

Editorial

Interventions at the structural, home, policy or school level is like searching for your wallet which you lost in the bushes under the lamppost because that is where the light is. The answer lies elsewhere – it lies in the person who gently closes the classroom door and performs the teaching act - the person who puts into place the end effects of so many policies, who interprets those policies and who is alone with students during their 15,000 hours of schooling. I therefore suggest that we should focus on the greatest source of variance that can make a difference – the teacher (Hattie, 2003, p. 3).

The thematic focus of this edition of the CEPS journal is “National vs. European trends within teacher education – possibilities and challenges”, one of the questions recently often posed not only by policy makers, but also teachers and teacher educators.

One could agree that education has always been and probably always will be deeply rooted in national culture, history and identity, which is probably also the reason that the issue of teaching and teachers’ quality was rarely a topic of international cooperation and comparative research before the 1990s. Today, teacher education is among the top priorities of European Union countries’ education policies, and one of the top topics for international cooperation and comparative research. We are witnessing Erasmus, Socrates, Leonardo, Tempus programmes, stimulating cooperation among educational institution of different countries; networks such as ENTEP (European Network on Teacher Education Policies), ATEE (Association for Teacher Education in Europe), TEPE (Teacher Education Policy in Europe) comparing and researching teacher education processes and policies; international analysis of quality of educational systems such as PISA, PIRLS, TIMSS, TALIS; strategies of the European Commission aiming at developing common frameworks and principles for developing national educational systems, including teacher education. The increased attention to teacher education of policy makers and other key stakeholders in the education sector has also been enhanced by accumulated research evidence indicating that “the teacher quality is significantly and positively related to the student’s attainment [...] and that it is the most important within-school aspect explaining student performance” (EC, 2007). Some of the key studies with the greatest impact on policy makers and educational experts have been the international comparisons, such as “Teachers matter – attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers” (OECD, 2005) or the so-called McKinsey reports “How the world’s best performing school systems come out on top” (Barber &

Mourshed, 2007) and “How the world’s most improved school systems keep getting better” (Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010). The main findings of these studies can be summarised in this sentence: “The quality of educational system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” (Barber & Morushed, 2007), as also indicated in the quotation by Hattie above.

Thus, teacher education today is no longer seen only as a “national affair”, but rather as a topic for international cooperation and comparative research, and is among the top priorities of education policies. It seems that internationalisation and globalisation, as well as the recent expansion of the use of the concept of the European Union as “a knowledge society”, has also stimulated the processes of harmonization in the development of teacher education systems. The purpose of the above-mentioned networking and cooperation is to deepen insight into systemic solutions and experiences in various countries, which might encourage reflection in one’s own country; however, one cannot overlook the expectation that national educational systems install transnational and European dimensions, resulting in a changing of educational systems as well as understandings about what qualitative education is and which competences teachers should acquire.

In the previous two decades, some points of convergence among European educational systems could be observed, but the gap between general European policy formulations and their translation into national practices remain; while in almost all the countries worldwide, regardless of their socio-economic contexts or differences in educational cultures and practices, some common challenges and problems in the field of teacher education could be observed, the answers to these challenges and problems are different even when they are inspired and guided by the same supranational educational policy initiatives. That is why questions regarding the role of national and transnational trends within teacher education remain. Moreover, this is also the question in this thematic issue of CEPS journal. We invited authors to deepen reflection and discussions on the various aspects of European dimension/s in teacher education systems as well as on the “meaning” of European teacher. In our invitation to authors we stated that the purpose of this issue is to raise the question as to whether European teacher education is possible and how so; what constitutes a “European teacher”, and more specifically which competences are needed within the framework of the new “European teacher professionalism”; the impact of international/European policy initiatives on national teacher education systems; the effects of teacher student exchanges (e.g. Erasmus programmes) on teacher and student formation; the understanding of international and European dimension/s in initial teacher education curricula; the impact of

international cooperation and comparative research on teacher education; intercultural education in teacher education.

As a result of our invitation, we present five articles discussing different aspects of national versus European trends within teacher education.

The first article titled “The European teacher: Transnational perspective in teacher education policy and practice” is authored by the Michael Schratz. In his paper, he examines the concept of the European teacher from various perspectives: five domains of teacher professionalism defined in the Austrian research project “Entwicklung von Professionalität im internationalen Kontext” are explained as an example of the research efforts within a particular socio-cultural context; lists of teacher competences are summarised as a product of the international cooperation of professionals in the field of teacher education; as a contribution to policy-making and future research and discussions, a list of domains that can be seen as an attempt to operationalize of the concept of ‘European teacher’ are offered. These examples show that the discussion about what constitutes the “Europeanness” in the teaching profession has been open at different levels, and some recommendations have been developed, but further discussions and research are still needed.

In the next article titled “Defining moments in policy development, direction, and implementation in Irish initial teacher education policy” the author, Teresa O’Doherty, examines Irish education’s engagement with a supranational institution, the OECD. The paper explores the impact of significant OECD documents over the last half century on the evolution of Irish education policy, specifically teacher education policy, posing the following questions: to what extent did Irish policy makers depend on external reviews and guidance to spur policy development and reform; was the repeated intervention of the OECD required to legitimise policy development by the state in education and particularly teacher education, which was provided by the church? According to author, while engagement with the OECD cannot simply explain changes in Irish education, it has played a significant role in creating the context for change, stimulating internal debate and providing the foundation for national policy development.

The third article “Croatian teacher competencies related to creation and implementation of education policy”, written by Vesna Kovač, Branko Rafajac and Iva Buchberger, is based on the assumption that the success of an education system and educational reforms depends largely on professional capacities and the willingness of teachers to implement new decisions in their everyday school practices. Deriving from that, the authors in the article present research in which they posed the question of how Croatian primary and secondary

teachers perceive the importance of the competences related to education policies, their cognition and mastering of competences related to the education policies, and how they perceive their actual participation in the creation and implementation of educational policies. They concluded that greater emphasis is necessary to include the development of these competences as a part of initial teacher education; that teachers should be strongly involved in the process of creating education policy, with better appreciation of their professional competences and capacities; and that stronger involvement should start with the creation of better conditions for strengthening their role in decision-making process at the school level.

The fourth article titled “Effects of German language teacher professional development on pupils’ learning outcomes in intercultural competence” written by Ana Šenjug Golub, is based on the evidence that development of intercultural competence is increasingly being perceived as a key goal both in the European education policy and in the national education policies of European countries, since its purpose is to establish and improve relationships and bring about mutual understanding and respect among members of different cultural and social groups. However, according to research results, it is evident that teachers often face difficulties in achieving the aims related to intercultural competences in the classroom. As a result, the study was designed to determine whether teacher professional development in the field of intercultural competence influence the achievement of goals set in the foreign language curricular documents. The results reported in this paper confirmed that foreign language teacher professional development in the field of intercultural competence had positive effects on pupils’ learning outcomes, especially in the cognitive component of intercultural competence. However, it seems that when designing such programmes, particular emphasis should be placed on the problem of stereotypes and prejudices, which are much harder to tackle.

The article written by Karin da Rocha: “Europe’s Got Talent: Setting the Stage for New Teachers by Educative Mentoring”, presents a project titled “Supporting new teacher at the beginning of their careers in primary schools” in which local mentors support novice teachers. This project references developments in other European countries and emphasizes the need for local variety and refraining from overly restrictive standards. The article focuses on the mentor’s role, its challenges and duties, taking into account the value of educative mentoring for professional learning communities and individual learning processes. The author concluded that, in contrast to the wider perspective, concepts like mentoring must also be considered on a regional or even local level. As the author states, “It is necessary to keep an eye on cultural contexts and

fitting when transferring one model to another European nation. Values and traditions of assessment or the definition of good teaching vary greatly and the acceptance of such models differs accordingly. This complex bridge between European and national concepts demands the respect of individual countries' needs."

In the *Varia* section, two papers are presented. The first, written by Seyyed Hatam Tamimi Sa'd and Zohre Qadermazi, entitled "Refusal Strategies of Iranian University English as a Foreign Language and Non-English Learners in Native Language", presents a comparative study with which the authors attempt to examine the possible effect that exposure to English has had on the use of refusal strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in comparison with those of non-English learners when refusing to do something in their native language, Persian. The results indicated that non-English learners used refusal strategies considerably more frequently than the EFL learners did, while the EFL learners utilized more adjuncts to refusals than the non-English learners did. However, the differences were not statistically significant. The results can be considered as evidence that the effect of the second language on the native language might not be at work in the pragmatic aspects of language learning.

The second paper, "Encouraging Family and Parent Education: Program Development and Evaluation in the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg, Germany", presented by Sandra Landhäußer, Stefan Faas and Rainer Treptow, presents a report that details the conceptualization and evaluation of a federal state program in Baden-Württemberg, Germany, which was launched in 2008 to encourage family and parent education. The results show that main goals of the program were reached.

At the end, a review Jana Bacevic's book "From Class to Identity / The Politics of Education Reforms in Former Yugoslavia" (2014) is given by Darko Štrajn.

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