

Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Conference

Teacher professional development for the quality and equity of lifelong learning

Lisboa, Parque das Nações – Pavilhão Atlântico – Sala Nónio
27 and 28 September 2007

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[1. A more competitive and inclusive Europe]

The Lisbon Strategy, launched in 2000 by the previous Portuguese Presidency of the European Union, sought to respond to the changes in the economy and society of the time. In terms of the globalisation of economic exchange, the increase in international competition and the affirmation of an economy of technologically advanced services, the European Union responded on two levels: first, it consolidated its development capacity and, second, it reaffirmed the ‘European social model’.

Education and training are core to that State of social investment, a political instrument that is essential to the construction of a virtuous circle between innovation and competitiveness, on the one hand, and cohesion and inclusion, on the other. There will not be a ‘knowledge society’ that is inclusive, cohesive and dynamic without a ‘knowledge economy’ that is capable of responding to the current and future challenges of competitiveness and innovation. And there will be no ‘knowledge economy’ without education systems that are capable of endowing young people with the knowledge, know-how and competencies that enable them, as adults, to respond, collectively and individually, to the professional, political and cultural challenges of the future.

At that time, Europe stated the importance of countries organising the form and content of high quality and appropriate education and training systems in order to meet the challenge of ensuring the quality of basic learning and the widespread extension of education and training at the highest levels, offering all the possibility of lifelong learning.

Quality, effectiveness and equity: it is perhaps this triangle that organises Europe’s ambition in the field of education and training within the framework of the Lisbon strategy.

[2. The role and the performance of schools in fulfilling objectives and meeting challenges]

From 2000 onwards, ambitious goals and agreed monitoring mechanisms were established that allowed stumbling blocks to the fulfilment of common objectives to be identified, and which also permitted the permanent updating of policy intervention in each country and the identification of areas of common intervention.

Under the leadership of the Commission, the educational systems of the different countries, in all their different forms, were subject to an extensive problem diagnosis and analysis, as well as the design of a global strategy and concrete policy measures, seeking paths to the definition of national policy that aims to achieve defined objectives. Due to this effort in monitoring and reflecting upon the role of schools and teachers, and from a comparative and integrative perspective, we know more about the possibilities of intervention, which in turn allows the full use of available resources in the area of education and training.

[3. Changes and new demands]

The changes caused by globalisation, particularly the ones that affect schools and teachers, have been identified as one of the main challenges for policy intervention. I would like to highlight three demands within this context: first, the development of new competencies in pupils' education; secondly, lifelong learning; and finally, education for social and political participation.

However, I believe that the greatest challenge continues to be the diversity of pupils. Although nothing new, the scale of the issue has grown considerably, especially as a result of the ambition of giving everyone higher levels of qualification. As well as the classic social and economic inequalities, we now have, sometimes cumulatively, a diversity of pupils' culture, age, language and learning pace.

Thus, despite all the changes, the constantly renewed challenges and the permanently moveable expectations that citizens have of schools, perhaps it is important to underline that the great challenge for educational systems, in all countries of the European Union, continues to be the same: teaching children and young people, whatever their social background, their learning pace, their motivations, endowing them with the knowledge and competencies that make them the citizens and professionals of the future.

Today, in each one of our different countries, this effort has a different importance, however: the issue is teaching all children and young people a common body of knowledge and competencies, but preparing them to act on a European scale, within a more diverse and competitive global context.

[4. Real changes in schools and corresponding changes in practice, competencies and the teacher education profile

This is something that is consensual in all reports about European countries, it is also the perception that the challenges of the change require changes in practice, in competencies and the teacher education profile, as well as how schools are organised and relate to the environment they are part of.

Firstly, **techno-pedagogic** changes, requiring the introduction of new material on the curriculum, particularly in the areas of ICT and languages, the continuation of lifelong learning and greater attention given to scientific research in initial and in-service teacher education.

Secondly, **organisational** changes, with the diversification of responsibilities and tasks in schools. Teachers need to improve teamwork competencies and increase participation in the workings of pedagogic bodies.

Thirdly, the changes are also **social** in nature, recognising the need for the school to work with other partners – local authorities, parents, companies, various associations.

[5. National and European intervention programmes/mechanisms]

The necessary changes demand concrete political answers. It is the responsibility of European and national institutions to adapt teacher education, create opportunities and make resources available to permit them to improve their performance.

There are various European instruments that contribute to this.

Firstly, the Bologna Treaty, which allows the consolidation of mobility, improves the coordination between initial and continuing education, and consolidates the scientific component of teacher training.

Secondly, instruments of teacher mobility within the European space. Although mobility is limited to a small group of teachers, the Comenius and Erasmus schemes, within the framework of the Socrates programme, and the Leonardo Da Vinci programme, have been essential in allowing teachers to do part of their teacher education in another country. The new Lifelong Learning Programme, launched at the time of the German presidency, will increase support for teacher mobility and the cooperation projects between training institutions. Within this context, mobility should be synonymous with greater experience, quality and diversity of learning provided on the training path and throughout life.

As we know, the areas of education and training are the responsibility of Member-States or the regional States that constitute them. However, the Open Coordination Method stimulates the production of references and guiding principles of national and regional policies. It is within this context that the Common European Principles for Teacher Competencies and Qualifications may be one more important instrument for the definition of the policies of each Member-State. At this crucial moment, I believe it is worth highlighting the importance of ensuring that the profession of teacher is recognised, materially and symbolically, as a highly qualified and socially indispensable activity within the European

Union. This recognition is essential if we want it to be an attractive profession and avoid a scarcity of teachers in the near future.

[6. The role of the Commission]

Of the considerable effort made by the European Commission to map and analyse the problems, the Communication on “Improving the quality of the teacher education” presented last August is particularly important; the Portuguese Presidency will submit conclusions in this area to the (Education) Council of the European Union. In the near future, the conclusions will permit the construction of a reference framework for teacher qualifications and competencies, functioning as a central mechanism in the promotion of its professional performance, contributing to the improvement of the quality, equity and efficiency of the teaching and learning processes in both general and vocational compulsory and upper-secondary education. I hope this proves to be a core work mechanism and that the conference that starts today allows the discussion of some of the implications of that proposal. The public debate about this issue is of particular interest to teachers, and their experience should enrich the discussion. However, this debate is also relevant to other players that are directly interested in education, as well as to society in general. And between the legitimate interests of the professionals and the no less legitimate public interest, a balance needs to be struck.

To conclude, let me highlight that, in the area of teacher education, the issue is the fulfilment of the ‘Education and Training 2010’ Programme and the Lisbon Strategy. In other words, it is the future of Europe, as the most economically competitive and socially cohesive place, that we are talking about.

Thank you very much for your attention

I hope you all have a good day’s work.