

The Continuous Professional Development of Teachers in EU Member States: New Policy Approaches, New Visions

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*“Tell me - I might forget,
show me – I might remember,
involve me and I shall understand.”*

(Chinese proverb)

Introduction

This text, based upon reports from ENTEPE members, aims to give a brief overview of the latest policy visions, approaches and possible interventions in the Continuous Professional Development¹ of Teachers in Europe. The second aim is to stimulate discussion in these countries and encourage the exchange of ideas, to promote reflection and the consideration of examples of other approaches, according to national needs in the context of various traditions in Teacher Education and Training. This text will not describe the status quo in EU Member States; such data are available in different studies from other European networks (see Eurydice, The information network on education in Europe, for such detailed data for one source)².

General Background

At the Feldkirch Conference on “Strategies of Change in Teacher Education- European Views”, organised by Otmar Gassner, (January 2002) the focus on CPD was addressed in the opening statement: “(...) the professionalism of teachers has assumed top priority. In order to gain and renew the skills needed for their profession, teachers should be immersed in the process of lifelong learning – and should ensure that their pupils are made aware of the importance of their own learning as a lifelong process.(...)”³.

Considering the current social, cultural, economic and - naturally - educational requirements for change in the societies of all European countries, there is unanimous agreement that all teachers should be provided during their career with opportunities to update the skills they need to perform their tasks as well as possible, and thus achieve the aims of a high quality education in their working fields.

While teachers are regarded as experts in learning with an adequate knowledge of educational theory and subject matters on which to build their classroom skills, this expertise increasingly has to become the expertise of a reflective lifelong learner, who is willing and able to understand her/his professional career as a constantly self evaluating process of personal and professional growth, instead of merely conserving existing classroom practices and passing them on to newcomers.

¹ In the context of lifelong learning more and more countries refer to CPD rather than ‘in-service-training’, it seems to be a more precise description of the further development of personal qualifications, profiles and competences and also seems to pay more attention to the continuity of provision throughout the various stages of professional career.

² <http://www.eurydice.org>

³ Gassner, O. (2002) Strategies of Change in Teacher Education. European Views. Conference Proceedings ENTEPE/BLK conference. 18 – 19 January, 2002, Feldkirch, Austria. <http://www.pa-feldkirch.ac.at/entep/texte/paedag200.pdf>

Keeping in mind the evolution of educational research in correlation with societal changes, teaching is regarded as a social activity which needs time, freedom and flexibility to respond to constantly changing circumstances. The need to redefine the role of, and the obligation for, CPD is therefore an item accorded high priority in many working groups in the European debate and is seen as very important by the public as well.

The fact that individual teachers have to take more and more ownership of their further professional development is also widely accepted. Although teachers' roles are changing, and they are expected to be self-directed learners, able and motivated to respond to change and to meet the varied requirements of their students, it must be the responsibility of all the relevant institutions and responsible bodies to respond to specific needs for further education, such as improving teaching and the actual classroom situation, learning outcomes, dealing with heterogeneity and cultural diversity, social and economic changes etc. Equally, it is the responsibility of the employer to provide appropriate working conditions and allocate sufficient resources to make such a continuum of professional development possible.

In the context of lifelong learning, CPD is a key issue, going far beyond the traditional concept of In-Service Training, which up to now has been the only place for teacher further education in some European countries. Policy makers and participating institutions in Teacher Education and Training are aware of the need to support teacher professional development which aims at the auto- and co-construction of knowledge and know-how as well as enhancing the individual choice of teachers meeting their need to further develop or strengthen their personal competences. Teachers are thus regarded as recipients of knowledge transfer as well as inventors, researchers and analysts.

Overall it can be argued that we are moving away from the concept of a receptive formation, where the decision makers (political or administrative authorities) recommend or oblige teachers to attend courses, looking for responses to questions which had not been asked. CPD on the contrary wants to encourage staff, school leaders and other partners in this field to participate in this lifelong attempt, and to conceive it as a constant dynamic process in which they themselves are active players.

Different understanding of, and conditions for, professional development in a lifelong learning context

The key phases that teachers go through during their career are more or less the same in all European countries despite different national backgrounds and traditions. They all enter the profession in institutions as academic learners (with increasing 'Universitisation' in Initial Teacher Education in all Member States); in some countries more than others this is linked to schools as the field of exemplary practice and studies to provide future teachers with theoretical and practical insights into their future profession and to enable them to reflect emerging new requirements as well as reflecting upon their personal process of developing the skills needed.

Researchers identify different stages when referring to the multidimensional aspects of professional development. Some regard the stages as the preparation, appointment, induction and in-service, whereas others speak of career-relevant phases like pre-service, induction, competency building, enthusiasm and growth, career frustration, stability and stagnation and finally career wind-down and career exit. (Bolam 1990⁴, and Kremer-Hayon & Fessler 1991⁵)

⁴ Bolam, R. (1990) Recent developments in England and Wales, in B. Joyce (Ed.) (1990) *Changing School Culture through Staff Development*, the 1990 ASCD Yearbook. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Virginia, USA, pp. 147 – 167.

⁵ Kremer-Hayon, L. & Fessler, R. (1991), *The inner world of school principals: reflections on career life stages*, paper presentation, 'Educational Development: the contribution of research on teachers' thinking.

Considering that this process of lifelong professional development and learning involves several changes, one can imagine that teachers' professional skills and work-related problems are very different when entering working life and toward the later years of their career. Those are mainly changes in thinking, in conceptions of knowledge, in conceptions of learning in general as well as in self-conceptions of their own learning process, their image of being a teacher, their command of the teaching subject with all the changes over time and environmental changes of the work available.

Many countries have up to now paid little attention to systemic approaches with a special focus on the changes in educational needs in these different phases of a teaching career. Although policies stressing the continuum of teachers' professional development are under discussion in several countries, the sometimes simplistic idea of a linear continuum seems to go along with the aim to achieve uniform educational outcomes or the political goal of being able to control the provision of teacher education in a national setting.

There are various international research findings about the modes for professional development and further learning of teachers and most of them stress the fact "(...) that teachers have not generally taken an active part in the production of knowledge about their own teaching (...)" as Day (1997)⁶ describes it.

Questions such as how teachers may become active in this field and reflective towards their own thinking, their personal theories and approaches (their personal models and schemata), their planning, their methodology in class and following actions - in other words their mind-sets, their conception of what it is to be a teacher or even a good teacher in a certain subject, a certain environment or cultural setting, a national tradition, a European context, etc. - have obviously not been subject to longitudinal studies in detail.

But on the other hand Schön (1992) comes to the conclusion that if teachers are not supported throughout their careers to develop reflective teaching at different levels "(...) teachers are cut off, then, both from the possibility of reflecting and building on their own know-how and from the conclusion that could serve them as spring-boards to new ways of seeing things (...)"⁷. One of the great challenges is therefore to achieve the overall aim that CPD is perceived as a need and as a right by all teachers.

Future challenges and visions in the field of CPD and lifelong learning of teachers

For many countries the magic reference year in the field of Teacher Education as a whole, and specifically CPD and lifelong learning strategies, seems to be 2010, corresponding with the Bologna Process and a parallel attempt to meet the requirements of the Lisbon Convention.

The growing awareness that all European citizens should benefit from an increasing quality of education and thus be able to become active members of the knowledge society requires a profile of teachers who have the skills and competences to accompany future citizens in this process of education, evolving new skills and the expected mobility.

Ensuring the improvement of quality, enhancing their assurance, promoting necessary changes, activating possible change agents and in general recognising teachers as key players in the implementation and intellectual dissemination of the reforms required, requires a high quality professional identity.

These changes are not just about changing curricula or designing certain courses and possibly making them mandatory, hoping then the required changes will eventually take

Fourth International Conference of the International Study Association on Teacher Thinking. 23-27 September, University of Surrey.

⁶ Day, Ch. (1997) In-Service Teacher Education in Europe: conditions and themes for development in the 21st century. *British Journal of In-service Education*, Vol. 23. No.1, 1997, p.42.

⁷ Schön, D.A. (1992) *La formación de profesionales reflexivos*. Barcelona. Paidós/MEC

place. We are dealing with a change of philosophy, actually creating a culture change in the professional development of teachers, their self concept and professional identity.

The question of how we can really make things happen in a time of ageing teaching staff and early retirement of teachers all over Europe, the risk of shortages in most countries, the lack of resources and many other obstacles, creates a constant challenge for policy makers today.

In his preview of the overall aim and agenda for the Conference on "Teacher Professional Development for the Quality and Equity of Lifelong Learning" in Lisbon (27-28 September 2007) Bartolo Campos pointed out that "(...) Improving teachers' education in order to respond to the new challenges faced by education and training systems in terms of lifelong learning, is therefore the first objective of the Education and Training 2010 programme as defined by the Council of the European Union and ratified by the European Council. It aims to promote cooperation between Member States' education and training policies so that they can become a world reference of efficiency and equity, and contribute to the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy and to the development of active citizenship.(...)". (Conference Preview, Lisbon 2007).

"Key competences for lifelong learning", as defined in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council in December 2006, are considered as relevant in schools across the EU member states and accordingly in Teacher Education as well. They are in specific subject areas:

- communication in the mother tongue,
- communication in foreign languages,
- mathematical competence and competence in science and technology.

More cross-curricular competences are:

- digital competence,
- learning to learn,
- social and civic competences,
- sense of initiative and entrepreneurship,
- cultural awareness and expression.

The eight key competences are underpinned by qualities to be developed such as critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem solving, risk assessment, decision taking, and constructive management of feelings.

The role of future CPD should, then, be to support teachers in service and provide them with the conditions and opportunities to further develop these professional and personal competences and acquire new competences like:

In the subject fields:

- acquire new knowledge in their subjects
- the structuring and restructuring of knowledge
- constructivist strategies in knowledge processing in their subjects
- learner orientation and diagnostic competence

In didactic matters:

- active learning strategies
- responding to individual learning processes and learning progression
- choosing or designing appropriate material for differentiated learning opportunities
- evaluating and documenting the different stages of progress

- promoting discovery learning opportunities

In pedagogical and social matters:

- appreciating heterogeneity
- managing diversity
- promoting cultural awareness
 - language awareness
 - learning awareness
- promoting social learning
- working with parents from different cultural or national backgrounds
- promoting respect, tolerance and collaboration in class and the wider school community

Working in teams with other teachers and professionals who are involved with the same learning groups seems to be a competence per se, like collaborating with parents and other social partners. Considering the constantly changing societies in a global world and the challenges that accompany these rapid changes, they undoubtedly require new competences that teachers might not have been able to develop during their initial teacher education.

Greater coherence between the different phases of teacher education

The term 'continuous professional development' implies that the different phases of teacher education should be designed as a system with coherence and continuity. Several countries stress the need that Initial Teacher Education, Induction and Continuous Professional Development should correspond to one consistent teacher education policy, through which teachers could build on such a foundation throughout the different stages of their process of qualification and professionalisation.

While it is a great support for students in their initial phase to be in contact with experienced teachers in their practical studies at school, it is also of great benefit to serving teachers to become aware of recent findings in their subject matters or the pedagogical field in general, and it would give schools access to a wider context of intellectual life and to research developments in different fields. From this perspective, CPD is not simply a process of 'updating' but one of continuous growth, depth, enrichment, sharing and change.

In this respect, researchers in the field of education will benefit from cooperation and partnerships, the experiences of students with classroom situations, with the individual teacher and the whole system, and will consider these findings in their future hypotheses and development of concepts, to contribute to a higher quality in Initial Teacher Education.

Practicing teachers will probably feel re-empowered by this newly initiated "iterative process of movement between practice and performance" - as Senge describes learning in teams - and will feel newly motivated to respond to the changes initiated by policy makers, school planners and their personal needs for change, and will more likely want to catch up with new cognitive and pedagogical demands, knowing that they are active partners in this overall process.⁸

Quality development and assurance and higher levels of qualification of training and teaching staff in all institutions involved in the different phases of teacher education might be a welcome side effect of such a partnership and cooperation model, which could also include the exchange of staff in certain projects or modules.

⁸ This statement was quoted in the context of the PLA (Peer Learning Activity) on 'Schools as Learning Communities' in The Hague, 2006

Universities and higher education institutions should, then, be encouraged to operate as providers of demand-driven CPD programmes. In some countries regional centres to deliver CPD are planned, with a greater integration of Higher Education Institutions and Training Institutions as well as traditional CPD providers, not only for reasons of synergy but also to share experiences and research findings and to strengthen schools and participating institutions as learning and research communities.

The role of the Universities in Teacher Education, which is very ambiguous in many countries at present, is expected to be more adequately met through such partnerships and this will at the same time construct a clearer expectation that teachers - as mentors, specialised and experienced teachers - would be involved in Teacher Education and Training, as well adding value to the work of schools and providing valuable insights for in depth action-research in schools, which has been neglected in many countries.

From merely individualistic engagement in CPD to a more systemic view in the learning school or school as learning community

If, as policy makers claim, teachers must engage in lifelong learning and continuous professional development, then schools must be supported to become learning organisations in which these efforts are understood as systemic challenges and not only individualistic commitments to differently perceived personal or institutional needs. At the school level, policies to encourage teachers' lifelong learning can only be effective if the responsible institutions create learning environments in which evidence-based and reflected practice are appreciated, in which continuous training is recognised as necessary and empowering, and in which a supporting system is a natural model.

In the context of the above mentioned Feldkirch Conference, at which CPD was an important topic, Gassner summarises several issues in one of his articles, addressing them as part of "the far-reaching decisions that lie ahead of us" (2002, p.136). One of the conclusions implies that schools should be made responsible for the CPD of their staff and the quality of teaching.

The expertise teachers need at one type of school or in one working or learning community (depending on regional aspects, the number of pupils, gender aspects, diversity of various factors, socio-cultural aspects of the area etc.) might not be in the least comparable with the expertise needed in another school from the same regional or national context.

The setting of explicit expectations and objectives by schools - in terms of improving School development, pupils' achievements, social cohesion and dealing with diversity - can motivate teachers to become key partners and take an active part in this collective learning process.

In an atmosphere of encouragement and the exchange of knowledge and experience, in which staff training needs may become obvious without offending anyone, and in which strategies for improvement can be aligned with school priorities, it can be expected that there will be a greater opportunity to develop new approaches and practices along with a greater effect of ownership and authenticity in personal achievements. The ability and willingness to share ideas, and the competence to work in teams are, ideally, preconditions for teachers in such an environment but they are also the results of the continuing interaction of personal and systemic needs.⁹

Future employers request that students take part in cooperative and self-directed learning, and teaching competences are required to enhance this way of learning, yet teachers themselves have to fight continuously for the time and the opportunity to construct for

⁹ The development of a school as a learning community also requires a new role of leaders, who engage in an ongoing and reflective learning process together with their staff, school leaders who are aware of themselves as leaders and learners, who are able and anticipate environmental change, who have the energy and authenticity to activate and motivate their staff and make them understand their envisioned contribution to this process.

themselves the same kind of learning situation, which should be a natural precondition in their professional environment.

Learning schools are an important contribution to school improvement in general; a situation in which pupils experience their 'learning teachers' as positive role models in lifelong learning will have a double effect: firstly on their own learning, with a great benefit for the individual, and secondly for their changing awareness of teachers as partners in the process of learning as a lifelong endeavour. Thus, collective creativity or collaborative learning and de-learning approaches, in which staff jointly analyse the school's objectives and their potential individual part in progress, can support the appreciation of diverse opinions and different personal skills and can thus enrich and re-energise the learning community and improve student learning as well.

Such a climate of trust and reliability helps teachers to relate more easily to a view of shared vision, understanding it as a chance to encompass the individual ideas of all staff in the process of continuous personal and systemic improvement. The ability to understand staff members as resources whose development is key to organisational performance, regardless of their specific role or status, is one very important competence that school leaders should have in their professional profile as the 'motor' of such a community.

As in other professions in society, school staff must increasingly be recognised as potentially active and equal partners in several important fields at school, like voluntary co-leaders, participating in decision-making circles, anticipating change and reframing problems.¹⁰

Teachers' individual development plans

In such learning communities, as well as in other systemic approaches "individual development plans" serve different functions; they are currently practiced in a few countries in Europe and are being widely considered as options for the future in many more.

An individual development plan is negotiated between the teacher and the management of the educational institution, the supervising boards or the principle of the school in cooperation with inspection boards, and can either include the whole teaching career or concentrate on further development with or without implications for promotion. In a negative way it can even be used as a penalty measure after a certain period of weak performance and resistance to further training for various reasons.

As mobility is expected of teachers and is regarded as a central component of the Initial Phase and Continuing Development Programmes, teachers with an individual development plan, and the documentation of the progress in a personal portfolio, will have easier access to opportunities for mobility in which their learning status can be better recognised, acknowledged and (after European wide mobility) valued in their home country. Personal portfolios also help teachers to reflect on the progress of their individual personal and professional development and such monitoring can even be conducted online with online-portfolios.

In the context of school evaluation and inspection some school supervisors have suggested that all schools should possess competence profiles for all their teachers, which would enable schools to identify the skills and competences of their staff more precisely. But within the concept of a learning organisation these profiles should only be used as an instrument for development and not for control. Here again trust is an important issue.

Such professional portfolios also provide transparency about the range of competences an individual teacher has to offer, when he or she applies for a new function or a position in the sector of Teacher Education; Personal profiles, extra qualifications in specific competence areas (such as the European Language Portfolio, a certificate on intercultural competences,

¹⁰ The Peer Learning Activity : "Schools as Learning Communities" conducted by the Cluster 'Teachers and Trainers' and the European Commission in The Hague in May 2006 has been a very interesting possibility of exchanging and sharing experiences, visions, questions and policy implications in this context.

on mediation, diagnosis, counselling etc.) are often preconditions for entry to certain leading posts and functions at different levels in the educational sector.

While “teachers play a vital role in enabling people to identify and develop their talents and (...) to acquire the complex range of knowledge, skills, and key competences that they will need as citizens throughout their personal, social and professional lives” effective school systems will have to provide their staff with development possibilities “to update existing skills (and competences) and/or developing new ones” to adapt to the evolving needs of learners. (European Council, 15 November 2007¹¹) The essential role of school leaders is widely accepted in this context. Further professional development in the context of career development and further qualifications for school leaders who have to meet these future expectations also have to be offered by the responsible bodies.

Different actions are being taken in several countries through strategic interventions in the field, which can include personal development plans or more general plans for certain regions, certain types of schools in a cooperation system or a whole country. Such initiatives are being planned or already established by Ministries, departments of education or at other policy levels; a few countries are even planning a system-wide change in leadership while others remain rather doubtful about the possibility of such a systemic endeavour and concentrate instead on individual further training of potential school-leaders and those in service. But distributed and shared leadership as one of the future objectives is recognised as a challenging alternative to the models of the past and best practice examples are available throughout Europe. Present structures are being changed or planned to be changed, while future leaders are already being anticipated and prepared in special CPD offers, in line with this approach.¹²

It is only possible to make school-leaders responsible for the results of school development, the outcome and success of further staff development with added quality and value, if the necessary individual opportunities and systemic conditions for learning are provided for all participants in the system. Individually, teachers can also be regarded as leaders in their field of competence, managing and realising their needs and seeing themselves as part of a team of experts of teaching and learning, in a culture of expertise at schools. This view can contribute to a challenging and a rewarding approach in CPD.

Evaluation of CPD approaches and initiatives as a means of sustainability, quality development and quality assurance

The principles underpinning School Evaluation and School Development Planning, involving school review and self-evaluation, should empower schools to take greater ownership in identifying the CPD needs of schools and of their teachers, in line with the specific objectives of each school. A system which provides for regular needs analysis should enable more efficient identification and provision of CPD concepts and programmes for whole-school development and for the development of individual teachers.

As each approach to evaluation implies a certain concept of quality, it is vital to design evaluation procedures on the basis of specific concepts of quality teaching. “If a school can justify evaluating all teachers through identical procedures, then the school is probably devoid of innovations.”¹³

Quality assurance by the evaluation of improvement in the system, as well as in the professional development of staff in correlation with school outcomes, is another important means of evaluation, which helps to govern and monitor change processes. Therefore CPD

¹¹ <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/07/st14/st14413.en07.pdf>

¹² In January 2006 a Peer Learning Seminar on ‘School Leadership’ was held in Brussels, offered by the European Commission in the context of the work of the Cluster ‘Teachers and Trainers’.

¹³ This statement was quoted from Travers, 1981, in a presentation by Michael Schratz about “Teacher Evaluation as Part of Professional Development” at the ENTEP Conference in Nicosia, Cyprus, in May 2006.

as a key factor in the effort to improve the quality of teaching must also be subject to evaluation with respect to its effective contribution to this endeavour.

By reflecting on their own work, possibly revising or even changing their self-concept and appreciating their own competences, staff should be encouraged to understand both ways of evaluation as an instrument of further developing their expertise and contributing to school development and results as a whole. They should be encouraged to clearly see this as a critical but constructive examination of their individual progress, of their own set of skills and competences, of the effectiveness of their teaching, of their classroom practice and of the school system as a whole. Such periodic reviewing and monitoring of teachers' professional development can help internalize new attitudes toward their professional understanding and can inspire their wish to raise personal standards in the field of subject competences as well as pedagogical, social and didactical skills. Beside a positive culture of feedback among all partners in the field of school and education, this professional discussion with a detached view of the system and the individual progress can certainly be one of the empowering chances to make growth and change happen.

Becoming equal partners in dealing with their own professionalism and presenting themselves productively and creatively within the school community and to other actors such as school boards or supervision bodies ought to be a condition sine qua non in a profession based on partnership, as outlined in The Common European Principles¹⁴.

In order to share the experiences and the effect of learning communities within schools in the context of lifelong learning, debates among schools and between schools and Teacher Education Institutions may contribute to an implicit and internal form of evaluation by stimulating interactions, individual cooperation or even long-term institutionalised partnerships.

Offering a communication structure that allows a continuous exchange of knowledge on the specific needs of staff or on the progress made within certain individual or institutional development efforts, encourages the partners involved to place greater emphasis on particular aspects of their own teaching, school development issues and classroom or school results.

Finally the following issues are regarded as especially relevant for national and European policy in improving the Continuous Professional Development of teachers:

- highly prescribed CPD programmes that do not take into account individual development needs, environmental conditions or the participating individuals, are not likely to succeed;
- teachers' professional development is more effective when there are systematic opportunities with conditions that allow change to happen, considering the dispositions of all parties involved;
- irrespective of national policy conditions such as autonomy, centralization, de-centralization, shared leadership or shared responsibilities among teacher education institutions, all partners in the school sector should want to establish a new learning culture and encourage teachers accordingly;
- this innovative learning culture should not be reduced to the staff at school; it should also include school boards, school supervisory bodies and parents;
- school leader development is vital to an understanding of partnerships within a school community in the process of collaborative lifelong learning;
- teachers as change agents and public actors should not be excluded from policy decision-making processes;

¹⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/principles_en.pdf

- policy makers should take advantage of opportunities to share action research outcomes and create a culture of cooperation as experts among equals.

“While responsibility for the organisation and content of education and training systems (...) rests with individual Member States (...) European cooperation has a useful role to play in helping the Member States to meet common challenges, particularly by means of the open method of coordination, which involves the development of common principles and goals, as well as joint initiatives such as peer learning activities, the exchange of experience and good practices and mutual monitoring.” This statement from the above mentioned Conclusions of the Council¹⁵ on improving the quality of teacher education should encourage all parties in the continuum of teacher education to share innovative approaches and emphasize cooperative learning on all levels and in all phases of this lifelong process of teacher education and teacher learning.

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¹⁵ *ibid*