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Report of the Peer Learning Activity, Oslo, May 2007

‘How can Teacher Education and Training policies prepare teachers to teach effectively in culturally diverse settings?’

This note summarises the main policy conclusions of a Peer Learning Activity, in which experts from several European countries exchange ideas on policy and practice on a key topic in Teacher Education. The ideas contained herein do not constitute EU policy.

Background

1. A number of Member States are experiencing significant levels of immigration for the first time; for others, it is a long-standing phenomenon. It poses a number of challenges (and opportunities) to education systems.
2. Firstly, according to the OECD survey Teachers matter (2005), "Some countries express concern that the cultural and language background of the teaching workforce does not reflect that of students, at a time when the student population in most countries is becoming more diverse". In the Netherlands it is estimated that the proportion of primary students from ethnic minorities is 12%, while only 4% of teachers have a similar background. Norway also notes the importance of having more teachers with first languages other than Norwegian. (Støren, 2001).
3. Secondly, in some Member States, teachers have not been, or feel that they have not been, adequately trained to teach groups of pupil from a diversity of cultures. For example, in the UK (En), an annual survey of newly qualified teachers shows that many of them felt that their initial training had not properly prepared them for teaching in a diverse classroom.
4. The Cluster 'Teachers and Trainers' agreed that that this second issue should be the focus of a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) which should in particular concentrate upon heterogeneity issues related to 'migration' and 'minorities' (as opposed, for example, to heterogeneity arising from disability, special needs, gifted children, gender issues ...). Mindsets, attitudes and discrimination were mentioned as examples of issues to consider.
5. The theme adopted by the Preparatory Group was ‘How can Teacher Education and Training policies prepare teachers to teach effectively in culturally diverse settings?’

The PLA

6. The Norwegian Ministry of Education hosted the PLA in Oslo from 20 to 24 May 2007.

Participants

7. Excluding the hosts, 14 people representing 9 countries (AT, CY, DE, DK, EE, ES, NL, PT, SE) took part.
8. Six people came from Ministries or government agencies; eight came from Teacher Education institutions.
9. Four participants kindly agreed to act as Chairpersons for one day of the PLA. This system worked well.

Preparation

10. This was the third PLA organised by the Teachers and Trainers Cluster. It was planned with the help of a small Preparatory Group of Cluster members and Norwegian colleagues.
11. The Commission circulated a background document before the event which provided the latest available Eurydice data¹ on the intercultural approach in Teacher Education, and on migration and education, and summaries of some academic research into the theme.
12. Participants were, as usual, asked to identify their countries' learning objectives before taking part. Not all countries did this.

Programme

13. The PLA Focused on examples provided by Norway, compared and contrasted with examples from Cyprus, Germany and the Netherlands. The main inputs in the programme were as follows:
 - Norway:
 - System of education
 - National policy on multicultural education and teacher training, (by the State Secretary, Education and Research)
 - Oslo Municipality's policy on multicultural education and Teacher Education
 - The work of the National Centre for Multicultural Education (NAFO)
 - Visits to an Oslo school
 - What parents require of teachers in multicultural settings (National Parents' Committee)
 - Teaching Unions' contribution to qualifying teachers for multicultural settings (Union of Education, Norway)
 - Two projects (Hedmark University College):
 - Inter-college cooperation on teacher training for bilingual
 - Research project on Teacher Training for multicultural settings
 - Cyprus: 'Zones of Educational Priority'²
 - Germany: pilot project on Initial Teacher Education and support for students from the Turkish community

¹ See *Integrating immigrant children into schools in Europe*, Eurydice, 2004, and *Key data on Education in Europe 2005*

² for description, see http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/2006/nap/cyprus_en.pdf; page 76

- Netherlands: work by Utrecht university on integrating multicultural competences in teacher training programmes
14. These inputs provided a stimulus to discuss issues of interest to the hosts and the visiting participants. The examples in this note are taken from these presentations, the school visits and the participants' discussions.
 15. The following conclusions are derived from the written and oral observations made by participants in the PLA. They were not discussed in this format during the PLA itself. The PLA did not find it possible to prioritise between the policy conclusions.

Policy Conclusions

A diversity of contexts

16. Member States have different perceptions of the role of education in a multicultural society; these range from those that see the school as an instrument for promoting the rapid integration of migrants into the majority culture of the host society, to those that see the school as a reflection of a *de facto* multicultural society in which all cultures are equally valued. In this context, it is helpful if the role of the school is explicitly stated, and the subject of broad consensus amongst stakeholders. Many participants were struck by the comment of a parent from an ethnic minority background who said that she, and parents like her, do not send their children to school to 'be integrated' into the host society, but to get a good education.
17. It should also be noted that the term 'culturally diverse settings' itself covers a diversity of contexts. In some contexts, cultural diversity stems only from migration; in others, different cultures have lived side by side for centuries. Further, the term 'multicultural classroom' may refer to one in which pupils from two cultures are present in equal numbers, one in which the majority of pupils are from a single culture, or one in which there are small proportions of pupils from many different cultures. Each of these presents different challenges.
18. Moreover, cultural minorities are not a homogeneous group; their educational needs - and the resources they bring to the classroom - are as varied as those of any other group. The policy responses can be equally varied. For example, some, but not all, pupils from minority backgrounds have a lower level of competence in the language of instruction than their peers. The different approaches to tackling this issue amongst the countries represented at the PLA include the provision of additional lessons in the language of instruction, the provision of some lessons through the medium of the pupil's mother tongue, the provision of lessons in the pupil's mother tongue, the provision of classroom assistants, etc.
19. Overall, participants concluded that policies to equip teachers to deal with the challenges and opportunities posed by culturally diverse classrooms need to be seen in the context of wider policies at the level of society, of the education system as a whole, and of each school. The teacher is not the only actor involved. Similarly, the effectiveness of the school in this area will depend on the wider society's attitudes towards multiculturalism; all citizens now require the skills and awareness necessary to live in a multicultural society³.
20. Participants drew a number of more detailed conclusions concerning policies at the level of education systems, the school, Teacher Education policies and curricula, and research. These are set out below.

³ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2006/962/EC)

System issues

21. Participants concluded that decision-making regarding cultural diversity at school will be more effective if:
 - policy makers are sensitised to the particular issues around cultural diversity in the classroom;
 - it draws upon the views of all actors (including social partners, parents' associations etc.) from the earliest stages, so as to develop shared ownership.
 - it is built upon the latest findings from research (without using research results to 'label' children from minority groups).
22. The work of all actors can be facilitated by dedicated educational resource centres that act as a bridge between policy-makers, researchers and schools. The Norwegian National Centre for Multicultural Education (NAFO⁴), which assists with competence development, awareness raising, networking and dissemination of good practice, is an example of such a body.
23. Several participants noted that the current teaching workforce in their country does not adequately reflect the cultural diversity of society. They identified a need for policies to encourage the recruitment and retention of larger numbers of teachers and other school staff - as well as school leaders and teacher educators - from other cultural backgrounds.

School issues

24. As regards the school, the participants noted that:
 - The role of the school leader is vital. All school leaders - but especially those in schools with culturally diverse populations - should possess at an advanced level the intercultural skills and sensitivities necessary to lead a multicultural learning community. Where they have the autonomy to do so, leaders will build a team of staff with the appropriate intercultural skills and sensitivities.
 - Schools with particularly diverse populations require additional financial support and specialist advice. The use of classroom assistants in classes with high levels of diversity can be effective. Diagnostic instruments that give an overview of the capacities of each pupil can play an important role in helping teachers provide individualised teaching.
 - Where schools have the autonomy to experiment with new approaches, education authorities can play a useful role in facilitating the networking of staff from different schools, and disseminating the results of successful projects. The involvement of educational researchers in school projects is important.
25. Participants observed several examples of creative ways in which schools can use children and parents from minority groups as a valuable educational resource. Schools can make use of the intercultural competences that have been gained by immigrant families themselves from living in the host country. Involving the parents of minority pupils in school and classroom activities can bring important additional resources into class; it can also help to convey the message that their language and culture are as valuable as those of the host country. A parent who cannot speak the language of the host country can still be treated as a partner in the child's education; one example involved parents from minority groups being invited to share in the activities of after-school homework clubs.

Teacher Education Policy

26. A key question posed was whether Teacher Education policy should seek to prepare all teachers to deal with diversity, or to focus training on a small number of specialists. Some teachers hold the view that pupils from minority backgrounds are the responsibility only of those teachers who teach the language of instruction as a second language. However, the PLA concluded that a systematic approach is required to develop in all teachers (including pre-primary staff) the skills and qualities necessary to work confidently and effectively in multicultural settings.
27. Appropriate training should be a part of both initial and in-service teacher education (CPD), both theory and practice, for all subjects. Participants noted that in several countries this would require changes to existing Teacher Education curricula and supply or courses.
28. Initial training should raise teachers' intercultural awareness, and provide core knowledge and intercultural skills (see below). Trainee teachers should, at least, be offered the possibility of undertaking one period of teaching practice (practicum) in a multicultural setting.
29. In this respect, there is evidence from a project in the Netherlands⁵ that student teachers can learn much by undertaking a teaching practicum abroad, thereby experiencing some of the reality of living and working in a different cultural context.
30. In the case of teachers already in post, a sufficient supply of training and development opportunities about working effectively in culturally diverse settings is needed. AS with all kinds of in-service Teacher Education, a whole-school approach is ideal; CPD / in-service training can be more effective if it is offered to teams of teachers within a school, in the context of the school's staff development plan, rather than to single individuals.
31. Teachers should in addition be able to develop more specialised intercultural skills during their careers if they so wish.

Teacher Education curricula

32. Participants concluded that dealing with a culturally diverse classroom means much more than dealing with pupils who have a poor grasp of the language of instruction, important though this is.
33. Every classroom is a place of diversity (we need only think of the diversity of age and gender; the diversity of learning styles and intelligences; the diversity of socio-economic groups; the ranges of ability / disability; the diversity of mother tongues ...). The skills and qualities that teachers require to teach effectively in culturally diverse settings are the same as those they will need to teach effectively in any other setting. They are based upon the principle that teaching should respond to the unique needs and aptitudes of each individual learner.
34. Participants drew the conclusion that for teachers to work effectively in multicultural settings it is important, above all, that they have appropriate attitudes towards diversity, and interpersonal skills such as empathy.
35. Teacher education should provide teachers with *knowledge* about intercultural issues in society and as they are present in the school. It should engage teachers' *commitment* to working in a culturally diverse society.

⁵ Teacher training for heterogeneous classrooms – strategies in research and development; Research Centre on Teaching in Multiethnic Schools, Utrecht University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Education.

36. It was not the purpose of the PLA to draw up a comprehensive syllabus for the Education of teachers to work in culturally diverse settings; however, participants concluded that several basic teaching skills⁶ are particularly important in this context:
- classroom research skills and the ability to engage with academic research;
 - monitoring the effectiveness of their classroom interventions;
 - reflecting critically on their own practice;
 - working collaboratively.
37. In addition, initial Teacher Education should also equip teachers with the skills to:
- examine and reassess their attitudes towards other cultures;
 - develop empathy;
 - treat all students as individuals;
 - promote the success of all students;
38. and the strategies to:
- deal appropriately with prejudice at school;
 - teach children who lack a strong command of the language of instruction;
 - make good use of the resources that minority children bring to the classroom; and
 - communicate effectively and with cultural sensitivity with parents.
39. There remains work to be done to complete this list of skills and qualities, and to consider how they can be assessed and measured.
40. In addition to these general competences, there is some evidence that there are intercultural skills and knowledge that are specific to each subject. Teacher Education should ensure that teachers of all subjects have the specific knowledge and competences to teach their specialist subject in intercultural settings.
41. Teacher Educators require specific advanced level training in these issues.

Teacher Education research

42. The content of teacher Education should take account of the views and experiences of stakeholders (parents, pupils, minority groups...). It should be based upon sound research evidence of what is effective in real school situations. In this regard, Teacher Education institutions should ensure that there is an effective partnership between themselves and schools, in which information and advice flow in both directions.
43. It became clear that the underlying concepts used in discussions of Teacher Education policy as regards cultural diversity differ from country to country. There may be benefit in further conceptual research on intercultural education to arrive at a shared terminology.
44. Participants agreed that research in this field needs to be brought into closer contact with daily life and teaching in schools.

⁶ See the skills outlined in *Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications*
http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/principles_en.pdf

Next steps

45. The policy conclusions above list the main ideas that participants said they would be taking home. At Annex A there are a series of questions which Cluster members may wish to consider in developing further their work to support schools as learning communities.

Questions to consider in order to support the further development of policies to prepare teachers to teach effectively in culturally diverse settings

- Is it clear what role the school is required to play in a multicultural society?
- To what extent does cultural diversity of the teaching workforce reflect that of students?
- Is there a specific policy on preparing teachers to teach effectively in culturally diverse settings? Does it fit in with wider policies at the level of society, of the education system as a whole, and of each school?
- Are there procedures in place for drawing on the views of stakeholders and researchers in the development of policy in this area?
- Is there a systematic approach to develop in all teachers the skills and qualities necessary to work confidently and effectively in multicultural settings? In initial education? In in-service education (CPD)?
- Is full advantage taken of mobility opportunities so that student teachers can experience living and working in a different cultural context?
- Is there a sufficient supply of training and development opportunities about working effectively in culturally diverse settings?
- Do Teacher Education syllabuses cover, as a minimum, the skills listed above?
- To what extent are school leaders currently equipped with the advanced intercultural skills and sensitivities necessary to lead a multicultural learning community?
- Is there an effective two-way flow of information and advice between Teacher Education institutions / researchers and schools?