

“The future ain’t what it used to be”.

EU education policy and Teachers' Role: Sketching the political background of a paradigm shift.

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Abstract

The present study deals with the quest for a “reformed” role of Teachers, within the new education- learning paradigm (in Kuhn’s terms). It seeks for a contextually embedded approach to such an issue, laying emphasis on the highly influential, supranational, initiative namely the Lisbon Strategy, and more specifically on the Work Programme “Education & Training 2010”. Any endeavor to analyse teachers’ role and the current teacher education policy cannot overlook the effects of the new forms of internationalisation and the emerging transformations in learning, H(uman)R(espouse)D(velopment), economy and labour market. On these grounds, policy initiatives, discursive practices and interest politics concerning the re-conceptualization of both teaching-learning process and teachers’ role in it, are examined within the public policies complex.

1. Preliminary remarks on the international context of education and educational policy nowadays. Teaching and Learning between competitiveness, employability and inclusivity.

There is no doubt that changes in education, worldwide, constitute an actual paradigm shift. A state retreat, concerning the *institutional domain and the legitimitative function of education*, affects the perception of the teaching and learning process. The econocratic view of policy-making in education and the gradual involvement of interest politics reshape the Education Policy making procedures and the redistributive action of educational systems (Papadakis & Tsakanika 2006: 289- 290), while teaching and learning are getting gradually (co-r-)related to employability and competitiveness.

The changing conditions of both

- ✓ education (whose teaching is a major determinant) and
- ✓ higher education (where teachers initial education usually takes place¹)

interact with the changing role of both Education Institutions and Higher Education Institutions, within a new socio-economic and political environment (see Klemencic 2006: A.1.1-3, p. 2).

The major parameters of the above-mentioned change and mainly the crucial policy initiatives that affect Education (in general) and Higher Education are

- ✓ the Lisbon Strategy, that gradually (re)contextualizes Education Policy,
- ✓ the Bologna Process (constituted by two main clusters of issues– structural and social dimension- see Zgaga 2004) and the ongoing implementation of policy agendas shaping the complicate venture for a European Higher Education Area,

In the context of both the major, mutual depended, supranational initiatives (namely the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy), education and furthermore education policies² are brought “not only at the forefront of discourse but also at the edge of political action” (Papadakis & Tsakanika 2006: 167) as the focal point of a two-pillar strategy. The abovementioned strategy aims at ensuring sustainability (see OECD/ IMHE 2003: 1) and promoting both employability and social cohesion within our post-industrial “risk

societies” (in U. Beck’s terms). Indeed, any attempt to analyse education and its major determinants (namely learning and teaching) within the Lisbon Agenda, cannot overlook the effects of the new forms of internationalisation and the emerging transformations in economy and labour market (Lavdas, Papadakis & Gidakou 2006: 131). All the above mentioned changes reflect the *dominant policy rationality within the policy complex*, while the macroeconomic intervention (transition from “Keynesianism” to “monetarism”/cf. Lipietz 1990 and Hirst & Thompson 1996: 74- 75), and the articulation of educational policy as active employment policy (cf. Commission of the European Communities 1989: 109, European Commission 2002: 15, Papadakis 2006: 203- 235, Hviden 2001) facilitate the macroeconomic over-determination of public policy in education and training (Gravaris & Papadakis 2002, Papadakis & Tsakanika 2005). As Taylor- Gooby points out, changes in the labour market structure have a crucial impact on the articulation of any kind of welfare policy (Taylor- Gooby 2004: 30- 32). In the case of education, they redefine its compensatory role and subsequently re-contextualize the notion and the extent of inclusion in the Era of flexible Reskilling and Employability.

2. Teaching and Learning within the new policy paradigm on education.

Europeanization, supranationalization of the public policies, the predominance of a new economic- developmental paradigm in the late modern capitalism and the multicultural challenge in the political systems and their civic culture, constitute the context of the major challenges for education today and subsequently redefine the role of teaching and learning in the educational process.

According to one of the fundamental policy documents of the Council of Europe on EDC (Education for Democratic Citizenship):

“society has become highly multicultural and diverse and political and economic conditions often shape the learning experience”

(Council of Europe 2004: 41).

In fact, the arising ritual of educational policy (in Popkewitz’s terms/ Popkewitz 1982: 5-29), the relevant politics of change (see Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard & Henry 1997), and the policy priorities underlying them, have re-formed education over Europe during the last two decades and keep on influencing both the teaching process and the teaching profession, that are inevitably becoming more complex and multidimensional than ever.

More specifically:

The European Strategy for Employment, the Lisbon Strategy and the E.U. States’ employment policies (National Action-Plans for Employment) have led in the transformation of the education and training structures and methods, in the context of the “human recourse development”, while the new public management and the transformations regarding the public policy complex redefine the priorities of the educational policy regarding skills (emphasis to the development of soft skills instead of the traditional manpower requirements approach). This major retreat combined with the, worldwide, emergence of “diverse” types of moral action, as the epicurism “welfarism” (see Sen 1987: 39) and the actual re-negotiation of the relation “agency - well being”, seem fundamental in policies that ex definitio should be proactive in enhancing inclusiveness and strengthening citizenship”³.

While education is perceived as a domain aiming at promoting employability⁴, economic development and flexibility, as well as social cohesion, an obvious question is raised: how this explicit emphasis on issues of employability and adaptability reflects on the social dimension of teaching and learning, on the teachers' social role and responsibility and their inclusive operation, on the possibilities of education to act as an inclusive mechanism as well. Especially if we take into consideration that there is a notable increase in skills-related overall inequality mainly manifested in the domains of employment, wages and economy in general (see Machin 2004), because of the ongoing technology- driven paradigm shift and the relevant increase of skills expectations (Gallie, 1996: 447-473). Such findings can explain the turn of the discourse on both Education and Higher Education to the importance of the learning outcomes⁵ (see Reichert & Tauch 2005), in order to make feasible and crystal clear to *“prospective and present students how their skills and knowledge acquired through the study are intended to be of use in their career development”* (UK QAA: URL)

Nevertheless, what is not exactly profound is how this explicit emphasis on employability, effectiveness and competitiveness (namely on issues over determined by the macro-economic agenda) reflects on the social dimension of Education and on the substance of its major operational parameters, Teaching and Learning. As Felicity Armstrong argues *“(issues of inclusion/ exclusion in general) are inseparable from issues relating to inclusion and exclusion in education which are about local, national and global policy developments relating to social and economic change, as well as about the making of education policies”* (Felicity Armstrong 2003: 1)

Summing up the progress made both in the Bologna process and in the Lisbon Agenda⁶, an unquestionable conclusion can be drawn: The objective for competitiveness, employability, adaptability and attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area is posed on the center of every policy agenda promoted. The European Employment Strategy and the Lisbon Agenda raise the issue of skills linked with the qualification frameworks' development (European Commission 2002: 20). Simultaneously, the venture towards the European Higher Education Area is gradually related to the

guidelines set by the Lisbon Agenda, while social dimension is integrated as a peripheral objective, strategically related to “*economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion*” (European Council 2000: 2). Within such a context, social dimension and inclusivity through teaching and learning are still an issue raised by both Supranational Structures, Member States and specific challengers, but are far from being a key- priority. On the other hand, due to this ongoing redefinition of the operational determinants of teaching and learning, they are both becoming a policy priority themselves.

3. Policy questions and stakes regarding Teachers’ role, within a changing context.

Within such a highly modified context (Wallace 1997), teachers’ role gradually gains in visibility. On the 24th of May 2005, the Council Conclusion on new indicators in education and training invited the Commission to “*cooperate with international organisations in order to satisfy the information needs of the EU in indicator areas such as ICT, adult skills and professional development of teachers*” (European Council 2005). Following up that invitation, the European Commission “invited experts from the Member States and Candidate countries to conclude on the scope and content of EU data needs on the professional development of teachers” (E.C. 2007c: 1) and subsequently proceeded in

- ✓ using effectively OECD’s TALIS survey “Teachers, Teaching and Learning” and
- ✓ establishing a new key-indicator on “Teachers Professional Development” (indicator 6E- see Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks 2007).

Additionally, an attempt to draw up a set of Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications took place in 2005, ending in the European Commission’s Communication “Improving the Quality of Teacher Education”, adopted in August 2007. This Communication argues for the better regulation, coordination and funding of teacher education and development at national level, the enhancement of the reflecting substance of the teaching profession (in order to reflect the diversity of the society etc), the necessity for the teacher education programmes to be available in the

Bachelor, Master and Doctorate cycles of higher education everywhere in Europe and the development of systems “*that ensure that at every point in their career, teachers have the full range of subject knowledge, attitudes and pedagogic skills to be able to help young people to reach their full potential and are able to take charge of their own learning pathways and to develop new knowledge about education and training through reflective practice*” (E.C. 2007: 53).

Such a set of policy objectives and priorities reflects the state of play regarding teachers’ education and profession, while coping with the relevant deficits reported by the Member States: shortfalls in teaching skills and difficulties in updating teachers’ skills, high percentage of older workers within the teaching profession, lack of systematic coordination, coherence and continuity mainly between initial education and subsequent in-service training and professional development, limited amount of in-service training available to practising teachers⁷ and deficits in many countries concerning the support services provided to teachers in their first years of teaching (see E.C. 2007: 52- 53).

Of course a Communication (despite its obvious influence) couldn’t be enough to cope effectively with such a range of remarkable deficits. Several policy initiatives and furthermore reforms have been recently reported by the Member States. According to the European Commission’s recent Cross Country Analysis “*reforms of initial teacher education have been undertaken in several countries (BE nl, BG, CY, DK, ES, FR, IE, IS, LI, MT, SI, UK), (including) changes that range from a major reform of initial teacher training in Belgium nl (focusing on more effective practice during initial training and better mentoring during the induction period) to an increase from three to five years of the education of teachers at the pre-primary and compulsory stages in Iceland, to introduction of short-term and long-term qualification courses in new educational contents in innovative training methods and multicultural environment in Bulgaria*” (E.C. 2007: 53). At the same time, reforms and changes

- ✓ related with teachers’ continuing training, qualification improvement, professional development and

- ✓ reflecting major shifts in educational curricula and subsequent needs in teaching methods and skills,

are underway in many Member States (according their National Reports on the progress towards the Lisbon Objectives).

Additionally the E.C. Cluster on ‘Teachers and Trainers’ (operating within the Work Programme ‘Education & Training 2010’) has recently identified the key policy conditions for “(a) the successful development of a school as a learning community; (b) the recruitment and development of school leaders; and (c) the establishment of effective partnerships between schools and companies....” (E.C. 2007: ch. 7.2.2. ii), while seeking for best practices regarding teachers’ motivation towards their continuing professional development, teachers’ preparation to teach effectively in multicultural settings and development of effective relationships between Teacher Education Institutions and Schools (European Commission 2007b: 1- 2).

It is crystal clear: the more complicated and demanding Teaching & Learning Process becomes, the broader institutional and operational issues (related to the Teaching Profession) are raised.

4. Teachers’ Role restated, Teaching Profession redefined? Instead of epilogue.

Deficits to cope with, new demands to satisfy, diversity to preserve and convergences to support and diverse (even controversial and contradictory) expectations to fulfill. These are probably the main rising challenges for the teaching profession and teachers’ role within the gradually changing educational landscape. Within such a context, teaching and Learning face an inevitable challenge to preserve their inclusive role, to promote the broader meaning of learning, without missing the momentum.

Could that ever be feasible in a rapidly changing “environment”?

In this question, our brief contextually embedded perspective can just quote a Yogi’s comment: “*future ain’t what it used to be*”. And such a future cannot stand mono-logical answers to multidimensional questions....

NOTES

¹As the European Commission points out: “*teacher education and development is a continuum running from initial pre-service education to induction for newly qualified teachers and in-service / continuing professional development*” (E.C. 2007a: 52).

² And key- issues related to them, such as structures, reforms and trends (Eurydice 2003: 11).

³ Citizenship has been conceptualized historically in different ways (Nikolakaki 2003: 403), since it has evolved from the personal development of the citizen in the polis into subordination to the claims of the nation state – gradually incorporating the notion of the global citizen. According to the Follow Up Group on EDC of the Council of Europe (2006: 6):

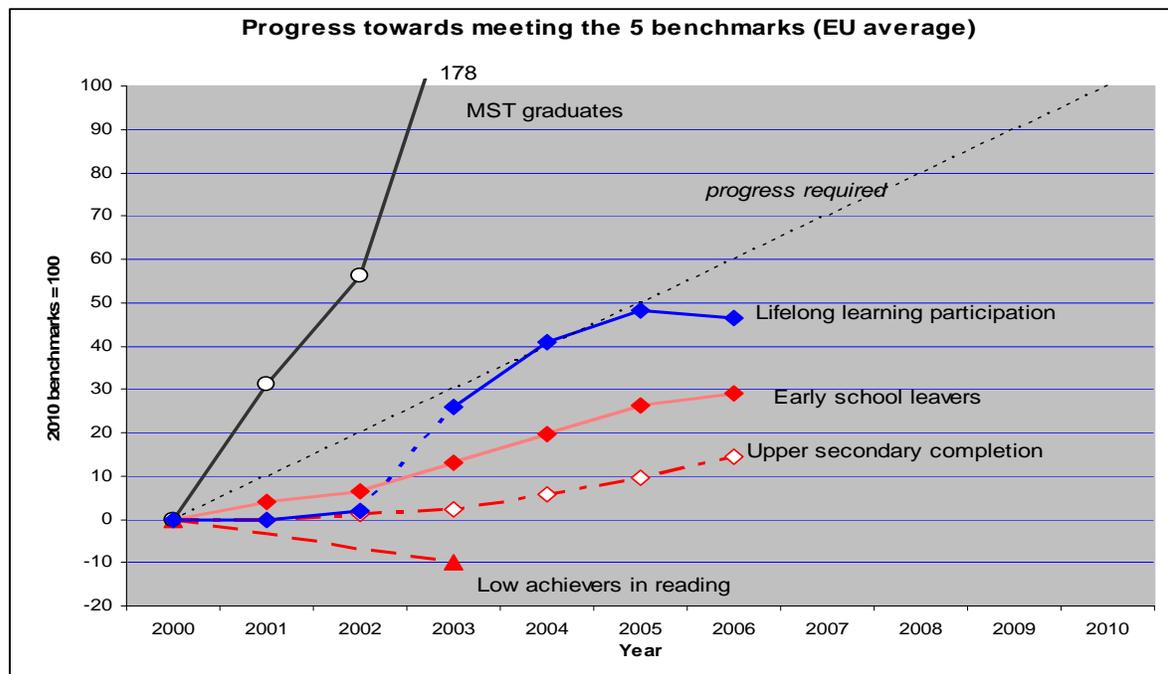
“Civic education in Europe aims at the development of a large-scale, inclusive and deliberative civic space that captures the democratic imagination of a tolerant and fair European polity. In that regard, citizenship education is part of a diachronical quest for ‘the good polity’, which in the case of a multicultural and ever-dynamic Europe refers to the means and institutions of bringing about an encompassing ‘civic partnership’ among distinct historically constituted, culturally defined and politically organised demoi”.

⁴ Let’s have a look on the birth of the Bologna Process itself. As Haug argues:

“among the factors explaining why there was a change in the agenda for higher education in Europe, the following can be highlighted: first the emergence of a real European labour market, which was bound to shape major elements of the university offering and functioning in the forthcoming years. The Trends 1 report noted that it was unlikely that the combination of a high rate of graduate unemployment and a shortage of qualified young people in key areas in many European countries would be accepted much longer by societies. The growing tension between an increasingly open and European labour market on the one hand, and exclusively national degree systems on the other, is certainly one of the core factors explaining the Bologna process” (Haug 2006: A.3.1-1, p. 5- 6).

⁵ I.e. Tuning Project Phase IV focuses explicitly on learning outcomes (L.O.) and competences as a focal point of the ongoing and planned curricular reforms (see Tuning Project 2006). Hereby, we should take into consideration that the manifested “shift to a learning outcomes perspective in education and training policies and practices” is linked to the development of the European Qualification Framework (E.C. 2007: ch 7.2.2. viii).

⁶ Regarding the progress in the 5 benchmarks areas, the recent 2007 Commission Staff Working Paper on the “Progress Towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training- Indicators and Benchmarks” is rather indicative:



Source: European Commission 2007 (Statistical Annex)

⁷ It is “*compulsory in only eleven Member States....while the fact that in-service training may be compulsory says little about actual participation rates*” (E.C. 2007: 52).

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