



Ljubljana 2010



COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

MED-23-5

Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education

“Education for Sustainable Democratic Societies: the Role of Teachers”

23rd session

Ljubljana, Slovenia, 4-5 June 2010

Introduction to sub-theme A: Teacher Competences for
Diverse Democratic Societies



MED-23-5

**Council of Europe Standing Conference of
Ministers of Education**

**“Education for Sustainable Democratic Societies :
the Role of Teachers”**

23rd session

Ljubljana, Slovenia, 4-5 June 2010

Introduction to sub-theme A: Teacher Competences for
Diverse Democratic Societies

Julie Allan

Introduction

The Steering Committee for Education (CDED) and the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR) of the Council of Europe have underlined the importance of education in Europe being 'founded on a coherent view of societies and the role of education in shaping them.' The Council of Europe considers competence to be a key issue and has sought to promote teacher education based on competences. The term competence is used both scientifically and in everyday language. Its origins can be seen in the Greek notion of 'arête' and the Roman term 'virtus', and is generally understood as being concerned with 'what people can do rather than what they know'. It can be attributed to individuals, social groups or institutions, and the words 'competence,' 'competency' or the plural form 'competencies,' are often used interchangeably. OECD has defined competency as:

*More than just knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to meet complex demands, drawing on and mobilizing psycho-social resources (including skills and attitudes in a particular context)*¹

In considering the competences required by teachers for diverse democratic societies, we are asking what do we want our teachers:

- To understand?
- To be?
- To do?

The experts within the Council of Europe project, *Policies and practices for teaching sociocultural diversity*, recommended that teacher competence for diverse democratic societies should not be viewed as consisting of fixed amounts of knowledge, skills or behaviours to be acquired by teachers, but must be responsive to the changing nature of the society in which the teacher works and subject to the teacher's continuous reflection and adaptation. The development of these competences within teacher education does not require a new curriculum, but rather a revision of existing working practices to provide student teachers with appropriate experiences and opportunities for reflection.

The CDED, in 2006, intensified its activity on teacher education through the gradual introduction of training modules for teacher education in several fields of activity. It has concentrated on the production of teaching materials but has also spearheaded the development of teacher competences within two major activities:

¹ OECD (2005) The definition and selection of key competencies: www.oecd.org/dataoecd/47/61/35070367.pdf.

The project, *Policies and practices for teaching sociocultural diversity*, began in 2006 with a survey of the coverage of aspects of diversity within the teacher education programmes of several member states², developed an analysis of concepts, principles and challenges for teacher education³; and has concluded with the establishment of a framework of competences for teaching sociocultural diversity⁴.

The framework contains three clusters of competences:

- Knowledge and Understanding: eg of 'the political, legal and structural context of sociocultural diversity'
- Communication and Relationships: including 'creating open-mindedness and respect in the school community'
- Management and teaching: including 'selecting and modifying teaching methods for the learning needs of pupils'.

A report, *How all teachers can support citizenship and human rights education: a framework for the development of competences*, consolidates work undertaken by Council of Europe over the past decade within the Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE) programme, *Learning and living democracy for all (2006-2009)* and provides a set of competences to support teachers in 'promoting democratic values through active, participatory teaching'⁵.

These competences are grouped around four clusters and associated questions:

- Knowledge and understanding: 'What can we do?'
- Teaching and learning activities: 'How can we do it?'
- Partnerships and community involvement: 'With whom can we do it?'
- Implementing and evaluating participatory approaches: 'How can we do it better?'

In undertaking the task of analyzing and developing key competences, it is necessary to examine the contribution of public authorities and Higher Education Institutions concerned with teacher education to the preparation of teachers with this range of competences. A key aspect of this, and a further requirement of the Ministers of Education, is to take the Bologna process forward, imbuing the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) with:

*a holistic vision encompassing [...] the values and functions of higher education in modern society as well as the ability of higher education and its graduates to address major issues, such as sustainability, democratic culture, social inclusion and intercultural dialogue*⁶.

² Policies and practices for teaching sociocultural diversity – A survey report (Council of Europe, 2008, ISBN 978-92-871-6440-7)

³ Policies and practices for teaching sociocultural diversity – Concepts, principles and challenges in teacher education (Council of Europe, 2009, ISBN 978-92-871-6582-4)

⁴ Policies and practices for teaching sociocultural diversity – A framework of teacher competences for engaging with diversity (Council of Europe, 2009, ISBN 978-92-871-6691-3)

⁵ How all teachers can support citizenship and human rights education: a framework for the development of competences (Council of Europe, 2009, ISBN 978-92-871-6555-8)

⁶ Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education (2007) - Building a More Humane and Inclusive Europe: The Role of Education Policies. Final Declaration. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Both the EHEA and the European Union (EU) provide overarching qualifications frameworks to assist in bringing national frameworks and systems together. This is oriented towards equivalence, rather than harmonisation, of qualifications⁷.

Key issues

A number of key issues arise in the advancement of teacher competences for diverse democratic societies and these concern education policies, institutions and the professional development of teaching staff.

- i. *The dynamic and changing nature of diversity within European societies:* European societies are ever more complex and diverse, and understanding of these societies, the needs and issues of particular groups within them, and the appropriate educational responses is often limited, partial or outdated⁸. There is a need for research and development work (local, national and comparative) to enhance understanding of the nature of diversity and its educational impact and to document and disseminate effective responses by teachers.
- ii. *Structural causes of inequalities and exclusion:* whilst education is central to overcoming disadvantages related to inequalities and exclusion, there is a need to recognise that other, more systemic, change may be required to address these.
- iii. *Educational policies and legal frameworks:* these are important in underlining responsibilities and obligations towards building diverse democratic societies and they need to be visible across all policies and frameworks. It is vital to also consider if and how specific policies and legal frameworks produce inequalities and exclusion or place constraints on the development of diversity for democratic societies.
- iv. *The assessment of teacher competences for diverse democratic societies:* elements of the teacher's competences in responding, reflecting and adapting are, by their very nature, difficult to assess. Nationally regulated standards for teaching, where these are in place, assume a fixed view of competences - which can be demonstrated through specific behaviours - and these standards, and the mechanisms for assessing them, may not readily accommodate the elements of teacher competences for diverse democratic societies.
- v. *The capacity of Teacher Education Institutions to develop teacher competences:* the Survey of Teacher Education Institutions within the project, *Policies and practices for teaching sociocultural diversity*, found the coverage of issues relating to diverse democratic societies was variable across member states, the experience and expertise of the trainers themselves was limited and there was a lack of relevant institutional policies.

⁷ Qualifications - Introduction to a concept. (Council of Europe Higher Education Series N°6 , 2007, ISBN 1871-6125-3)

⁸ Policies and practices for teaching sociocultural diversity - Concepts, principles and challenges in teacher education (Council of Europe., 2009, ISBN 978-92-871-6582-4)

- vi. *Teachers' understanding of diversity and of their competence needs:* newly qualified teachers report significant apprehension about the multitude of diversity they encounter, but also an interest in gaining more knowledge, understanding and experience of it. Their apprehension and concerns with the immediacy of the classroom situation leads them to understand their competence needs to be highly specific and skills-based, but teacher education programmes can be effective in encouraging greater reflection and a more responsive engagement with diversity.
- vii. *Monitoring of teachers exiting from teacher education programmes:* the Berlin Mandate specifies the responsibility of institutions to monitor student completion, progression and employability but this practice is not widespread and it is therefore not likely that much is known about either general or specific teacher competences.
- viii. *Opportunities and experiences which will ensure the development of competences for diverse democratic societies:* engagement with inter-cultural groups and with linguistic diversity can be limited and this may in turn limit the extent to which teacher competence in this area can develop. Incentives and rewards for teachers who develop, and can share, high levels of competence in diversity may be beneficial.
- ix. *Progression and continuity:* the development of competences for diverse democratic societies has to be dynamic and to develop throughout the teacher's career, but the opportunities for this may be restricted by discontinuities between initial and in-service teacher education provision.

Conclusion

Whilst the challenge of developing competences for diverse democratic societies is both enormous and complex, there is clearly much that can be done. The advancement of this process does not appear to be dependent on member states making available vast amounts of resources, specialised technical knowledge or personnel, but of addressing the issues identified above and of finding ways of simultaneously creating opportunities and removing barriers.

Guiding questions for debate

1. What competences are considered necessary for teachers in order to meet students' diverse needs? What should teachers be able to understand, be and do in diverse democratic societies?
2. How effectively do member states' educational policies and legal frameworks underline responsibilities and obligations towards building diverse democratic societies? Do specific policies and legal frameworks produce inequalities and exclusion or place constraints on the development of diversity for democratic societies?
3. What support (eg resources, national networks) might be offered to Teacher Education Institutions to enable them to more effectively develop teacher competences, encourage greater reflection and a more responsive engagement with diversity? Could a nationally co-ordinated programme, which offers students cultural and social experiences of diversity, be established?

Illustrative case from Belgium (Flemish Community)

Personalised education

Geert Speltincx, Karel de Grote University College – Plantijn University College

Who?

- Karel de Grote University College - Department of teacher education, 1900 students, 150 teacher trainers
- Plantijn University College - Department of teacher education, 108 students, 15 teacher trainers
- Situated in Antwerp, a multicultural city in the Flemish part of Belgium
- Project leader: Geert Speltincx, geert.speltincx@kdg.be

What?

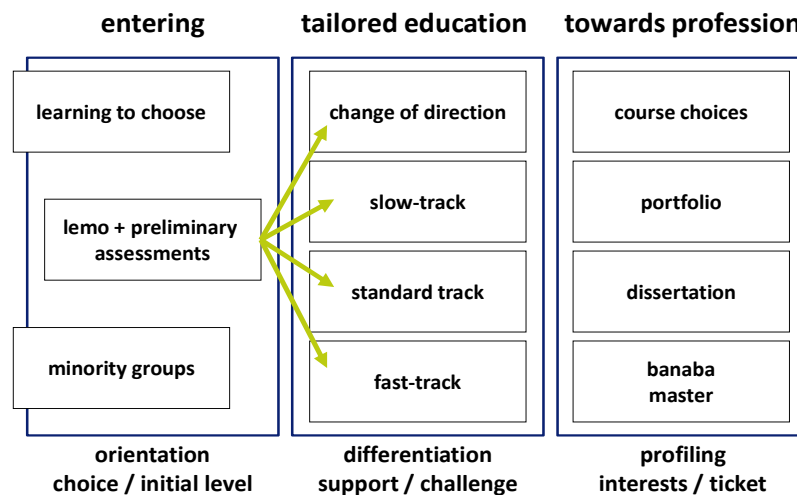
- Personalised education is a vision of education translated into different supporting initiatives to promote minority groups' entry into higher education teaching, successful completion of their degree and incorporation into their profession.

Why?

- To respond to the diversity of the new intake student population
- To take into account how today's students learn, how their learning process works, and how they construct and share knowledge
- To prepare students for a complex job in a multicultural environment

How?

- Design for all: every action undertaken must work to the advantage of every student. Both 'strong' students and those students who need more guidance and support must benefit from the same structural framework.
- Actions are undertaken in all phases of the study process:
 - o Supporting students to make the right choice and measuring their learning competences and motivation (lemo) and initial level (preliminary assessments)
 - o Curriculum differentiation and the supply, depending on the case, of extra support or challenges
 - o Working towards self-regulation, widening course choices and strengthening the link with the profession, in order to challenge and motivate students, and prepare them for working life.



Personalised education and ‘teacher competences for diverse democratic societies’

This case study focuses on the development of personalised learning in the department of teacher education. First, this case study reflects on how we have developed different ways to deal with the diverse character of our student population. Second, the proper implementation and the transparency of the concepts for the students can be seen as an experiential way of learning about personalised education.

Responsive to the changing nature of society

Our vision of education has grown in a context of changing social trends. Personalised education is our answer to new social challenges. The most important challenges are the diversity of the new intake student population, the limited initial language skills (Dutch) of incoming students, the widening gap between secondary and tertiary education, the limited study efficiency in the first year (even worse for minority groups) and the mission to prepare students for a complex profession in an urban context.

Research and developmental work to enhance the understanding of the nature of diversity and its educational impact

Personalised education is a framework for developmental work in an educational setting which aims to respond to the issues of diversity. We do not base our decisions on guesswork, but conduct quantitative and qualitative research to investigate the impact of our implementations. These supportive research projects are conducted by ourselves or take place in collaboration with the University of Antwerp, Institute of Education and Information Sciences.

Provide student teachers with appropriate experiences and opportunities for reflection

Walk the talk. By offering personalised education to our students, we allow students to experience a wealth of possibilities to live up to diverse needs in education. This sets a good example and encourages students to have a greater reflection and a more responsive engagement with diversity.

Structural causes of inequalities and exclusion

The ‘standard track’ educational model does not succeed in overcoming the disadvantages related to inequalities and exclusion. In fact, our educational system even enlarges the inequalities. In order to meet the needs of minority groups, we need a system of unequal treatment, based on an equal screening of initial level and learning competences.

More support for Teacher Education Institutions

The developmental work in Teacher Education Institutions is essential in understanding the challenges of diverse democratic societies. This developmental work leads to an evidence-based practice, grounded on daily experiences, the knowledge of worldwide research and self-conducted supportive research projects. This is not the result of one day’s work but one stage in a long but promising learning process. We need more resources to perform the necessary developmental work, to integrate the findings into the students’ curriculum and to disseminate the acquired knowledge.

