



POLICY PAPER

The Quality of Teachers

Recommendations on the development of indicators
to identify teacher quality

October 2006

ATEE
Association for Teacher Education in Europe

Preface

The quality of teachers is an important issue in both national and European policies. Teacher education plays a very significant role in increasing and safeguarding the quality of teachers. The Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE) aims to improve the quality of teacher education in Europe through the international exchange of research and practice in pre-service and in-service teacher education, and through active dialogue between the different stakeholders.

When developing national or European policies on teacher quality, it is important to incorporate professional and academic perspectives on teacher professionalism and teacher development. To fuel these policies and to contribute to the clarification of the concept of teacher quality, the ATEE recently brought together an international group of over 300 teacher education professionals who are involved in the theory and/or practice of educating teachers.

At its 30th annual conference in Amsterdam, ATEE members addressed the issue of teacher quality by means of keynote presentations, paper presentations during parallel sessions, and meetings of research and development centres. The participants were invited to engage in an interactive and ongoing debate during the conference, stimulated by a discussion paper prepared by the Academic Committee of the conference.

The outcomes of the 30th ATEE conference were translated to seven recommendations on the development of, criteria for and use of indicators for teacher quality.

During ATEE's 31st annual conference in Portoroz, Slovenia, the recommendations were discussed and accepted by the General Assembly.

This document presents the seven recommendations and the elaboration of the recommendations. The aim of the recommendations is to inspire teachers to reflect on their professional quality and to help them to find indicators¹ for this quality and to develop this quality. We also hope that the recommendations will support policy makers who are involved in developing indicators to identify teacher quality.

ATEE Administrative Council²
October 2006

¹ Here, 'indicator' means a way to make visible the effects of a quality even though the quality itself is not visible. An indicator can be of a quantitative or a qualitative nature.

² For more information, please contact Marco Snoek, Amsterdam Institute of Education, M.Snoek@hva.nl.

Recommendations on the development of, criteria for and use of indicators of teacher quality

Development of indicators

1. A shared frame of reference regarding the concept of teacher quality is needed in order to facilitate international cooperation and exchange.
2. Both national and European processes to formulate indicators to identify teacher quality should focus on the involvement and ownership of teachers, as this is a necessary condition for quality indicators that will have a real impact on teaching.

Criteria for indicators

3. Indicators of teacher quality should take into account the concerns and perspectives of the different stakeholders (government, school leaders, teachers, teacher education, parents/pupils). Only then can quality indicators be used as a shared language.
4. As teaching is a profession that entails reflective thinking, continuing professional development, autonomy, responsibility, creativity, research and personal judgements, indicators to identify the quality of teachers should reflect these values and attributes.
5. The indicators and their use should reflect the collaborative nature of teaching by allowing room in professional profiles for flexibility, personal styles and variety.
6. Indicators of teacher quality should be focused not only on the teaching process itself but also on the development of teaching materials, school innovation and knowledge development through systematic reflection and research.

The use of indicators

7. Quality indicators are not goals in themselves, but should be part of a system to stimulate teacher quality that is consistent with the indicators and that stimulates ownership by teachers.

The Quality of Teachers

'To understand the true quality of people, you must look into their minds, and examine their pursuits and aversions.'
Marcus Aurelius

Growing attention is being paid throughout Europe to the quality of teachers. This is a result of the strong awareness that education plays an important role in maintaining social and economic stability within Europe. The quality of teachers affects both the quality of schools and the learning of pupils. Moreover, changes in society are leading to new expectations of the role of education, which in turn is leading to new demands on the quality and competences of teachers. Thus, there is an increased need to be more explicit in describing teacher quality. Such explicit descriptions can help teachers, school leaders, teacher educators and governments to enhance teacher quality.

The concern about the quality of teachers has led to policies that stimulate the further development of the teaching profession. Many of these policies are focused on the development and definition of indicators that will promote and support the quality of teachers and teacher education, and that can be used to compare teacher quality by means of benchmarking. Examples of such indicators are the many descriptions that have been drawn up of a teacher's required competences and standards.

Quality indicators are defined on both a national and the European level. On the latter level, the need for such indicators is expressed (and the first descriptions of indicators are given) in a variety of documents, including the OECD document 'Teachers Matter',³ the EU documents 'Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications'⁴ and 'Changes in Teacher and Trainer Competences', and the ENTEP document 'The European Teacher'.⁵ As indicated in the OECD document, quality indicators for the teaching profession will also play a role in raising the status and increasing the attractiveness of the teaching profession. In that respect, they can make a major contribution to safeguarding the quality and quantity of the teacher workforce.

The ATEE supports efforts to develop the quality of teachers. As an association for teacher education institutes and individual teacher educators in Europe, teacher quality is the very core and essence of our activities. Recent discussions within the ATEE have made it clear that the national debates on the quality of teachers differ from country to country. Some countries have developed and implemented standards (or related concepts), while other countries do not yet have formal standards. There are strong differences between the European countries with respect to:

³ OECD (2005). Teachers Matter: Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers. OECD, Paris.

⁴ European Commission (2005). Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications. European Commission, 2005. See http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/testingconf_en.html.

⁵ European Network on Teacher Education Policies. See: <http://www.pa-feldkirch.ac.at/entep/>.

- The involvement of teachers and other groups in society that define quality indicators for teachers.
- The way in which the use of indicators of teacher quality is restricted to initial teacher education or also relates to the work of teachers in schools.
- The amount of detail or the broadness of the descriptions of quality indicators.
- The amount of freedom individual institutions have to define quality indicators or to interpret national quality indicators on a local level (i.e. whether the quality indicators are intended as guidelines or as regulations).

We believe that both teacher educators in European countries and the ATEE – as an umbrella association for teacher educators – can and should contribute to the debates on teacher quality and teacher standards. As experts in education and the learning of teachers, we wish to highlight six issues in the debate that should be taken into account in both national and European policies on teacher quality. These issues are the need for:

1. Conceptual clarity
2. Ownership of teachers
3. Involvement of different perspectives on teacher quality
4. A balanced view on teacher quality
5. Diversity in teacher profiles
6. The consistent use of indicators.

1: Conceptual clarity

The concepts that are used to define teacher quality are complex and lack clear definitions. In some countries, quality indicators are seen as instruments to safeguard and control the quality of teachers and teacher education. This might lead to negative emotions concerning a reduction in the professional autonomy of teachers and teacher education institutes. It might also lead to inertia, as it might stimulate the view that a teacher's professional development is complete once he or she meets the standards. In other countries, standards are seen as instruments to stimulate the professional development of teachers. Such standards are often associated with positive emotions related to increasing the professional autonomy of teachers.

In international discussions on teacher quality, the use of such words as 'competence' and 'standard' can create confusion, since in each country different words and definitions are used and different emotions are invoked. For example, 'standard' may be associated with the concept of 'standardization', which in turn may be associated with industrial mass production models, 'one size fits all' and 'middle of the road'. Such associations make the word 'standard' biased and useless in situations where it is meant to stimulate professional growth.

These different interpretations and emotions are seldom addressed in international policy debates, and this shortcoming may lead to conceptual confusion. As a result,

there is a risk that each individual, each institution and each government will use and interpret descriptions of quality indicators according to the own situation. There is also the danger that only one interpretation will become dominant without there being an explicit and thorough discussion of the interpretation used.

We believe that international exchange and cooperation will contribute to the quality of education in Europe. To make such international exchange and cooperation fruitful, there must be a dialogue based shared frame of reference with respect to concepts of teacher quality.

2: Ownership of teachers

Just as pupils need to feel ownership of their learning in order to stimulate their learning and will lose their motivation if the teacher fails to involve them in the goals of their learning, teachers will lose their motivation for professional development if they are not involved in defining the indicators that will be used to identify their professional quality. This will reduce the attractiveness of the profession. Therefore, the involvement and ownership of teachers in national or European processes to formulate indicators of teacher quality is a condition for quality indicators that can have a real impact on teaching.

3: Perspectives on teacher quality

A variety of actors are involved in the debate on the quality of teachers: governmental delegates, school leaders, teacher educators and – last but by no means least – teachers themselves (and in some countries, also parents and pupils). Each actor has its specific concerns and uses its own perspective on the quality of teachers.

The government (or local authority) is concerned with maintaining and safeguarding the quality of education. This concern might lead to formal regulations, including the explicit definition of standards of teachers.

School leaders are responsible for appointing a teaching staff that will support and guarantee the quality of the learning process of pupils and students. To promote the quality of the teaching staff, an attractive and challenging learning environment must be created. Quality indicators for teachers can be used as an instrument within the human resource policy of the school for the selection of new staff and for arranging the continuing professional development of the teaching staff.

Teacher education institutes need an explicit definition of the quality of student teachers for two reasons, that is, they need this frame of reference 1) to be able to supervise students in their development towards becoming competent teachers and 2) to assess the students in order to guarantee the quality of future teachers.

Teachers are responsible for their own continuous professional development. Explicit

indicators to identify the quality of teachers can help them to monitor and navigate their learning process.

Parents and pupils are concerned with the effects that the teacher has on the learning of the pupil.

Quality indicators can create a shared frame of reference and a shared language for communication between the various actors. The lifelong learning of teachers will be promoted and supported if teachers and school leaders use the same frame of reference for teacher quality and the professional development of teachers.

Since the aims and concerns of each of the actors differ, the quality indicators should be formulated in such a way that they include all these different concerns and aims. In many cases, quality indicators are developed from only one perspective (e.g. with a focus on controlling and safeguarding the quality of teachers), which makes them less suitable as an instrument for teachers to monitor and stimulate their own learning. The use of a shared frame of reference that includes all the different perspectives will increase the ownership and active involvement of all actors.

4: A balanced view on the quality of teachers

A variety of resources can and should be used to identify indicators to identify teacher quality. Teacher quality is an overall concept that comprises not only knowledge and skills, but also personal qualities (respect, care, courage, empathy, etc.) and personal values, attitudes, identity, beliefs, etc. The way in which these characteristics are implicitly or explicitly included in indicators of teacher quality reflects the dominant social, cultural, economic and educational views and concerns about the quality of teachers.

In debates about the innovative power of Europe and the knowledge economy, discussions on teacher quality tend to focus on knowledge and skills. If quality indicators are used as an instrument to control teacher quality, the indicators are predominantly those that are easy to measure in a way that is quantitatively objective. Such approaches lead to a very limited and one-sided perspective on the quality of teachers and teacher education.

Teaching, however, is a complex profession and it is impossible to measure the quality of teachers through standardized tests. Such quality aspects as attitudes, values and identity are difficult to define and to measure. But since these characteristics are vital aspects of teaching and teachers, we must prevent the occurrence of situations in which a narrow and simplistic perspective of teacher quality becomes dominant as a result of problems related to the assessment of such personal qualities.

We strongly support a concept of teaching in which teaching is seen as a profession that entails reflective thinking, continuing professional development, autonomy, responsibility, creativity, research and personal judgements. Indicators that identify the

quality of teachers should reflect these values and attributes.

5: Diversity within a team

Although most quality indicators focus on individual quality, the teaching profession is not an isolated profession. Teaching pupils and students is a collective responsibility and each team member contributes his or her personal quality to this process. The indicators and their use should reflect this collaborative perspective in such a way that they allow room for flexibility, personal styles and professional profiles. As no two teachers are the same, it is necessary to have a variety of profiles and teaching styles within a team of teachers.

This collaborative perspective is not restricted to the teaching of pupils, but extends to innovation processes in the school. Teaching, school innovation and knowledge development are interconnected. Therefore, teachers also need to possess qualities that are related to innovation and knowledge development.

6: The consistent use of indicators

Identifying quality indicators is just one step towards improving the quality of teachers. A second step is to use quality indicators to support and stimulate their professional development. The way in which the indicators are used should be consistent with the indicators themselves. For example, if professional growth, trust and responsibility are important values to be developed in pupils, then teachers themselves should be given trust and responsibility and their professional growth should be stimulated. This has consequences for the way in which quality indicators are used.

Quality standards for teacher educators

If we want teacher educators to be role models for their student teachers, then teacher educators should be explicit about their own professional quality, the indicators of this quality and the way they use them to develop professionally in a systematic and self-regulated way. In this respect, teacher educators carry a heavy responsibility, as the quality of teacher educators affects not only the quality of teacher education and the learning of the student teachers, but also the attractiveness and the quality of the teaching profession and therefore the quality of the education that is provided to pupils.

The ATEE, as a professional community of teacher educators in Europe, will continue to stimulate communities of teacher educators to develop indicators of teacher educator quality within local or national contexts and to exchange such between their communities.

October 2006
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