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**Report of a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) in Vilnius, Lithuania
4 – 8 October 2009
'Practical classroom training within
Initial Teacher Education'**

***What are the policy conditions for the successful implementation of
classroom practice in Initial Teacher Education?***

This note provides an overview of a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) in which experts from several European countries exchanged ideas on policies for the successful implementation of classroom practice in Initial Teacher Education, and summarises the main policy conclusions. The ideas contained herein do not constitute EU policy.

Policy Context

1. The practical classroom elements of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) have been increasingly highlighted as an important issue in recent years.
2. The European Commission Communication 'Improving the Quality of Teacher Education' (2007)¹ referred to 'the need for [teachers] to have sufficient practical experience in real classrooms as a part of their initial education'.
3. In their response, Ministers of Education² in 2007 agreed 'to endeavour to ensure that teachers hold a qualification [...] which strikes a suitable balance between research-based studies and teaching practice'. Returning to this theme in 2009³, Ministers recognised that: 'Teacher education programmes ... need to be of high quality, relevant

1 COM(2007) 392 final. 3.8.2007

2 Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 15 November 2007, on improving the quality of teacher education (Official Journal 2007/C 300/07 of 12.12.2007)

3 Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 26 November 2009 on the professional development of teachers and school leaders.

to needs and based on a well-balanced combination of solid academic research and extensive practical experience’ and agreed that initial teacher education should have a ‘strong practical component’.

4. Eurydice data show that the proportion of professional training in teacher education for the upper secondary level is rather low. Irrespective of the model followed (consecutive or concurrent), the proportion of professional training is usually under 30%, only exceeding this figure in Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta and Sweden. In most countries, the percentage of time for acquiring teaching skills varies between 11 % and 30 %. Certain countries (Denmark and Spain) devote an even smaller proportion of time (less than 10 %) to specifically professional training.

The PLA process

5. The Lithuanian Ministry of Education, with the assistance of the Modern Didactics Centre, hosted the PLA in Vilnius from 4 to 8 October 2009.
6. 19 people representing 12 Member States (AT, B (vl), DE, DK, ES, FI, HU, NO, LT, PT, TR, UK) took part. Representatives came from Ministries, government agencies or Teacher Education institutions (TEIs).
7. The overall objective of the PLA was to derive policy conclusions and recommendations to help Member States to develop their policies on the practical aspect of Initial Teacher Education programmes. The PLA provided participants with an opportunity to learn from other countries’ policies and practice, and to reflect critically on the current arrangements in their own countries with a view to making appropriate modifications.
8. Preparatory material, including Eurydice data, was circulated prior to the event by the host country and the Commission. Documentation relating to the PLA, including preparatory material, the programme, presentations, further reading and some pictures can be accessed at <http://www.sdcentras.lt/pla/index.htm> .
9. Lithuanian input was provided by a wide range of stakeholders including young teachers, university and school-based mentors and school leaders. The programme included a school visit.
10. In addition to a detailed examination of the Lithuanian model, presentations were received from Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, Hungary and UK (England).
11. Comparison and contrasting of these different policies enabled participants to elucidate a number of key issues and questions.
12. Some participants agreed to act as facilitators/ chairs for one day of the PLA each. As on previous occasions, this worked well.

Initial Teacher Education

13. Before undertaking any review of Initial Teacher Education (or education more broadly), policymakers will wish to ensure that they, and other stakeholders, share a common understanding about (for example):

- what education and teaching are for, (and what Teacher Education is for)
- what competences effective teachers possess, and
- what ‘good teaching’ looks like.

It may require some considerable discussion and debate to arrive at such a shared understanding. However, if these conditions are not met, it will be difficult to assess whether the ITE programme or policy is producing the outcomes that society requires (in terms of the teacher competences etc.)

14. Just as the teacher’s role is to engineer rich and effective learning environments that facilitate learning by their pupils, so the providers of ITE can be expected to provide student teachers with rich and effective learning environments in which they can begin to develop their full potential.
15. ITE programmes need to deal with the whole student teacher, and with the whole enterprise of teaching; this requires close collaboration between all the actors involved, whether they work in different institutions, or in different departments of the same institution. It should not be left to the student teacher alone to make connections between the different inputs she receives from different teacher educators.
16. The programme of ITE exposes the student teacher for the first time to key concepts and behaviours such as reflective practice, professional collaboration, evidence-based teaching and so on; if these are to become more firmly embedded in the teaching profession, it is important that ITE be effective in transmitting the relevant values.
17. Teacher Educators are expected to model the pedagogies, competences and professional values that student teachers are to acquire. The education of Teacher Educators (whether based in Teacher Education Institutions or in schools) has an important impact upon the quality of the education of student teachers and merits further peer learning.

Classroom Practice

18. This PLA has focused upon the practical, school-based elements of Initial Teacher Education programmes, here called Classroom Practice (CP); it is assumed that every student teacher will experience several CPs. It goes without saying, however, that CP cannot be seen in isolation from the rest of the programme of ITE which is itself but one element of a continuum of career-long Teacher Education.
19. ITE is the launch pad for career-long learning by the teacher. It should be understood that no teacher ever finishes learning about teaching; thus, the purpose of CP is to help the student teacher begin a process of experimentation and reflection that will last throughout her career.
20. The objectives of CP include allowing the student teacher to:
 - observe models of good professional practice;
 - learn how to engineer effective learning environments;
 - start to discover what it is really like to be a teacher ‘in mind body and soul’;
 - experience ‘reality’: real schools, real pupils and real teachers in all their diversity;

- begin a career-long habit of experimentation and reflection to discover what works or does not work for her⁴ (and for her pupils), and why; this will include taking risks in a supportive environment and in an authentic setting;
 - begin to build her professional identity and gain self-confidence as a teacher; and
 - learn to act in accordance with professional values and codes of ethics.
21. CP will normally involve student teachers in activities such as: observing and then reflecting on a wide range of different teaching styles, planning, delivering and receiving feedback on lessons, collaborating with other colleagues, undertaking non-classroom teacher activities, etc. It is important that CP provide a safe space in which the student teacher can develop, and then test out, her own hypotheses, in which she can experiment, and learn by trial and error.
22. In the light of the evidence reviewed, the experts concluded that, for CP to be effective:
- the minimum learning outcomes for each period of classroom practice should be clearly defined by the TEI in discussion with the student teacher;
 - student teachers should be both adequately challenged by their assignments and adequately supported by mentors to meet these challenges; and
 - student teachers should be actively involved in planning their CPs.
23. Taken together, the different periods of CP undertaken by a student teacher should result in her being able to work autonomously as a teacher in the classroom and in the wider school community, by the end of the ITE.
24. The CP experience can be a key factor in influencing the student teacher to remain in the teaching profession. The partners responsible for organising CP should ensure that sufficient individualised support is available for each student teacher so that CP does not have the effect of discouraging young people from joining the profession.

Preparing for Classroom Practice

25. Every student teacher starts ITE at a different point in her personal and professional development. Student Teachers need to be prepared before they undertake each period of Classroom Practice. This preparation should be cyclical in nature, so that reflection upon the previous period of classroom practice informs preparation for the next. It needs to have a sound theoretical basis and to link theory and practice.
26. ITE courses can use active learning approaches, such as micro-teaching, simulations, role-plays and video analysis, to begin to introduce student teachers to the act of teaching before they enter their first ‘real’ classroom’ as teachers.
27. It can be advantageous for school-based mentors to be involved in some of the preparatory activities that take place in a Teacher Education Institution. The Principal of the practice school also needs to be involved in preparing the CP.

⁴ For simplicity, only the feminine pronouns are used in this text.

Structure of Classroom Practice

28. The number and length of periods of CP in an ITE course will vary from country to country. They should, however, provide a sufficient range of teaching experience that on completing the course the student teacher can be fully responsible for a class. Even so, every beginning teacher will require a comprehensive programme of early career support ('induction') during her first years in post.
29. CP should start as soon as possible in the ITE course, with a period of structured observation and participation in the activities of a school.
30. Good systems of ITE make sure that there is a progression in the degree of challenge posed by the learning tasks undertaken by students, in the skills acquired, and in the level of autonomy expected and achieved in progressive periods of CP.
31. CP will be most effective if student teachers are given specific tasks to focus on in each period of CP and if their work is guided by tutors and mentors. The planned minimum learning outcomes will be different for each successive period of CP, and should be explicit.
32. Peer learning can be an effective way to encourage reflection amongst groups of student teachers⁵; it can also help them acquire the collaborative skills they will require in their professional lives.
33. CP should ensure that every student teacher is exposed to diverse types of school, management style, pupil and teacher. In this context, the exclusive use of schools with a special status (such as those attached directly to TEIs) has been questioned.
34. A CP undertaken abroad can bring added benefits that do not derive from CP undertaken in one's home country; e.g. it assists the student teacher in the process of reflection about theory and practice by providing a different perspective.

The central role of Mentoring

35. Research has found that the school-based mentor is one of the most powerful sources of influence on student teachers⁶. Mentors play key roles in supporting student teachers during CP; in particular, they help to create an effective learning environment for the student teacher, and act as a bridge between Teacher Education Institution and the

⁵ Totterdell, M. And Lambert, D. in 'The professional formation of teachers: a case study in reconceptualising initial teacher education through an evolving model of partnership in training and learning', *Teacher Development*, 2, 3, 351-71. (1998) emphasise the importance to beginning teachers of reflecting both individually and within a communal context.

⁶ See, for example:
- Su, J.Z.X. (1992). 'Sources of influence in preservice teacher socialization', *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 18, 239-258;
Nettle, E.B. (1998). 'Stability and Change in the Beliefs of Student Teachers During Practice Teaching', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 14, 2, 193-204;
Hobson, A.J. and Malderez, A. (2002). 'School-based mentoring in initial teacher training (ITT): What the student teachers think', *TOPIC*, Issue 28, Item 8, 1-6.

practice school. They need to adopt an approach that takes fully into account the needs of the individual student teacher⁷.

36. Though a student teacher may be mainly mentored by one or two individuals, mentoring is a responsibility of the whole school. The school leader has a particular responsibility to create the kind of learning community in which effective mentoring can take place.
37. Mentoring tasks include:
 - helping the student teacher to integrate into the school community;
 - modelling a range of effective teaching behaviours, and modelling professional values, including the ‘teacher as learner’;
 - providing a safe environment in which the student teacher can take risks and learn;
 - matching student tasks to their developing abilities;
 - helping the student teacher to plan and evaluate her teaching activities and assess their impact upon pupils;
 - observing the student teacher’s practice and providing constructive feedback and ‘feed forward’ to improve her performance;
 - coaching to help the student teacher improve practical teaching competences;
 - assisting the student teacher to reflect constructively upon her own performance;
 - providing a ‘scaffolding’ and helping to break the complex classroom situation down into pieces that the student teacher can manage⁸, so that she retains a sense of control, and is therefore less stressed;
 - challenging the student teacher’s assumptions; assisting her to question and reflect upon her own practice, and to seek and use evidence;
 - encouraging the student teacher to reflect upon education in its broadest sense.
38. Mentors require sufficient paid time to develop their mentoring competences and to do the job well.
39. In some cases, mentors may be involved in monitoring and assessing the performance of the student teacher; however, this may be an obstacle to the student being open about any problems she may encounter.

⁷ See, for example:
- Younger, M., Brindley, S., Peddar, D. And Hagger, H. (2004). ‘Starting points: student teachers’ reasons for becoming teachers and their preconceptions of what this will mean’, *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 27, 3, 245-264.
- Vallance, R. (1997). ‘A psychological profile of PGCE students - implications for initial teacher education’. In Hudson, A. and Lambert, D. (Eds.) *Exploring Futures in Initial Teacher Education Changing Key for Changing Times*. London: University of London Institute of Education.
- Hawkey, K. (1995). ‘Learning from Peers: the experience of student teachers in schoolbased teacher education’, *Journal of Teacher Education*, 46, 3, 175-183.

⁸ see, for example, Younger, et al *op cit*.

Mentor training

40. Because of the importance of their role, mentors require extensive preparation⁹ covering both content and process. The development, and subsequent deployment, of mentorship skills can be an important stage in the CPD pathway of experienced teachers. A mentor should:
- be recognised by peers as an effective teacher;
 - have a strong sense of professional identity;
 - understand the overall aims of CP within ITE, and the vision of the CP partners and be up to date with developments in the continuum of TE;
 - be able to build the trust of the students teachers in her care;
 - be able to integrate theory and practice¹⁰; have an inquiry based attitude to learning; and a talent for self reflection and able to teach student teachers to be reflective;
 - have effective communication skills (written and oral);
 - have skills in guidance;
 - have a positive attitude to diversity; be capable of responding to the different needs of individual pupils, and be able to transmit this competence; and
 - be open to criticism and committed to professional dialogue.
41. Mentor training might be undertaken through traditional training programmes, through peer reflection groups (with other teacher educators and mentors). A ‘cascade’ approach might also be useful to developing mentoring skills in large numbers of teachers.
42. In principle, every school teacher should have the potential to act as a mentor. A shortage of candidates to be mentors may reflect wider issues of teacher quality, or of the recognition and status offered to mentors.

Theory and Practice

43. All teaching professionals should understand that ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ are not in contradiction, but that a continuous interaction between these two ways of understanding the world is necessary in reflective practice.
44. CP enables student teachers to be both ‘in action’ and ‘in reflection’. Through reflection they can use their growing understanding of theory to analyse their practice, and use their practice to reflect upon theory, with the ultimate aim of creating their own personal theory of practice. Subject didactics can be seen as a bridge between didactical theory and classroom practice. The challenge is therefore not so much about ‘getting the right

⁹ see Hobson, A.J. and Malderez, A. *op cit.* .

¹⁰ see, for example Hascher, T., Cocard, Y. and Moser, P. (2004). ‘Forget about theory - practice is all? Student teachers’ learning in practicum’, *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*, 10, 6, 623-637.

balance between theory and practice, as of ensuring the right interaction between them¹¹. It may be profitable for student teachers to undertake action research during their CP.

45. Given that trainees' preconceptions about teaching and student learning can impact on their experience of ITE¹², ITE courses need to challenge student teachers' preconceptions about (for example) teaching and learning.
46. Ideally, all actors (teachers, school leaders, mentors, teacher educators ...) would be role models for reflective teaching. Common training programmes, or other forms of joint working, can help all actors in CP share the same assumptions and understandings.
47. Teacher Educators can be expected to model throughout their own teaching the pedagogies, approaches and values that they expect student teachers to adopt in the classroom.
48. There is a need to encourage further research into CP.

Assessing student teachers

49. The purpose of assessment is to help the learner to learn. For this to happen, student teachers, like all learners, need the right mix of formative and summative assessment. Assessing the progress of a student teacher should not be seen as a one-off activity but as an activity that runs throughout the CP. It may involve several people, who will need to communicate effectively with each other about the student's progress.
50. Teaching competences can best be demonstrated and assessed in an authentic learning environment. This has consequences for the way in which the assessment of student teachers' competences is organised.
51. Teaching and learning are multifaceted human activities involving complex interpersonal relationships and requiring a wide range of knowledge and competences. Teachers play multiple roles in a variety of different contexts. There are many different, and equally valid, ways to be an effective teacher. In this context, the full range of teaching behaviours and competences cannot be reduced to a small number of easily observable and measurable actions. The summative assessment of the student teacher, at

¹¹ See, for example :
- Tomlinson, P.D. (1999a). 'Conscious reflection and implicit learning in initial teacher preparation: I Recent light on an old issue', in *Oxford Review of Education*, 25, 3, 405-424.
- Hagger, H. and McIntyre, D. (2006). *Learning Teaching from Teachers: Realising the Potential of School- based Teacher Education*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

¹² See, for example :
- Feiman-Nemser, S., Williamson Mcdiarmid, G., Melnick, S.L. & Parker, M. 'Changing beginning teachers' conceptions: a description of an introductory teacher education course'. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association, Washington DC, 20-24 April. (1987) :
- Wubbels, T. 'Taking account of student teachers' preconceptions', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 8, 2, 137-149. (1992) ;
-Korthagen, F.A.J., Kessels, J., Koster, B., Lagerwerf, B., And Wubbels, T. 'Linking Practice and Theory: The Pedagogy of Realistic Teacher Education.' Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. (2001),

the end of a course of ITE, should be comprehensive, and cover all of the learning outcomes specified.

52. Depending upon local circumstances, the actors involved either in setting the framework, or in undertaking a final assessment of student teachers, may include government agencies, the Teacher Education Institution, the practice schools, the student teacher, pupils, and the wider school community.
53. Those considering applying for, and those taking part in, a course of ITE have a right to know which competences they will have acquired at the end of it. Student teachers have a right to know the specific criteria against which their performance will be assessed at the end of their training course. The performance of all student teachers should therefore be assessed against the same set of agreed, objective and observable criteria, covering at least the fields of subject knowledge, pedagogical skills, capacity for self reflection, professional behaviours and values, and relationships.
54. Partnerships responsible for ITE will wish to consider these further issues:
 - who should be involved in devising assessment criteria?
 - what balance between formal and informal assessment?
 - what balance between formative and summative assessment? and
 - what ways should be used to involve student teachers themselves in their assessment?
55. The development of teaching competences lasts a lifetime; it is important not to give the impression that a teacher who has completed a certain course, or acquired a certain qualification, may stop developing and learning. Any 'final' assessment of a student teacher's competences should be the starting point for the preparation of a professional development plan for her first years in the profession.

Partnership

56. CP, like the rest of Teacher Education will be most effective when it is organised and delivered in partnership. The partners may include Teacher Education Institutions, teacher educators, local / regional authorities responsible for schools, participating schools, school leaders, mentors, and student teachers themselves. All have a valuable contribution to make, and should respect the contribution made by others, and collaborate effectively with them.
57. For example, there needs to be effective communication between school-based and Teacher Education Institution-based mentors / tutors in the planning, implementation and evaluation of CP.
58. Effective collaboration needs to be carefully constructed and maintained over time. A key concern should be to engineer a system in which each actor works, albeit separately, for the same overall goals. Thought needs to be given to:
 - Consultation of all the partners in such a way that each understands the potential benefits to them, and the particular contributions they can make.

- A clear division of responsibilities.
 - Delegation of each task to the partner most able to deliver it.
 - Appropriate flows of resources (financial and other) to make the system work effectively.
 - The role of research in informing the structure and content of CP.
 - A pilot phase and monitoring, before full implementation.
 - In-built continuous evaluation and review of the process.
59. The CP system can be organised in such a way that all actors benefit from it.
- *Student teachers* benefit if all the actors involved have the same objectives and expectations about CP and if they organise CP as a coherent process;
 - *Teacher Education Institutions* benefit if there is easy collaboration between all the actors, and if responsibility for delivering CP is shared. Wise TEIs and teacher educators will learn as much from their students' CP as their students do, and will integrate this into their teaching; they benefit by having early access to new ideas and trends coming from the school, by being able to use CP for field research, by bringing 'real school life' into their teaching, and by being able to engage school teachers in the education of new teachers.
 - *Schools* benefit from the enthusiasm of student teachers; the input from TEIs can help them develop as schools, and can help the professional development of their teachers; they are able to take part in research; there may be an element of prestige in being a partner of the local TEI.
 - CP provides a valuable learning environment for *teacher educators* (whether they are based in TEI or in schools) and for mentors, as well as for student teachers.

Quality Assurance in CP

60. It is important that all stakeholders have full confidence in the quality of the system for organising CP, and the system for assessing the classroom performance of student teachers. The key actors are likely to be:
- Government (national / regional / local) – responsible for setting overall parameters;
 - the TEI/ the partnership organising TE – responsible for accreditation, for educating mentors; for defining and agreeing clear assessment criteria and procedures;
 - partner schools – responsible, amongst other things for providing models of good professional practice; and
 - Student Teachers.
61. CP provides a vital source of feedback for the Teacher Education Institution and other actors about the effectiveness of their provision. Systems are needed to seek and to act upon this feedback from student teachers and schools.

62. As with any other element of the education system, for changes to be sustainable, they need to have wide support from all stakeholders, including parents and pupils, schools and TEIs. Careful thought needs to be given to ways of involving all stakeholders throughout the process of change.

Policy Implications

63. In the light of this analysis, key questions for reviewing policy and practice on Classroom Practice and ITE might include the following:
- is there a shared understanding about the purposes of education and the competences required by teachers and teacher educators?
 - have the relevant educational authorities (local, regional, national ...) set in place the appropriate conditions to facilitate successful CP?
 - are the roles and responsibilities of each actor clearly defined?
 - do ITE programmes provide student teachers with effective, authentic learning environments and provide adequate support and challenge, in the light of students' individual development needs?
 - do arrangements for CP expose students to good professional practice and professional values, and provide a safe space for experimentation and reflection?
 - are the learning outcomes for ITE and for each period of classroom practice clearly defined and progressive?
 - are students effectively prepared before each CP?
 - do mentors have adequate training, clear task descriptions and enough time to fulfil their tasks?
 - does the CP provide for sufficient interrelationship between theory and practice? is CP fully embedded in the ITE programme?
 - do all teacher educators consistently model the pedagogies, approaches and values that they expect student teachers to adopt in the classroom?
 - is student assessment at the end of a programme of ITE comprehensive, and undertaken in an authentic learning environment? does it connect with the plan for the individual teacher's early professional development?
 - are criteria for student assessment as objective and transparent as possible?
 - is the partnership delivering ITE based upon a clear division of responsibilities and continuous evaluation and review of the process?

Glossary

64. The following words have been used in the following ways in this text.

Classroom Practice (CP):	the practical, school-based elements of any course of Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Note that these practical periods should also include teacher tasks undertaken outside the classroom, such as collaboration with colleagues or communication with parents. Note also that some ITE programmes are almost entirely based in schools.
Induction:	the support that is given to beginning teachers after finishing the formal programme of initial teacher education at the start of the first contract as a teacher in school.
Mentor:	the teacher who is recognised by her peers as experienced and effective and who supports student teachers during their periods of CP in school.
Tutor:	a teacher educator, usually not based in a school.
Teacher Education Institution:	any institution responsible for the overall delivery of a programme of ITE and the conferring of an ITE qualification.
Teacher Educator	any person with responsibility for educating teachers, including those based in Teacher Education Institutions and those based in schools