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## COMPETENCE-BASED APPROACHES TO PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION OF TEACHERS IN THE EUROPE

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The article deals with the problem of competence-based approaches to teacher education in the Europe. In the last years, teacher education in the Europe has been dominated by problems: the need to bridge the gap between theory and practice, the shortage of teachers in the Europe, and finally the liberal ideas on a market-orientated society. Teacher education should offer more flexible routes, taking into account the results of prior (formal and informal) learning. An example of this development is a new law on allowing people with prior learning to enter the teaching profession without having done a full course on teacher education. Finally it must be noted that a fundamental discussion (M. Elshout-Mohr, R. Oostdam, A. Dietze, M. Snoek et al.) is going on in the academic world of European educational research about the way assessment systems must be aligned to constructivist and competence-based educational arrangements. In a recent policy document of the Ministries of Education, the position of institutions, which play an important role in supporting schools in their development, like institutions for curriculum development and in-service training, assessment-centers and institutions for teacher education, has changed. The key players in the European education are the schools and all supporting institutions should adapt to the needs of the schools. This approach calls for an open market, where schools can buy services they need from every organization, commercial or non-commercial. Inspired by the work of the ATEE Research and Development Centre on Developments in Curricula for Teacher Education, the Dutch association for teacher educators, VELON, has started a scenario project on the future of teacher education in the Europe. VELON projects and pilots towards competence-based learning, the formulation of competencies, the introduction of portfolios and the development of new competence-based instruments for assessment are analyzed in this article.

**Key words:** *competence-based approaches, portfolios, teacher education, assessment.*

У статті вивчається проблема компетентнісних підходів до підготовки вчителів у країнах Європейського Союзу; аналізуються проекти та пілоти компетентнісного навчання, визначення компетентності, введення портфоліо і розвиток нових компетентнісних інструментів оцінювання.

**Ключові слова:** *компетентнісні підходи, портфоліо, підготовка вчителів, оцінювання, проект*

В статье изучается проблема компетентностных подходов к подготовке учителей в странах Европейского Союза; анализируются проекты и пилоты компетентностного обучения, определение компетентности, введение портфолио и развитие новых компетентностных инструментов оценивания.

**Ключевые слова:** *компетентностные подходы, портфолио, подготовка учителей, оценивание, проект.*

**Introduction.** In the last three years, teacher education in the Europe has been dominated by intensive discussions, which challenge the traditional presuppositions of teacher education. Three issues dominate these discussions: the need to bridge the gap between theory and practice, the shortage of teachers in The Netherlands, and finally the liberal ideas on a market-orientated society [7]. These three issues influence and strengthen each other, leading to “landslides” in teacher education [6, p. 5–12] and a dynamic situation whereby new ideas are welcomed and tried out and where the traditional presuppositions are questioned. However, ‘the pressure underlying these developments runs the risk of leading to a lack of reflection and distance, because

there is so little time for critical observation’ [4, p. 586–601].

In general, there is growing dissatisfaction (F. Dochy, G. Moerkerke, M. Elshout-Mohr, R. Oostdam, F. Dietze, M. Snoek et al.) with the fragmented approach to the curriculum in teacher education. It is left to the integrative ability of the student to process the atomistic elements into what today we call competencies. Also the validity of the corresponding assessment method was questioned. A sufficient mastery of separate knowledge and skill components does not guarantee adequate behaviour in complex professional situations. Especially in higher professional education, there is a tendency towards a more holistic view on the assessment of competence, related to professional behaviour in working situations [2; 3].



**Goals.** The aim of the article is to analyze projects and pilots, the formulation of competencies, the introduction of portfolios and the development of new competence-based instruments for assessment towards competence-based learning in professional preparation of teachers in the Europe.

European pedagogues (M. Elshout-Mohr, R. Ootsdam, A. Dietze, M. Snoek et al.) have noticed that the institutions for secondary teacher education are tackling the development of assessments and the introduction of the use of portfolios in the curricula. Consequently they have produced a redefinition of the competencies for the teaching profession in a way that can be used in the new concept [3]. In cooperation with scientists (S. Dieric, F. Dochy, G. van de Watering et al.) and national organization for the professional quality of the teacher, the joint institutions for teacher education proposed a new system of describing competencies that can function as an instrument to achieve a common frame of reference for school, student and teacher education. This approach to describing the teaching professional has been the foundation for a new description of teaching standards [6].

The emphasis on competence-orientated approaches in education, combined with the shortage of teachers has lead to new views on the curriculum for teacher education. Teacher education should offer more flexible routes, taking into account the results of prior (formal and informal) learning. An example of this development is a new law on allowing people with prior learning to enter the teaching profession without having done a full course on teacher education.

The Dutch ministry of education, for example, has launched a program to attract more students to primary and secondary teacher education from traditional and new sources. In August 2000 an Interim Act came into force that made it possible to deliver short and flexible routes for people with some kind of prior learning [5]. An entrance assessment was developed on a national level. Many of the official state funded institutions for teacher education set up assessment centers that could diagnose applicants with reference to competence orientated criteria. A training of assessors is well under way. Assessments are executed with a pair of assessors, one being an experienced teacher from primary or secondary education, the other being a teacher educator. Assessments use a mixture of portfolio evidence from the past and behaviour on the spot. The applicant applies for a job at a school and the school applies for the assessment of the applicant at an assessment centre at an institute for teacher education.

The outcome of the assessment is the decision whether the applicant is allowed to work without strict supervision in a school,

and a written advise about the work based (“dual”) learning route that combines the work in school with the learning that still is necessary to get the official teaching license, focusing on the missing elements in the desired teaching standards.

So, the follow up of this assessment should be a needs-driven, competence-orientated, work-based learning route. The official state funded institutions for teacher education have difficulty in providing for these kinds of routes. The transformation of their curriculum concept towards more dynamic curricula has only just started. It is clear that this national development is a great stimulant for this necessary transformation.

Competence-orientated and holistic assessments and the use of portfolio instruments are now seen to be necessary in the “ordinary” programs too. The necessity of a transition to needs driven curricula has become apparent.

Finally it must be noted that a fundamental discussion (M. Elshout-Mohr, R. Ootsdam, A. Dietze, M. Snoek et al.) is going on in the academic world of European educational research about the way assessment systems must be aligned to constructivist and competence-based educational arrangements [3]. Also the concerns about validity, reliability, acceptability and efficiency in the different settings are addressed. S. Dieric, F. Dochy, G. van de Watering state that the traditional meanings to validity and reliability are not relevant in the context of competence-based assessments and must be replaced by new meanings [3]. So, it is not a question of old versus new in the world of assessment. It is new next to old, each functioning in its appropriate realm. The real issue is the change in the overall concept of curriculum, from supply driven and assessing whether the supply has been adequately consumed to needs driven and challenging students to construct their own proof of competence. We are near the end of the traditional concept of curriculum. The shortage of teachers leads to a situation in which schools are getting more involved in teacher education as a consequence of their human resource responsibility.

The concept of school-based teacher education is developed by schools and

teacher education institutions together, supported by the government. In a recent policy document the Dutch Minister of Education states that “teacher education is a part of the human resource responsibility of a school board” [5]. Only a few years ago school



boards would not recognize themselves in this statement, feeling that their main responsibility was towards their pupils and the education they had to offer them. The shortage of teachers, however, made schools more aware of the need of intensive human resource management. TE institutions are not able to attract enough students to educate the number of teachers needed by the schools. At this moment schools start to recruit new (unlicensed) teachers themselves. Some schools even state that they are willing to educate teachers themselves, when TE institutions are not able to fulfill their needs. Although this rhetoric is nowhere put into practice yet, it is not unlikely that large school organizations might be able and willing to organize their own education of teachers, with or without buying expertise from TE institutions.

In a recent policy document of the Ministry of Education [5], the position of institutions, which play an important role in supporting schools in their development, like institutions for curriculum development and in-service training, assessment centers and institutions for teacher education, has changed.

The key players in education are the schools and all supporting institutions should adapt to the needs of the schools. This approach calls for an open market, where schools can buy services they need from every organization, commercial or non-commercial.

This policy is inspired by Van Wieringen who presented four scenarios for the roles of schools and institutions for teacher education. These scenarios have influenced the National Education Board [5] in its advice on the "educative infrastructure". Van Wieringen makes a separation between the involvement in the actual education of teachers and the coordination.

When schools participate in the curriculum of teacher education, the link between theory and practice can be restored and it can contribute to the attractiveness of the teaching profession in the school, creating new roles and challenges for teachers. Those changes might lead to a reversion of roles: the schools do not wait and see what TE institutions come up with, but they take the lead and demand new services and new quality from teacher education. Schools become learning organizations, in which professional development of new and old staff is integrated in the school organization.

The division between in-service and pre-service teacher education disappears. Schools ask for new, specially designed curricula and stronger involvement in parts of the curriculum, which traditionally are run within the institution for teacher education. In this

turbulent situation, institutions for teacher education try to redefine their position: in a recent policy document they presented themselves as expertise centers for education and accreditation of teachers.

Inspired by the work of the ATEE Research and Development Centre on Developments in Curricula for Teacher Education [1], the Dutch association for teacher educators, VELON, has started a scenario project on the future of teacher education in The Netherlands.

The many changes described above have a large impact on teacher education. For many teacher educators, the large amount of new initiatives and new regulations at this moment seems rather confusing. The VELON started the scenario project to help teacher educators to make sense of the turbulent developments and to help them to look forward to possible future models for teacher education. In this the motivation of the VELON was in line with the motivation of RDC19 [6].

During two sessions teacher educators were invited to reflect on the four possible scenarios resulting from this matrix. These reflections led to descriptions of the four scenarios which were realistic and plausible and which were connected to challenging metaphors.

Combining these dilemmas, four scenarios emerge.

*The first scenario* actually describes the traditional situation of teacher education in The Netherlands: teacher education is regulated and funded by the government and takes place through a fixed curriculum where students learn the knowledge and skills described in the attainment targets that are needed to be a qualified teacher. In discussing this scenario, teacher education was compared with a trip by coach bus to Rome.

The coach driver (the teacher educator) knows the route and the road to take. He or she can improvise (in case of emergencies or accidents), is engaging, and can tell interesting stories about the sites they pass on the road, he or she has eyes for the needs of the passengers (making a pee stop when necessary) and can vary activities when passengers get bored (by starting an interesting video). He or she can have a colleague with whom to share the job, each having their own expertise (e.g. driving in the mountains). The passengers don't need to think about the route to Rome, they just can board the coach and let the driver guide them. They don't have an overview of the route; neither do they know the trouble they can meet on their way. The general idea is that a group that boards the coach will all arrive at Rome at the same time, although it can happen that one of the pas-



sengers decides to leave the coach halfway during the journey, because he decides that Rome is not a desirable destination or that the trip takes too long. Or one can drop off the coach to go sightseeing at an interesting place, to catch on again with the next coach. Of course, it is possible to join the coach halfway down the route, for those who do not live in the town of departure but live some way along the route and have travelled that part of the journey years ago. The coach company is flourishing, although recently it is under pressure since more and more travellers are taking alternative routes to Rome: fast journeys by airplane, non-stop journeys and self-organized trips.

This metaphor is very recognizable for teacher educators in The Netherlands, since it describes what most of them have done during the last decades. However, with growing influence of constructivistic approaches in teacher education and the need for more flexible and competence-based curricula, the coach company changes into a travel agency for people who want to design their own journey, supporting travellers who want to travel to Rome by giving them advice on the luggage to take with them, checking their vehicles, supplying them with information on the possible routes to take, on possible difficulties they might encounter and on possible places to stay for the night. Thus, the travellers leave for Rome, individually or in groups, well prepared. When they encounter each other during their journey, they exchange experiences and give each other advice on what to do when they come across certain problems.

*Scenario 2. Competence-based teacher education as a general provision*

In this scenario the government is in charge of teacher education: it decides the competences that must be met and which qualifications are needed for the variety of jobs in schools. It decides which institutions are allowed to educate teachers, supplies them with funds for the education of teachers and is at the same time responsible for the quality control by the Inspectorate. The authority to decide on the actual design of learning routes, assessment instruments, etc. is delegated to the institutions. The institutions for teacher education have, together with the schools, described the competences for teachers, which are authorized by the government. In close cooperation with schools, these competencies are translated to curriculum models and assessment instruments.

Schools and institutions for teacher education have evaluated the existing curricula and decided on the need for more flexible routes into the teaching profession. Key element in

the new curriculum models is the idea that the competences and qualifications are leading, but that the routes to meet those qualifications can vary, based on personal preferences, learning styles and prior learning. Teacher education is seen as a part of life-long learning, where students can define their own personal learning route and students and teachers show their professional development in integrative assessments.

*Scenario 3. Curriculum-based teacher education as a market-orientated activity.* In the process of deregulation the government has transferred a considerable autonomy to schools. The main responsibility of the government is on the quality of education.

The way to reach the desired quality is for the schools to decide. That means that the government has dropped strict guidelines concerning teacher qualifications. It is up to the schools to decide what personnel they want to appoint and what qualifications are needed. This has started at higher education and vocational education, but is now also realized in primary and secondary education. As long as the schools meets the quality standards, the government doesn't meddle with the teachers a school wants to appoint. The budget for teaching and non-teaching staff and for their pre- and in-service education has been transferred to the schools. This change was necessary since the Bologna Declaration made it possible for other organizations to offer their services to schools. At this moment schools can chose between a lot of institutions offering services in the field of human resource development and education of teachers. There is a strong competition both in price and quality. The trend towards competence-based teacher education is returning. The idea of individual routes and courses led to a complex and hardly transparent system of routes that was difficult to manage. The need for a clear and transparent system has led to a revival of curriculum orientated models, where fixed curricula are offered. The school, the institution for teacher education and the student agree on a general program, so everyone knows what to expect.

Since schools differ considerably, there is a great diversity in the needs of schools and the profiles of teachers they want. This has led to a large number of routes that are offered to schools. Institutions for teacher education have problems in organizing this great diversity. Courses for a small number of students are very expensive, so schools try to form alliances to combine groups of students.

These developments have led to large changes within (teacher) education: Schools are much more aware of their responsibility



in the continuous professional development of their staff and teacher educators have become more sensitive to the needs of schools and the costs of their activities. Institutions for teacher education are forced to adapt to the trends and whims of schools and have difficulty in defining their own policy and continuity. The attraction of the teaching profession has diminished even further, since the general teaching profession has ceased to exist. There are very many specialized teaching profiles, which make the profession vague and hinders mobility in the profession.

*Scenario 4. Competence-based teacher education as a market-orientated activity*

The government has retreated in the field of education. Schools are responsible for the quality of their education. Parents and pupils are very keen on the learning results of pupils. If the quality drops, schools will suffer a drop in the number of pupils.

To guarantee the desired quality schools hire those employees that fit in the mission and the product that the school wants to offer. A school can appoint those employees or they can be hired for a limited time as autonomous professionals. There are two types of teachers: those who have had a broad and general teacher education like the courses at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The variety in teacher profiles includes a variety in needs for further professional development: initial courses to become a general teacher, courses to broaden one's expertise towards a general teacher profile or courses to specialise in one of the many possible subjects. Schools define the teacher profiles they need. Individual professionals chose a profile that can distinguish them from other professionals and give them added value for schools.

Just as in schools, those courses can be offered by 'institutions' or by independent educational entrepreneurs. To ensure the quality of these independent entrepreneurs a system of accreditation is founded. Quality is ensured by registration of professionals in an independent register of educational professionals.

**Summary.** The key concepts of these scenarios can be recognized in the developments of teacher education in the Europe. Dutch scenario model is used as an example of the axis social coherence-individualism. Both axes of the VELON model are related to these concepts, however both on a different level. The axis curriculum-competencies indicates a continuum from teacher education dominated by a fixed curriculum to teacher

education organized around competencies as fixed outcomes, but with a flexible way to reach that outcome. In this way this axis indicates the freedom of the student in taking responsibility for his/her learning process and learning route. In a fixed curriculum, there is no freedom for the student; the curriculum is the same for all students. This part of the axis is related to a socially coherent society. The other part of the axis indicates a situation in which students have much more freedom to design their own personal learning routes, based on their individual competence-profiles, thus relating to the ATEE concept of individualism. The axis general provision of society-market activity is also related to the ATEE concepts of social coherence and individualism. This axis indicated the freedom of schools to define the type of teacher education they want. In the situation where teacher education is seen as a general provision of society, the government decides on a clear, uniform and coherent system for teacher education, relating to the ATEE concept of social coherence. In the situation where teacher education is seen as a market orientated activity, where schools can pronounce their needs and demands, schools can differ considerably in their wishes for the education of their teachers.

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