The Meaning of Partnerships in Education: Highlights from 31st Annual ATEE Conference in Portorož, Slovenia

ATEE (The Association of Teacher Education in Europe) has been active for more than 30 years. Its mission is to enhance the quality of Teacher Education in Europe through active dialogue and international exchange of research and practice in initial and in-service teacher education. Research and practice contribute to development of knowledge and understanding of the most effective ways in which to educate and develop teachers. The ATEE tries to find the most effective ways to combine both research and practice and to apply this new knowledge in local contexts. Besides, it gives new initiatives and engages itself in analyses and studies of educational policies throughout Europe.

Highlights in the life of ATEE are the annual conferences organised in different European countries from the very beginning. This year it was organised by The National School for Leadership in Education and by The Faculty of Education in Ljubljana. It was held in Portorož, Slovenia between 21st and 25th October. 270 participants from 35 countries (46 from Slovenia) attended the conference.

The theme of the conference in Slovenia was Co-operative Partnerships in Teacher Education. It was not selected only because partnerships have been stated as one of the EU Commission’s priorities for education but also because partnerships can offer several opportunities for developing teacher professionalism. “Partnership in education is an imperative in 21st century as no system can function in isolation: the key is seeking of synergy as neither schools nor universities can take the responsibility for all challenges of the 21st century alone; and it is a fact that every new generation of students embarking on their studies in education now will significantly affect education in the next thirty to forty years” (from Cveta Razdevšek-Pučko’s keynote speech). Beside this, research studies point to several positive implications of partnerships, such as: developing shared vision and shared values, better insight into individual partners’ work, exchange of ideas and good practice, developing professional discourse and shared efforts for improving quality of education. Therefore partnerships are important for education of future teachers as well as for in-service training and teacher professional development.

Importance of partnership, its types and good practice in this field were presented by prof. dr. Cveta Razdevšek-Pučko and prof. dr. Mireia Montane. Participants presented their experiences in 38 parallel (thematic) sessions, 9 symposia, 5 round tables, 4 workshops and 8 posters. We are especially pleased that so many professionals from Slovenia participated actively at the conference with 21 papers in parallel sessions, 1 symposium and 4 posters.

Pre-conference has to be also highlighted. It was held on 21st October at The Faculty of Education in Ljubljana. Two parallel workshops were organised, namely The Use of ICT in Classrooms and Addressing Diversities in Teacher Education. 45 participants attended both events, which might indicate that both themes were highly relevant.

Participants’ evaluations indicate that the quality of the conference was high in content as well as in organisational terms. We learned about different aspects, types and opportunities that partnerships in education can offer for teacher education and to education in general. At the same time meeting of so many experts and professionals itself offered several
opportunities for establishing new partnerships that can contribute to development of as important an area as teacher education is perceived.

These *Proceedings of ATEE 2006* have been compiled in order to disseminate valuable presentations beyond the conference participants. Beside 72 papers we have added keynotes and the closing keynote. We hope that you will find a lot of interesting ideas that may contribute to further development of teacher education.

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