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European journal of teacher education 16 (1993) 1, S. 69-77

urn:nbn:de:0111-opus-17246



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European Dimension, Multiculturalism and Teacher Training. An experience in a network of training institutions

CHRISTOPH KODRON

1. The Development of the Network of Training Institutions (Reseau d'Institution de Formation, RIF)

For a long time the Commission of the European Community has made clear its interest in strengthening exchanges and mobility in general as well as in introducing the European dimension into the school system and education. There are basic differences between the 12 member states of the EC especially in the field and structure of schools and teacher education. Education is taken up by the EC for the first time in the Maastricht treaty. Very few minor competencies will be transferred to the EC. The member states keep the overall competence in the field of educational policy. The EC has some influence because it finances special programmes connected with the field of education, such as professional training, the mobility of the labour force and the introduction of European diplomas by co-operating universities in different countries and co-operation related to the EC-regulations on the mutual recognition of diplomas in higher education.

These EC regulations on the mutual recognition define the rules for mutually recognising the university diplomas of other member states. They include those for teachers, having a minimum training of three years in an institution of higher education and they specify the additional requirements needed for recognition, however various states still have to present their stipulations. In order to promote co-operation and exchange the Community developed many programmes such as ERASMUS, LINGUA and ARION for the field of education.

In May 1988, the Ministers of Education of the States of the European Community adopted a resolution concerning the introduction of the 'European dimension' in education, in which teacher training is especially mentioned. This resolution introduces a so-called 'European University' for the period from 1989 to 1992.

There are some major reasons which lead the Commission to support and to undertake special initiatives in teacher education:

- (1) The idea that education and training should take the European dimension into account so as to contribute to the development of a European identity.
- (2) Only few innovations in the school curricula were introduced by the member states.

- (3) In the national teacher training systems no major change in orientation towards Europe was visible.
- (4) The study by Mice Bruce published in 1989 pointed out that future teachers are under-represented in the exchange activities supported by ERASMUS.
- (5) Connections and co-operation between the teacher training institutions of the EC were comparatively rare.

In view of this situation the first European University of 1989 held at the Hogeschool Interstudie in Nijmegen, The Netherlands proposed the idea of setting up a network of teacher training institutions in order to promote the European Dimension in Education by direct co-operation between trainers and their institutions. With the help of the European Commission the teacher training institutions in all member states of the EC were asked by post if they were interested in joining such a network and if so, in which fields they were particularly interested. From their answers 14 themes were identified as being of common interest to the groups of training institutions. The themes which were eventually taken up in individual sub-networks were:

- (1) European citizenship.
- (2) The European dimension in education, human rights and values.
- (3) The training of school directors towards a European dimension.
- (4) The comparison of educational and teacher training systems.
- (5) The development of a basic curriculum on European dimension for primary schools.
- (6) The development of a basic curriculum on European dimension for secondary schools.
- (7) Elaboration and sharing of materials used for schools in social sciences.
- (8) Elaboration and sharing of materials for science teaching.
- (9) Learning foreign languages for a better European dimension in education.
- (10) The European dimension and new technologies.
- (11) Europe and the cultural patrimony (heritage).
- (12) The European dimension and environment education.
- (13) The European dimension and multiculturalism.
- (14) The European dimension and the integration of disabled children or children having difficulties at school.

To recruit co-ordinators for the groups of institutions interested in a common theme, mainly those institutions which participated in the first European University were approached. Beside this it was decided that the two co-ordinators of each sub-network should preferably come from different kinds of institutions and different member states. It is important to note that these sub-networks were set-up around individual themes. The co-ordinators and members were not chosen according to the type of teacher they train or the formal status of the institution. Thus, very different kinds of institutions came together, not only institutions from the higher education sector (which are eligible for ERASMUS) but also inservice training institutions or research institutions working in this field.

Those persons who accepted co-ordinating met for the first time in May 1990 in Brussels following an invitation by the European Commission. The discussions showed clearly that the introduction of a European dimension into initial and inservice teacher training was regarded as a common aim. All participants also agreed that it would be better to act as one network and to use sub-networks for concrete work only, but to

attempt to keep one another informed in the hope of achieving mutual insights that would be of advantage for the joint progress of all.

Therefore all agreed to ask the Commission for developing a special programme for the whole sector of teacher education in order to meet the specific needs of this field. This was done to take into account the fact that teacher training systems differ to a large extent and have comparatively special regulations and restrictions and also that the aim of teacher education is teaching. So the introduction of a European dimension should come first, whereas mobility of persons (as aimed by ERASMUS) could only be a tool for broadening the mind, for developing mutual understanding by making personal experiences in another country and by joint projects so as to develop shared views and—where possible—teaching materials potentially useful in different school systems.

But the developments soon showed, that a special programme for teacher education is not possible (yet?). Financial aid by the EC is only forthcoming if the projects of the networks fit into existing programmes such as ERASMUS. This was and is a major problem not only because some of the institutions within the network (RIF) are not eligible for these programmes. ERASMUS only provides money for the sector of higher education, linking its support to the status of university trainer and students of such institutions. Thus the whole sector of inservice teaching of teachers is excluded. But all network co-ordinators agreed that precisely this field of training for the millions of teachers working in schools should not be excluded if one wants to introduce a European dimension into the classroom. Furthermore the professional, practical part of the preservice training of teachers is not supported and has to be financed by other sources if it is not provided by universities in specialised institutions or schools as is the case in the Federal Republic of Germany for example.

This was a bitter set back for many of our first plans, but the European Commission secured the continuation and future development of the whole network (RIF) by financing two annual meetings for the co-ordinators and by the allotment of some money for the co-ordination and basic functioning of each sub-network. With this money it was possible to maintain the entire network (RIF) as a unit which today has approximately 150 members. The European Commission also sees the RIF as an advisory body and a resource for all fields related to teacher training and the European dimension. The RIF was therefore also asked to organise the summer university in 1993, to spread the idea of networking in the field of teacher training, to inform a broader professional public of the experiences gained to submit the results to professional critique.

Our future intention is to establish a (additional) European Diploma in Teacher Education for the European dimension. We conceptualised a moduled course with a common core of prescribed chosen from the 14 themes mentioned above from the rest of the themes (e.g. European dimension and new technologies).

During the last year every sub-network developed a specific plan of action to advance the European dimension in the specific theme they are working on. Some gathered and disseminated specific information, e.g. about the curricula in the diverse teacher training systems, others collaboratively developed teaching materials or teaching units for teacher training or for school teaching. Four sub-networks began a pilot project in the academic year 1991–92 includes the aspect of mobility with a financial grant by ERASMUS. These four networks deal with issues concerning curricula, European citizenship, environmental education and multiculturalism from the perspective of the European dimension.

2. The Sub-network: European Dimension and Multiculturalism

The first list of 16 interested teacher training institutions was comparatively long. However, first attempts at collecting useful information (about the status of the training institution, the number of students in different types of teacher education, the institutional and private addresses of persons in charge of the co-operation, their knowledge of languages showed that nearly half of these institutions did not respond. But other institutions on hearing of this new initiative asked to join. Now 15 institutions are members of this sub-network, which seems too large for personal co-ordination and good co-operation, but is of advantage in situations in which some institutions are prevented from participating in activities, usually because of time problems (holidays, examinations, special study duties, etc.).

One difficulty was and is that the interest in this theme is concentrated in the northern countries, with Portugal, France, Italy and Greece completely unrepresented. From France one IUFM joined at the beginning of this year. The absence of France was mainly caused by the changes in the institutional framework (closing of the 'école normale' and introducing the 'Institut universitaire pour la formation des maitres', IUFM). It seems that mainly those teacher training institutions joined the network which have a small number of staff members or are part of a huge university, organising the entire of teacher training as a separate, distinct unit (colleges, departments). If there are major changes the persons tend to leave the network or to suspend their membership for some time.

The fact that all of the members define main interests differently should be seen as a challenge to develop a common pedagogical view and methodology. The main interest varies according to local needs in teacher training and/or teaching requirements, but also according to the training, interests and teaching subjects of the persons involved in the co-operation. Some have the primary objective of developing mutual knowledge and co-operation between the traditional European cultures of the states, some focus their interest primarily on knowing and respecting traditional territorial minorities, while others have newly arrived immigrants and the pedagogical implications as their main emphasis.

2.1 *Four-Week Student Seminar: a First-Hand Account*

Apart from intensive exchange of information we planned and executed the first four-week student seminar in the ICP (Inter-university Cooperation programme) ERASMUS scheme, organised and conducted by the GUARDINI Institut of Hoger Pedagogische Onderwijs in Brussels. This predominantly experimental seminar was based on the following principles of organisational arrangements:

- (1) The student seminar will comprise of the same number of students (8) from the host institution and two students of every foreign institutions (together 8) so that they can work in a binational tandem.
- (2) During the first two weeks the foreign students will live with the families of host students, the last two weeks all students will stay in the same hotel, thus living and working together intensively.
- (3) Lectures will basically be provided by the host-institution, but also by trainers from other institutions of the network, not only by those institutions whose students are attending.
- (4) Students should prepare themselves and be prepared.

- (5) Students other than those personally participating should be involved during the preparation period.
- (6) After the seminar the organisers should receive a feedback by the students and they should also disseminate their experiences in their own training institution.

It was agreed that students should not be chosen on the basis of their good knowledge of English, but that they should know some foreign language. They were not chosen with respect to a particular field of teaching (e.g. future primary teachers) nor with regard to the special subject of study. We thought that as we are dealing with the 'European dimension and multiculturalism' not only students with a good command of English should participate, but also—taking into account our main theme: multiculturalism—those that are members of ethnic minorities.

However, it might be a weakness that up to now there has not been enough time to discuss and really decide in concert on the aim of our activities, neither in the fields mentioned (official cultures, old or new minorities) nor in the sense of what should be developed, even though the majority seemed to tend toward the following as first possibilities:

- (1) Do we intend to develop a new type of European pedagogical training seminar for future teachers by taking the multilingual and multicultural situation as the starting-point for a new conception of teaching and learning style that should be developed or
- (2) Do we intend to organise seminars in some traditional way by for example selecting students and teaching staff members in advance on the basis of their abilities in the English language and choosing lectures and materials effective in one national setting only?

Bearing in mind the notion of 'Interculturalism and multiculturalism', the working concept was based on the principle of comparison, bringing the students together in everyday life and by joint work. In concrete three dimensions should be examined:

- (1) Contexts (differences and similarities in housing, meals, clothes, etc.).
- (2) Prejudices (illustrated by examples taken from national, group related or personal ones).
- (3) Behaviour and conventional habits (organisation of time and space, preferences in leisure activities, etc.).

The content of the seminar comprised:

- (1) Informing the other students about their own teacher training.
- (2) Information about (a) the school system and teacher training in Brussels and Belgium; (b) institutions of the EC, and (c) visiting school (European School, Flemish schools).
- (3) Daily lessons in the Dutch language during the first weeks.
- (4) Lessons about key themes such as European Dimension, stereotypes, prejudice, cultural games.
- (5) Preparing lessons with European/multi-cultural content in small mixed groups to be taught at schools in Brussels.
- (6) Some cultural excursions to the Walloon and to the Flemish part of Belgium, cultural events, etc.

In their preparatory work, students should include producing a video about their

student life and the locations of their training, teaching at a school and interviews with minority groups, as well as collecting articles about Belgium and Brussels and preparing some topics for lessons.

Mainly due to the fact that the information that this seminar would be financially supported was received very late, the concrete preparation was not always as planned. Time table constraints prevented meeting as intended to plan the joint lectures in concrete terms. Therefore the joint plans for the lectures were only discussed in a general way, while the concretisation and co-ordination was left to the few teacher trainers who were able to meet.

The recruitment of students was also not easy for some of the institutions. For some institution it was evident from the beginning that such a seminar conducted abroad would not be accepted as course credit within the existing training schema, their students would only be able to attend during the holidays. Only students from institutions in The Netherlands knew from the beginning that the seminar would officially be recognised as part of their course of studies. For German students the final decision to hold the seminar was taken too late to organise the four-week absence during the ongoing term. There was no possibility of having the stay abroad officially accepted as course credit at such short notice, even though under some circumstances it is possible to be absent from the university during the semester. In other cases, students confronted with the actual situation of having to make a decision perceived many problems hindering their attendance such as leaving for four weeks would result in their losing the job, with which they support (partly) their studies or family as well as study-related or personal problems.

2.2 Evaluative and Comparative Remarks

Even though the final evaluation will only be made later, I can already say that this seminar was successful and all students were completely satisfied with having participated. Nearly all students wrote positive remarks in their evaluations such as: 'It was a unique and fruitful experience in my professional training', 'These weeks revealed many basic things about myself and living together', 'I always thought that we [British and Belgians] are living in a similar way and did not imagine the differences I experienced in the family where I was, e.g. meal habits, living styles and perspectives', 'Before this experience I really did not know what European dimension could mean for me. Now I am curious to teach some time in another country'.

There were many very positive aspects especially concerning living with a family, living and working together in the hotel and matters related to school visits and their own teaching as a bicultural team in schools, obtaining a lot of information and gaining various experiences. Particularly some more specifically personal experiences seem to be related to expectations and previous experiences of foreign settings. It could also be that the kind of preparation plays a role, for example, if the students expect characteristically 'Belgian' things or if they only expect that they should adapt the new situation and learn many new, unexpected things. The content of some of the lectures was also mentioned in a very positive way, e.g. about prejudices, the European dimension, what could it be European dimension and the cultural game. The lessons held in Dutch were given very contradictory judgements by the students. Some found it very helpful, as it revealed to them how a pupil feels not knowing a language very well, some mentioned positively that it was a good way of obtaining a better understanding of the environment

in Brussels and helpful to cope with the local classroom situation. For others it was just boring and a waste of time.

Apart from the many positive remarks some harsh criticism was also leveled at the content. Some considered the Dutch lessons useless, wasted time as they would never have the opportunity of using it again. But a greater number mentioned that the connection between the different lessons dealing with 'European dimension', 'Multiculturalism', 'intercultural learning' was not at all clear. They asked for a clearer concept about 'what the "European Dimension" is, what relationships exist between nationalities and minorities, what "multi-" and "intercultural" means'. This criticism nearly always also referred to the extremely different styles of teaching that students know from their own training institutions (as well as what they experienced in schools) and that the different trainers used during the seminar. The freedom and autonomy of students in everyday life, in their course of studies and the teaching methods used seem to differ to a large extent. As expected nearly all students complained that there had not been enough time for joint discussions, as the programme was too crammed, especially by cultural events, which some would prefer to be optional.

A particularly problematic area was the intended co-operation between the trainers of different institutions in teaching. There were two major problems. For co-teaching one needs direct communication joint planning. Not having much money available for preparations was only one of the problems, the other was the extreme difficulty of finding dates that suited all trainers for the joint preparation. Due to these difficulties only those trainers who lived quite near to Brussels met more than once for concrete planning.

A major problem that only became apparent during the seminar and put forward by the students was the different styles of teaching and different orientations in teaching, partly due to different professional subjects, partly due to different perspectives and aims in (national) perspectives on teacher education, partly, as always, due to personal factors.

I will not deal with the question of language in great depth, I only want to point out, that for a multilingual situation lecturing is quite problematic, regardless of the chosen language. What is needed are extremely well-prepared special lessons designed for the multilingual setting using many different materials, different learning and working settings for the students, preferably using methods requiring active participation.

3. Underlying Problems and Outlook

I got the impression, that some of our main problems are related to the following issues.

It seems to me that in the majority of all European states the introduction of compulsory schooling after the French Revolution promoted the development of one (national) language, common values, and common national feelings by highlighting the distinctions between states and cultures. Frequently this was also tied to a particular religion. In general this development seemed to involve the suppression of minorities, especially language minorities. At the same time the national borders were firmly demarkated due to the development of a national educational system and increased by the introduction of special examinations, even in the university sector, followed by almost only employing persons who had received the proper national schooling and training. Even though the EC regulations have been in force for more than a year, I have not seen any remarkable change yet.

I have the impression that the introduction of national training systems for teachers,

especially for the teachers of the great majority of the population, was largely used for creating and establishing the concepts of the given national state. It seems to me that in this process it was largely irrelevant whether the school and teacher training was the responsibility of the state or the church. Taking this into account one can say that in every European country one of the major objectives of schooling was the unification of the national population and establishing in fact and in thinking clear distinctions between neighbouring states, languages and cultures. This historically developed and grown orientation in education persists mainly due to the fact that it has influenced the content as well as all sectors and structures of education so that we tend—even today—to consider some of our own national traditions as general and universal or as the only valid ones. Thus when trying to organise a joint student seminar that is to take place during the term and should be recognised as a valid part of training we are confronted with many problems nowadays. The co-operative work of trainers with colleagues in other countries is often not officially accepted. Only few training institutions have provided posts, pay or other subsidies for cooperation. Thus co-operation tends to have a low priority in the official duties or is no official duty at all. Most of our colleagues in the network can only participate by investing private time.

Apart from the development of clear distinctions between the different national systems, some common general ideas based on shared Latin-Greek, Christian and humanist tradition were propagated by all the well-known great pedagogues from Jan Komenský (J. Comenius) onwards to our times. Thus, some of these ideals were also transported into type of schools, mainly into secondary schools for a smaller élite. But this teaching does not seem to be very effective, transmitting mainly idealistic ideas which consequently did not gain much influence on life or politics. But nevertheless, we can refer back to them and especially build on the large number of preliminary studies of the Council of Europe, conducted on the basis the European Convention of Basic Human Rights of 1950.

Today all member states of the EC are multicultural in some dimension of culture, language, ethnicity or religion. Some have always been multicultural in this sense, mainly without acknowledging this officially or only accepting it partly, for example in the religious sector. Others have become multicultural since the Second World War due to the migration. But in many states or regions the multicultural setting is only applied to pupils not to the teaching staff, which has for several reasons stayed mono-cultural. Compared with the teaching staff, many classes are multi-lingual and multi-cultural. Looking at the teaching reality in schools the frequently heard political message, 'that cultural and linguistic diversity represents the richness of Europe which should be preserved', sounds like a purely idealistic slogan.

To change and really establish a European dimension and perspective in the just mentioned fields we need major political inputs and changes in policy. Instead of narrow-minded, precisely described training programmes, teacher training needs more freedom to establish flexible professional training which is open for exchange, study and training in another country and even common study modules. But we also need many additional pedagogical, didactical inputs.

In the network we took the first step by developing a method for holding directly co-operative seminars and introducing some elements of a pedagogy for co-operation. The main principles on which we based our work seem to be valid. One major question is still open the use of language(s) or the demand for a 'lingua franca'. In this area there is no unanimous opinion, some, for practical reasons, propose making English the only required language, others think of using two languages such as English and French. I

am with others convinced that we should have more confidence in the diverse communicative competencies of our students and that we should not administratively impose a working language right from the beginning, thinking that by doing so the linguistic and cultural problems would be solved. However a lot of energy should be put into:

- (1) The development of pedagogical teaching methods using other communicative ways than just language by opting for a multilingual situation as a concept.
- (2) The development of learning/instructional strategies for teacher training which are much less dependent on lecturing and speaking.
- (3) The reformation of our (foreign) language teaching by extending the knowledge of one language by introducing multiple connections through the use of metaphors, common origins and loan words as well as teaching about the neighbouring languages.
- (4) The in-depth inspection of our own cultural identity and thus discovering the multiplicity of common interrelated developments. (Only Adam had his own unique culture!)

If we agree that Europeans have to come closer together and that Europe should have a peaceful future we have to develop a great variety of forms of co-operation between people and a pedagogical strategy for and a methodology of intercultural learning in all sectors of education for the multicultural European society. If we fail, peaceful (re-)developments will definitely become more unlikely.

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