded in a professional continuum of lifelong learning which includes initial teacher education, induction and continuing professional development, as they cannot be expected to possess all the necessary competences on completing their initial teacher education.

(4)

Statement 2 from *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers*. Executive Summary. November 2004:

The stages of initial teacher education, induction and professional development need to be much better interconnected to create a more coherent learning and development system for teachers. A statement of teacher competencies and performance standards at different stages of their career will provide a framework for the teacher development continuum. As part of this there needs to be a clear set of expectations about teachers' own responsibilities for their on-going development, and a structure of support to facilitate their growth. (11)

These two statements illustrate that, at policy level, there is widespread agreement on priorities on a number of points; one is the necessity to link the different parts of teacher education (ITE, induction, CPD), the other is on the high importance of CPD for all teachers. However, this agreement at policy level has not resulted in the envisaged actions in a number of the EU member states. Two examples shall illustrate this point.

Example one: Induction

I will focus on the induction phase first. There is evidence to support the assumption that an induction phase at the entrance of a teaching career increases the quality of teaching as well as self-confidence and self-esteem among newly qualified teachers. Why, then, would any country want to do without this instrument? Nevertheless, according to the latest available data from Eurybase 2002/03, there are sixteen countries in Europe that have no induction phase for their teachers (Commission 2007a, 8).

In this respect, England may well stand for good practice:

The induction period combines an individualised programme of support, which provides opportunities for NQTs [newly qualified teachers] to further develop their knowledge, skills and achievements in relation to the standards for the award of QTS [qualified teacher status], with an assessment of their performance. It takes account of the NQT's strengths and areas for development as set out in the Career Entry and Development Profile which each NQT brings from initial teacher training to their first teaching post. Such profiles summarise information about the new teacher's strengths and about priorities for their further professional development. (Training and Development Agency for Schools)

To call for research, good practice, and peer learning activities is one thing, but to then ignore the results yielded by research and the options provided by peer learning activities is another. This can be reformulated more pointedly: The present weakness in European education is not policy, but its implementation, which is a national affair. There is no lack of knowledge about the measures to be taken; there is rather a lack of political will to implement policy decisions.

Implementation problems

A policy paper like the *Common European Principles* of 2005, which was welcomed by ENTEP and disseminated across Europe in the Coordination Notes (Gassner 2005a, 4) and the ENTEP homepage from 2005 onward, took almost three years to be eventually launched in a toned-down version as a *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament* in September 2007. How can Europe reach the 2010 targets when it takes three years to get such a policy paper published!

It is generally acknowledged that teachers are the key players in education and particularly in the race to meet the 2010 targets. And Paulo Santiago from the OECD is just one of the experts to list measures that increase quality: they are

- selection into teaching

- mandatory induction periods
- teacher profiles
- statements of job competences and performance standards. (Gassner, 2005b, 7)

Yet, while the urgency of the situation is recognised in the 2006 Interim Report, action on the part of the commission is slow or non-existent.

Should it not be possible to gather a panel of European experts to negotiate a research-informed list of measures that are known to increase the quality of education? And why can such priority measures not be EU-funded or at least substantially co-funded? “For many countries funding remains a key challenge and an obstacle to implementing the modernisation agenda” (JIR 2006, 10), the Joint Interim Report reads. However, financial arguments are often used as killer phrases and could be swept away if there were easy-access European funding for this kind of high-priority structural measures.

EU policy and national policies

A second aspect of this issue is the failure to translate agreed policy statements into concrete policy steps on a national level as a necessary transfer before implementation. “Many – but by no means all – countries have now developed lifelong learning policy statements, for example strategy documents or national action plans.” (JIR 2006, 7) This simply means that two years before 2010 a number of European states have no lifelong learning policy statements, let alone action plans. This illustrates that there is a wide gap between policy knowledge among European experts and policy awareness among national decision-makers; and the gap is even wider between these groups and national teacher educators, who, in many cases, are no serious players in the national policy debate.

Example two: Continuous professional development

This point can be illustrated with reference to the ITE-CPD continuum (initial teacher education – continuous professional development). There is broad

agreement on the fact that a teacher's education is lifelong and that ITE should foreshadow CPD just as CPD should systematically link back to ITE. Nevertheless, there are still a number of countries without a systematic concept for CPD that is based on and strongly linked to the ITE curriculum. This is partly due to the fact that in many countries CPD is still supply-driven and would have to be totally restructured. Introducing change in a national system meets with resistance because it destabilises existing power structures and entrenched flows of money.

Whereas CPD needs an adequate time frame to be sustainable, it must also be flexible enough to cater for individual needs. It looks more than promising to go for individual profiles of strengths and weaknesses at the entry point of a teaching career (England). This should be complemented by individual professional development plans, negotiated with and supervised by the school head, possibly in cooperation with the inspectorate where this exists. (ENTEP, Kerger, Uzerli 2007, OECD 2005)

If there is agreement in theory, if this is seen as best practice, what stops us from implementing it? Some countries delay or refuse implementation for various reasons (finances, power structures, lack of national policy, teacher union), others pay lip service. Austria is a case in point. Since October 2007 ITE and CPD have been housed in the new Universities of Education, but not a single one of the policy measures mentioned above has been put in place. Another interesting observation based on this situation is the fact that Austria now looks good in European charts published for instance by Eurydice as on paper the policy is in place.

ENTEP perspectives

This brings me back to ENTEP and another crucial function of the network, which is a forum mid-air between the national member states and the European Commission. Whereas the official statistical data give one truth, ENTEP discussions and papers often uncover another truth. It is this search for truth based on a number of perspectives that is at the heart of ENTEP and

that is one of the strengths of the network.

Paul Holdsworth (European Commission) identified several critical issues in today's teacher education debate (cf. Proceedings of TEPE Conference 2008, Ljubljana), reminding us of our ministers' signatures on papers that many of them have kept to themselves. Following this line of thought, I argue for an intensive and disciplined dialogue between ministries of education and the teacher education institutions. Thus, I would have expected the Communication on *Improving the Quality of Teacher Education*, which was eventually published in August 2007, to be sent out to all national teacher education institutions for discussion, comment and feedback. Similarly, I would have expected ministers to inform all national teacher education institutions about European documents and agreements which they signed in November 2007.

Such a process would broaden the national discussion fora, it would activate the think tanks, and it would create a more widespread awareness of teacher education policy. This would help to close the gap between theory and practice and between policy decision-makers, practitioners and researchers. Refusing this dialogue means refusing the solutions we need at national and European levels.

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