MODELS FOR CURRICULAR INNOVATION OF EUROPEAN INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMME

Liliana Măţă¹, Andreia Irina Suciu¹, Mihaela Lupu²
¹”Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacău (ROMANIA)
² “George Enescu” Art University (ROMANIA)
liliana.mata@ub.ro, andreiairinasuciu@yahoo.com, office_lupumihaela@yahoo.com

Abstract

The nature and quality of training teachers is an issue of great interest in many countries throughout the world. Teacher's initial training represents one of the main preoccupations of educational debates focused on finding appropriate solutions for the requirements of contemporary society in close connection with the expectations of the community, of families and students. The goal of our study consists in exploring the models for curricular innovation of European initial teacher training programmes, comparative to the Romanian model. According to current teaching patterns, prospective teachers in the initial training programme are prepared to acquire specific pedagogic skills for the Language and Communication curricular area. The strategies come from the later era, and subscribe to curriculum innovation based on the reflexive perspective: deliberation, student participation and context relevance. These diverse approaches are based on a combination of relevant needs of the subject area, the context and the unique requirements of the students and teachers the curriculum is developed for. It is important that teachers’ knowledge and attitudes regarding centrally driven curriculum innovations are taken into account before, during and after the implementation phase. This means that their opinions need to be reported and their voices heard, not only by educational policy makers and curriculum designers, but also by the wider language-teaching community. The study was unfolded in CNCSIS – TE 282/July 2010 “INOVACOM – Curricular innovations for the development of the pedagogical competencies of teachers of Romanian language and communication through initial training programmes for teachers”.

Keywords: Curricular innovation, initial teacher training, models.

1 CHANGES OF THE PROGRAMMES OF INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CURRICULUM

The nature and quality of forming/ training teachers is an issue of great interest in many countries throughout the world. Teacher’s initial training represents one of the main preoccupations of educational debates focused on finding appropriate solutions for the requirements of contemporary society in close connection with the expectations of the community, of families and students. One cannot talk about the improvement of education without influencing teachers’ professional development [1]. The new requirements demand new models of the process of education which didactics can provide for both teachers and students [2]. During the 1990s, pre-service teacher training reforms led to substantial change within teacher training institutions, as well as within schools, where an increasing proportion of practical training now takes place [3]. These changes have had an impact on university and school personnel, including their workload, their career prospects and in some cases, their professional identity.

Teacher-education programmes have been characterized as brief, technologically impoverished, and lacking in conceptual clarity and programmatic consistency [4]. What was needed, we feel, was a careful examination of the extent to which, and how, knowledge bases for teaching develop through training, and an examination of the relationship of these knowledge bases to student-teaching performances and competences. Goodlad [5], for example, stated that the research we conducted points rather painfully to incoherent programmes not tied to a mission, with no basic principles of curriculum guiding them, no organizing themes or elements. Teacher education requires reconstruction. While we have a vast literature on the pedagogical underpinning of initial teacher education, and on the respective contributions of schools and higher education to the professional learning of new teachers [6], we have relatively few accounts of the management of change in initial teacher education. This is a curious lacuna, not least since the last decade has engendered a
considerable literature on the management of change and the process of change in the schools to which the 'products' of teacher education proceed.

We need to change the angle of approach to one’s career and implicitly to the person’s evolution, starting with initial training and ending with continuous education. The initial professionalization is the most important aspect of initial training as well as the training of the individual for the teaching career [7]. There is also an emphasis on accomplishing professionalization in the conditions of surpassing mono-specialization as a complex process. R. Iucu captures the changes occurring in the curriculum in light of a comparative analysis of contemporary and traditional system of teacher training. In the traditional system, the curriculum is prescribed and binding, unlike the contemporary system where the curriculum is flexible and open to optional courses built on transferable professional credits. However, and in spite of the trend to professionalization evident in the reforms of the 90s, pre-service training is still dominated by a world view in which “the academic disciplines are the focus of the curriculum” [8]. Indeed, pre-service training is still dominated by a multidisciplinary epistemological scheme based on departmental silos and fragmentation, and often on the linearity of the content and practice, both in terms of curriculum organization (although more time has been made available for practice-teaching) and in terms of the presentation of the curriculum by teachers in the classroom. In practice, this means that pre-service training is organized around a model in which universities dispense theoretical knowledge, methods and skills, while schools provide settings to apply that knowledge, and it is up to future teachers to integrate those elements.

The current policy emphasis is on giving teachers and students more flexibility in the curriculum, particularly by celebrating the role of teachers as innovators and on developing children’s innovating and creative mindsets [9]. The received perspective of the curriculum is giving way to the reflexive perspective, signifying the demise of previously unchallenged, static or passive concepts of the curriculum. It has been replaced with an active and alive concept, thus necessitating the adoption of pertinent strategies and processes for its development, in line with this changed portrayal. The strategies come from the later era, and subscribe to curriculum innovation based on the reflexive perspective: deliberation, student participation and context relevance. These diverse approaches are based on a combination of relevant needs of the subject area, the context and the unique requirements of the students and teachers the curriculum is developed for.

We need to produce today a pre-service curriculum based on the logic of the professional act, breaking with the “traditional split of disciplines in the following teaching blocks: general and scientific, technological and practice” [10]. In other words, the centre of gravity of the curriculum must be the professional act itself, both as an object of knowledge and as a training practice as well as a focus of theoretical, cultural and critical reflection. Given the conditions of rapid evolution of society, initial training will create opportunities for forming both abilities (competencies) specific to the didactic profession as well as adjacent experiences of coping with the requirements of society. Innovative approaches to the curriculum at the present time have shifted some of the stress from subject knowledge to the acquisition of ‘21st century skills’ and ‘personalization’ which are seen as essential both for individuals’ personal successes in learning and adult life, and for national economic development [9]. The new frameworks for skills and new curricular aims reinforce the need for innovative approaches to education that can contribute to social and economic renewal.

2 CURRENT EUROPEAN MODELS IN INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING

In this section we will analyze the current models and new developments in initial teacher training at European level. B. Moon, L. Vlasceanu, L.C. Barrows [11] conducted a systematic study of Current Models and New Developments in Europe from the perspective of Teacher Education. Our goal is to capture the new developments only in the initial teacher training programmes.

2.1 Curricular Developments in Austria

Corresponding to the parallel structure of the different types of teacher education institutions, in-service training (INSET) is provided in four different departments at in-service training institutions (Pädagogische Institute) in the regions (Länder). Universities also offer in-service training, but it tends to be on the basis of personal or institutional interest.

In-service training is organized regionally. Every province operates an in-service training institution. Some – such as Vienna or Vorarlberg – have separate institutions rather than one catering to all school types. The training programmes are offered as half-day, one-day, or longer seminars aimed at
supporting the professional development of teachers. Such professional training, which usually does not lead to a certificate, focuses on new methodologies and approaches in a certain subject or field of study, aspects of co-operative learning and networking, school management, ICT, school evaluation and development, etc. In addition, there are nation-wide weeklong seminars (Kompaktseminare) or educational events for participants from different provinces. Staff members usually enrol in in-service training during the academic school year, as well as in the first or last week of summer holidays. Only some seminars take place during holidays. Schools are also offered the possibility of using five working days for school internal professionalization activities. However, these days are often also used for other purposes (e.g., the extension of holidays).

Although societal pressure is pushing teachers to commit themselves to the idea of life-long learning, participation in in-service training is not compulsory in Austria. In-service training is only compulsory for new programmes requiring special training (e.g., the introduction of English into primary schools for children aged 6 and up, or the introduction of ICT at lower secondary level).

2.2 Curricular Developments in Croatia

The governmental institution responsible for the structuring and the organization of in-service teacher education is the Institute for School Development [12].

At the start of each school year, a special catalogue of thematic courses is offered to the educational public. The content and form of programmes included in the catalogue are usually defined through collaboration between counsellors of the Institute for School Development and university field experts. Approximately 80 percent of the courses are discipline-oriented; 12 percent are related to the educational sciences; and 8 percent are dedicated to civic education.

2.3 Curricular Developments in England

England is developing more diversified ways of gaining qualified teacher status than any other country in Europe. In part, this diversity stems from the distrust of university providers, which began with the Clarke reforms in the 1990s. It also reflects the growing crisis in recruitment to secondary schools (see below). As yet, however, the numbers taking the new routes into teaching are low. For the foreseeable future, universities are likely to be training at least four out of five teachers.

A key aspect of the recent changes is to place much greater emphasis on school experience or practice. It is important to mention that trainees like this aspect. Research studies have charted the more positive evaluations that trainees give to their courses, following the introduction of the school-based approach. A key aspect of the curriculum, therefore, is the quality of the experience that can be provided in schools. Most universities now have well developed schemes that set out what takes place in a school and what form the curriculum within the university takes. Experienced teachers from schools participate in the planning and implementation of the programme. Schools, especially secondary schools, will often have more than one trainee, and the programme will be co-ordinated by a senior member of the staff.

Pre-service teacher education has, therefore, become a much more instrumental, practical – some would say – process with little time available for speculative work around educational theorizing. In the mid 1990s, for example, ideas of reflective practice or the reflective practitioner were the subject of much criticism. Despite this attitude, many teacher educators attempt to retain a self-critical perspective in their work.

2.4 Curricular Developments in France

All teachers are entitled to in-service training, which is voluntary. As of September 1998, IUFMs (Les Instituts Universitaires de Formation des Maîtres) are designated as the main provider of in-service training for teachers in posts, a decision intended to foster the complementarity and continuity of pre-and in-service training and the continuity between primary and secondary education. In-service training is meant to provide a new framework for life-long learning and to reaffirm the university dimension of teacher training, whether initial or in-service.

Each recteur is responsible for the pedagogical policies in his or her académie and, along with the given IUFM, he or she carries out a needs analysis for in-service training in the académie, decides on the objectives to be prioritized, and on evaluation procedures for a training plan. The training plan is designed by the IUFM and includes strategies whereby its components are delivered to teachers. After
negotiations and adjustments, the Recteur endorses the plan that will be implemented by the personnel in the IUFM, the universities, the schools, and other linked apposite organizations.

In the Official despatch from the Ministry [13], the Minister of Education asked that particular attention be paid to:
– the development of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) practices in schools;
– the diversification of trainers, so that courses are designed according to needs rather than available resources;
– the use of research findings in updating knowledge;
– support for newly qualified teachers;
– the development of in-service training courses leading to qualifications that would favour career development or changes.

Not every aspect of the Minister’s plan has yet been implemented. Many changes throughout the French educational system that have been launched simultaneously are being put into place progressively.

The Minister clearly states the role of IUFMs in research: Whether for pre-service training, or for in-service training, or for the trainers’ training, innovative strategies are supported by research developments. The implementation of the ministerial priorities... will therefore, and as much as possible, be linked to the results of the research carried out by the IUFMs together with the universities and national organizations.

2.5 Curricular Developments in Germany

In Europe, there are two main models of teacher education [14]: the concurrent model (i.e., studies in subjects and in education and didactics are carried out from the beginning or at the same time) and the consecutive model (i.e., first the subject courses are taken and the pedagogical training begins afterwards). Teacher education in Germany follows the concurrent model.

The students have the right and obligation to choose certain elements of the curriculum for specialization. Precise and detailed curricula and study programmes are developed by the universities. In the field of educational studies, the curricular structure is very poor. In the curriculum for elementary school teachers, the proportion of the studies in the main subjects is lower than for higher level teachers, and the proportion of educational studies is higher. All student teachers have to spend three periods of practical training (Praktika) during the university phase of their training (in North-Rhine-Westphalia, three Praktika, each lasting for four weeks). The components of the first examination are: two written examinations (Klausur, 4 hours) and one oral examination in each of the two subjects, one thesis (60-80-page long) in one of the subjects chosen by the student; and one written and one oral examination in Educational Studies.

One of the most important elements of reform in education is the development of a core curriculum for the subject, the subject-didactics, and the educational studies; ending of the collection-type of curriculum in teacher education.

2.6 Curricular Developments in Hungary

Training for the teaching profession is gradually being permeated by the concept of learning as a lifelong process. This concept is a permeating notion in the main tier of training, in-service trainee instruction, and teacher training programmes. Indications of this tendency may be observed in the various educational systems and in everyday practice, but today’s reality is better characterized by the institutional, organizational, and theoretical differences between training and in-service training centres, and by the lack of an in-service introduction for novice teachers entering the profession.

As a result of the institutional integration ordained by the amendment made to the Higher Education Act in 1999, several colleges and universities will probably re-structure their teacher training programmes, a few of them even developing them into teacher training faculties.

2.7 Curricular Developments in Ireland

Reforms, therefore, have tended to be within existing structures and constraints rather than being part of more fundamental re-structuring and reconceptualization. The Government White Paper recognized the need for a serious rethinking of the enterprise, when it called for a review in 1995. Attempted
innovations notwithstanding, programmes tend to perpetuate a “sink or swim” attitude and approach to teaching or classroom survival, an approach that is shared by staff and students. Programmes typically include “foundation” disciplines (sometimes subdivided into humanistic – history and philosophy, and scientific – psychology and sociology), “methods” courses in the particular subjects in which students have studied within their degrees, as well as curriculum and assessment. Some programmes also include teaching studies as a section of the programme and the ICTs may be located here or have a separate designation. As this programme is at “graduate” level, students are obliged to pay fees, etc. Consequently, they are keen to maximize their “teaching” time in any one-week, to enhance earnings. Being a “utility” player within a school is helpful for the given school principal, because a “dip” student may be deployed as a “substitute” teacher when a member of staff is unavoidably absent. There is a basic tension, therefore, between theoretical and practical issues, the logistics of travelling to school and, from there, to a university, on the same day.

In the secondary school sector, programmes are reliant, to a great extent, on part-time staff, a situation that is a significant constraint on reform, while the duration of programmes is generally regarded as inadequate. However, in the absence of a comprehensive and systematic approach to induction for beginning teachers, as well of as a more systematic and sustained approach to continuing professional learning across the teaching career, it is likely that the initial socialization into the profession will continue to be overloaded. There is need in both sectors to forge partnerships between schools and the academy, while recognizing that such efforts are very labour intensive and, in the absence of additional personnel and resources with attendant hybrid career trajectories, it is unlikely that more adequate mentoring and more sustained commitment to ongoing professional development and learning can become the norm [15].

2.8 Curricular Developments in Italy

Secondary school teachers have always been required to obtain a complete university education and to earn the academic degree, laurea, i.e. a second level (MA, MS) degree. Such a degree, however, is subject matter oriented and does not include any additional path of formal training as teachers.

Examinations in national competitions for teaching posts (concorsi) are aimed at assessing subject-matter competence, disregarding the didactic side. Access to the responsibility of headmaster/headmistress requires administrative and legal competencies, but does not require abilities like curriculum planning and/or evaluation, guidance, staff management, etc.

2.9 Curricular Developments in Netherlands

In the last two decades, teacher education in the Netherlands was dominated by several issues (for an overview of changes in Dutch teacher education [16]. The leading pedagogical issues were concerned with the gap between theory and practice and the definition of the professional profiles of teachers [17]. The curricular issues concerned the balance between subject studies and educational studies and the integration of the two, leading to fierce debates both in primary school education and in secondary teacher education (shifting the amount of subject theories from 70 to 80 percent to 50 percent of the curriculum and discussing to what extent subject theories and educational theories could be integrated).

Also the nature of teaching practice periods has changed. In 1995, the Dutch Ministry of Education initiated an ambitious plan called the LiO project. Through it, an independent teaching practice of half a year (the “teacher-in-training” period) was introduced at the end of HBO studies [18]. The project aimed at diminishing “praxis shock” by stimulating students to work independently for a few months. Teachers-in-training are paid a small salary by the involved schools. In this way, the induction period has become part of the curriculum, with coaching from the institution for teacher education being available. The impact of the teacher-in-training project was enormous. The curriculum was adapted to prepare students for their teacher-in-training period, and the supervision of student teachers and mentors improved considerably.

2.10 Curricular Developments in Poland

Teacher training in universities is regulated by the September 1990 Act on Higher Education that is currently being amended. In recent years, over half of all teachers have been trained in higher education institutions within departments that are not specialized in teacher training (i.e., other than departments of pedagogy).
The comment has often been made that higher education institutions in Poland are rather academically oriented, focused on the given discipline rather than on how to teach it. Also little attention has been paid to courses in moral and civic education, as well as to the psychological aspects of teacher training. Being autonomous, higher education institutions are free to design their own teacher training curricula, and the Ministry of National Education has little or no influence on what is taught. Also, the Ministry of National Education has no say in the allocation of teacher education candidates among the different disciplines. For this reason, an over supply of teachers exists in some teaching subjects, while in others, there is a shortage. The disciplinary structures of higher education institutions (traditionally, departments are organized around specific disciplines) do not correspond to the exigencies of preparing teachers either for teaching two subjects or for cross-curricular competencies.

2.11 Curricular Developments in Romania

Prior to the 1995 Law on Education, the initial teacher training system reflected the institutional structures of the communist period. Teachers for lower and upper secondary education would receive university training (4 to 5 years of studies). In 1999, the pedagogical high schools began to be closed and to be replaced by university colleges. In 2001, according to the new educational policy, the teacher training system of pedagogical high schools (Scoala Normala) was restored.

Teachers are formed in their specialty within specialty departments from universities [7]. They are formed in fields such as: the theory of pedagogy, the didactics of specialty and the psychology of education. This form of organization does not offer the guarantee that the universities responsible with the initial training of future teachers come to help graduates – the would-be teachers – both in what the curriculum in secondary school is regarded and in what the introduction of the new methods of teaching-learning proposed by the reform programme of the Ministry of Education is regarded.

The reform of teacher education should be comprehensive and integrative. New approaches are needed regarding the system of initial teacher training and the system of further teacher training.

3 RESEARCH DIRECTIONS IN THE TERMS OF CURRICULAR INNOVATION IN-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

A great deal of research in Europe describes the problems and difficulties novice teachers encounter in many areas, in spite of the increasing specialization of their preparation. R. Neil [19] identifies four categories of research regarding to in-service teacher education: 1) exploration of various means of collaboration between teachers and administrators in in-service planning and implementation; 2) examination of educational change related to the individual teacher; 3) descriptions of the places in which in-service occurs; 4) exploring the special needs of teachers in their induction year.

In terms of curricular development, several case studies make reference to the information and communications technologies (ICTs). Brief quotes or paraphrases from the case studies provide an indicator of the prevailing perception and utilization of the ICTs [11]:

– Austria: “Key words such as ‘e-learning’ and ‘knowledge management’ indicate the direction of future societal development. In-service training has been the trendsetter so far, but pre-service institutions are becoming increasingly aware of the necessity to integrate ICT skills across the curriculum.”

– Croatia: “An overview of study programmes for teacher education... reveals that courses on the use of the new information and communication technologies in teaching simply do not exist. On the one hand, this situation is partly due to the generally poor information and communications technology equipment available in Croatian institutions of higher education. A more important reason lies with the insufficient competencies of teacher educators in this area.”

– England: All qualifying teachers have to meet a set of ICT standards for pre-service teacher education courses.

– France: The development of ICT knowledge and understanding is now required of all pre-service courses. A number of key criteria are built in, including the need for trainees to be able to use ICT to develop autonomy in learners and to facilitate learner to learner co-operation.

– Finland: “The teaching of information technology applications in the instructional process is integrated into practically all courses.”
– The Netherlands: “Experimental teacher education programmes” involve innovation in primary school courses, focusing on new approaches that use the ICTs and tele-learning. The curriculum is meant to equip future primary school teachers in the integral use of the ICTs in schools.

– Poland: The new teachers’ tasks that are mentioned often include IT.

– Romania: The new challenges for teacher education include the effective use of IT in teacher education and in the daily activities of teachers.

4 CONCLUSIONS
The tendencies manifest in society at an economic, political, or cultural level have made their influence felt at the level of the curriculum imposing new requirements for the educational fora, the educational institutions or trainees in general (be they students or teachers), all in the context of the necessities dictated by the labour market and the increase in importance of the concept of professional development. That is why, in pre-academic or academic circles new buzzwords such as “change”, “flexibility”, “adaptation” to a market that requires better prepared professionals have determined the appearance of attempts or virtual success in reforming the curricula so as to meet the demands of a new market needing well-trained specialists.

From the eleven European models we have studied some emerge as more drastic and/ or effective, others are in transition towards what seems to be a successful transformation while others struggle in the old patterns. Thus, if in countries such as Austria, England, the Netherlands there have been made changes so as to answer to societal pressures of career-oriented market smoothing the transitional from studenthood to employment and diminishing the distance between theory and practice, in others such as France or Germany or even Romania there have been drafted programmes for the implementation of curricula starting from clearly defined objectives and variables or there have operated transformations in the nature of educational institutions so as to reinstate a realistic training, in countries such as Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, or Poland such attempts are still in initial phase due to a lack of realistic assessment of teachers, or a lack of practical thinking or resources.

REFERENCES


