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Teachers for the Knowledge Society

# The Professional Mobility of Teachers - new tendencies in the global society

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## Abstract

The teaching career remains a difficult issue in the context of the professional mobility in a diverse Europe with an open labour market. Within the dynamics of nowadays society we have to ask ourselves if Romanian teachers and educators are ready for the growing mobility. In order to discuss these aspects we refer to two of our researches: one was carried out in a COPE project while the other is a revised longitudinal research (2009) that was done ten years ago for the first time. As a result we propose a model to re-dimension the competences for the European educator.

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## 1. Introduction

Today, more than ever, the globalisation phenomenon imposes a more flexible concept of the countries' frontiers, such a case being that of the European Union. The most common consequence is the freedom of movement which also imposes a free labour market. These elements can be found in many specialized fields and professions but yet the reflection angles for the teaching profession are much dimmer. Why is this happening?

We may offer more than one possible explanation: (1) First, the teaching profession implies some national specific features and thus, the teachers have a more reduced possibility to move from one country to another. (2) The educational systems are often seen as the most conservative of the subsystems of the social network and it allows less change. (3) The teachers themselves have certain characteristics among which the choice of their profession being made by the wish to develop and the motivation for the profession. In many cases, leaving for another country is determined also by the need for financial development (the exodus being directed towards the more developed countries), a need that represents a lower indicator which concerns the option for a career of those deciding upon the teaching profession. Before moving on, we could ask ourselves about the opportunities and limitations regarding the European movement within the teaching profession. Does the migration of teachers represent a positive or a negative factor? We can make a distinction between professional mobility and migration. In the European Union this distinction is more and more superficial. There are a number of reasons for this situation.

Firstly, the education of teachers and the whole professional development system within the European Union tends to be harmonized both at the level of the curricula and at the level of financing. We can speak more and more of the European Union and thus the emphasis shifts from a particular country. Secondly, considering the multicultural phenomenon, we can see the mobility from one country to another as one between the districts of the

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same country. Also schools have more and more children belonging to various ethnic and multicultural backgrounds and this leads to the recruitment of those teachers that come from the same background as such diverse students (see also De Villiers, Degazon-Johnson, 2007).

Thirdly, teachers need professional development, including the experience exchange within other teaching systems. This is why we agree with the European Educational Perspective. The EU recommends that “teachers spend time abroad as part of their initial teacher training, as well as regularly during their teaching careers. Stays abroad and exchanges can provide valuable experience, motivation and continuing professional development” (European Commission, 2009). The positive aspect represents only one side of the same coin. The other side consists in the fact that the teacher migration continues to be a growing phenomenon in many countries across the globe, causing shortages in teacher supply and demand, with severe impact on the quality of education systems in the ‘sending’ countries (Sinyolo, 2010, p. 13). “Migration is one of the most significant domestic, development and foreign policy issues in the world today. The recruitment of teachers from source and/or developing countries has become a popular solution to rectify a shortage of teachers in many industrialized countries, including the UK and the United States, but at the expense of developing countries. (...) The issue of teacher pay in source countries can be considered as a key factor in the push dynamic” (Ochs, Miller, Mulvaney, 2008).

## **2. Influential factors for the educational mobility**

Professional mobility is an important element for the career development for teachers as well, especially since the young generation is more flexible considering the career change. In a research we did in 2006 (Pânișoară, & Pânișoară, 2008) we have highlighted that young persons tend to have a more flexible concept- the concept of carrier (so the change is not so stressful anymore). We can see that there is a more consistent openness to flexibility towards teaching career. On the other hand, those who remain in their country also agree the idea of teaching abroad. “Around half of all non-migrant teachers we surveyed in each country expressed an interest in teaching in a foreign country. These findings suggest that teachers value the option of teaching abroad, even if most expressing an interest may never actually migrate. Interestingly, there was no clear distinction between the levels of interest in countries that are net senders of migrants compared to that in countries that are net recipients (Appleton, Morgan, Sives, 2006, pp. 775-776).

The mobility phenomenon is not as widely spread as it might seem. We are interested in what the European teacher needs in order to build the concept of the United Europe. This is why it is important to analyse why teachers with the same background, with same experience or training still have different openness to the phenomenon of international mobility. This perspective is very important for the migration phenomenon because it comes with a lot of stress and challenges for the persons who choose this way. The studies dealing with the cultural shock highlight that it can be even bigger for teaching career. American Federation of Teachers observed in 2009 that the teachers who migrated in America have to deal with challenges which they are not ready to face yet (parents who put into question the teacher’s authority, the existence of metal detectors in schools or undisciplined pupils who “do not stand-up” in front of teachers).

So, taking into consideration the stressors we can understand why some persons have big difficulties to adapt to the new conditions of the new country as Dascher and Haupt also observe (2010). Moreover, some persons have a reduced ability to communicate in a multiculturalism context, which means that he experiences difficulties abroad. In fact, the profile of migrant person presume existence of “healthy migrant effect” (Kirkcaldy et al. apud Weishaar, 2010), a concept which assumes that individuals who leave their home country and endure in a foreign culture are particularly robust, healthy, resilient and more resourceful than non-migrants or migrants who have returned to their home country. The teachers with a controllable degree of stress caused by the new country or by the new school develop relevant characteristics. For example, Christine Arab (2005) emphasizes a series of common characteristics during her studies of migration such as: teachers’ personal skills or the moment in which they are in the career. A major factor which is emphasized with priority in multiple thesis is: need for professional and personal development (Garam, 2007, Appleton, Morgan & Sives, 2006) This thing is consonant with the formation of teachers and the motivation for choosing the teaching career and work in this area. In a study made by us in 2008 (see also Pânișoară & Pânișoară 2010) the subjects responded that the main reasons for choosing this profession are the passion for the domain, love for children/young pupils, the need for professional development. Because of these reasons the teachers remain in didactical field, even if in another country. More than that as Scafidi, Sjoquist and Stinebrickner

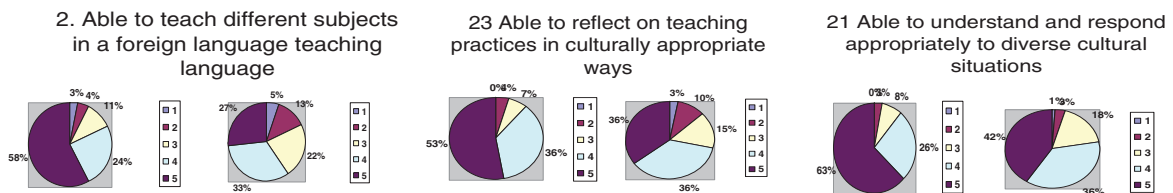
(2007) put forward this desire is in direct proportion with every person’s career expectations. The mentioned authors observe that persons who work in a high-level educational institution are more sure candidates for mobility than those who work in schools with a low level of professionalism. The explanation lies in the management of career perceived by each person: for those who work in a good school, mobility in another country represents the next level whereas for those who work in a “low-level school” evolution means that they would go to a better school (in their country) It is not less important to notice that this stimulated mobility and sustained by teachers’ personal desire of professional development brings also a infusion of “fresh blood” in host educational systems, according to *The Recognition of Teacher Qualifications across nine Commonwealth Member States - A research project* (The Commonwealth Secretariat, 2006).

**3. Research and analysis**

If we consider the above issues, it is obvious that mobility is a positive consequence of balance and the protection of diversity in a united Europe. The examples are not few in number. For example, Sparks (apud Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, Meisels, 2007) observes that in Texas, out of the total number of teachers hired, 41% came from one district to another. The phenomenon is worldwide spread, but the European specificity offers new dimensions; the professional mobility is a vector which will grow in time. Initial and in-service training of teachers is made unfortunately from a monoculture perspective, (and) openness to professional mobility and multiculturalism are limited.. The experimental evidences of this study are at the meeting point of another two studies made before by the authors (research done in a Comenius project about European Educator Competences and re-printed of a longitudinal research done ten years ago first time (re-printed in 2009). Both researches use the questionnaire as instrument. The subjects analysed within the Comenius project were students who prepared to be teachers (but the whole research was made on a national population who work as active teachers).

*3.1. Results. First perspective:*

We analyse here three items (answers meaning 1-minimum, 5 maximum, 2-4 – grades between them) of the questionnaires of the study of the Competences of Professional Educators Project (COPE ) – see also Ferrer (2010):



Item	1	2	3	4	5
2	3% (left) 5% (right)	4% (left) 13% (right)	11% (left) 22% (right)	24% (left) 33% (right)	58% (left) 27% (right)
21	0% (left) 1% (right)	3% (left) 3% (right)	8% (left) 18% (right)	26% (left) 36% (right)	63% (left) 42% (right)
23	0% (left) 3% (right)	4% (left) 10% (right)	7% (left) 15% (right)	36% (left) 36% (right)	53% (left) 36% (right)

We observe that the subjects view themselves as “Able to reflect on the teaching practices in culturally appropriate ways”; “Able to understand and respond appropriately to diverse cultural situations” and “Able to teach different subjects in a foreign language” which seem to be important in teacher training (left graphic of each question), but they do not have it at a right professional level (right graphic of each question).

These elements are mandatory for the development of professional mobility in all directions: teachers who want to pursue this career in another country than the country of their origin must adapt to different cultural requirements, must understand and have empathy for their students, their families and their new way of life. Yet, how many of these requirements do we find in the curricula for the initial training of a teacher? It is obvious that we have only minor emphases, a national dimension of teacher training/instruction which is a first level of analysis. Of course, there exit courses focused on multiculturalism but only in optional mode (as optional courses), not in the common compulsory educational plan of Teacher Training Department. On the other hand, because of the theoretical part

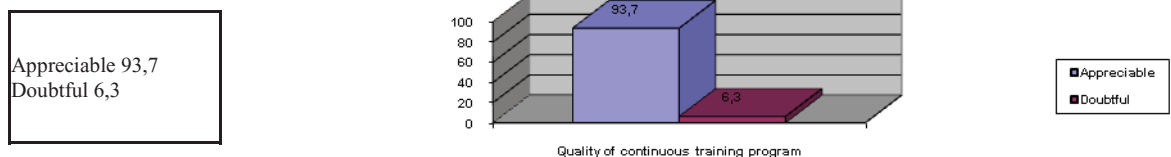
from above and taking into consideration the need of professional mobility for teachers, we have to admit that we have a serious gap in the training of future teachers. The world for which we prepare them would become a global country in which the borders would be only a formality. This world means not only inter- or multicultural, but also a preparation for change, for innovation, for unusual and for tolerance. These should be found in compulsory curricula for the initial training. How do things work in in-service training? In-service training for teachers seems more adapted to these concrete needs of teachers; however it is only an apparent status.

3.2. Results. Second perspective

According to a research of two of our researches in 2009-2010 as longitudinal finality of a research made in 1999-2000 (see also Iucu, Pânișoară, 2000) the aspects are more complex and we should be more attentive to the problem. We sustain the affirmation with two items from the research made in 2009-2010 to justify the issue.

We have the question: does the in-service training system for the area of development prepare the teachers to face new challenges of today’s world, for change and innovation, for adaptability or flexibility? This new curricula should sustain working with multicultural groups in our own system or in another country or culture.

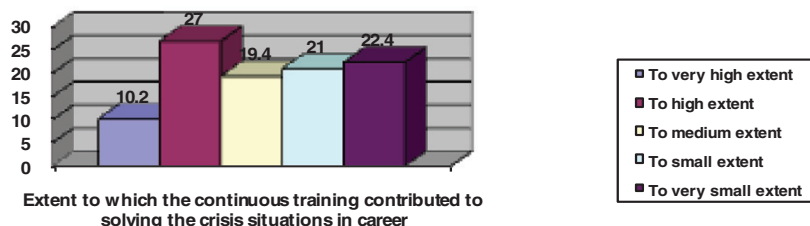
Item no. 30 of the questionnaire regarding the in-service training was about the quality of this service, in the way it was perceived by teachers: *How do you appreciate the quality of these continuous training programs?*



As it can be noticed, the quality of the continuous training programs is significantly appreciated in a positive way. Such a perspective represents a good feedback for the continuous training system in light of intensifying the efforts for its reforming and development. However it should be remembered the fact that for another question in the same questionnaire the subjects appreciated that the continuous training system should be revised to a great and very great extent (86% at the level of objectives and contents, 82.5% at the level of methods and procedures, 80.6% at level of evaluation/assessment tools and techniques). This duality of answers emphasizes the fact that the subjects do not have specific criteria for analysing the in service training; their quality is good, but it still must be developed. It is obvious that we have an inservice training system well structured, but there are some real needs of current school practice (in which teacher should permanently innovate and adjust).

There is another reliable indicator to observe how teachers can develop characteristics such as adaptability to new conditions, flexibility, tolerance for diversity etc. All teachers have experienced critical situations in their teaching career; the question is to what extent the in-service training program offer teachers the needed competences to solve a crisis situation in their careers? In a normal way, quality training for understanding a crisis situation, for managing them and obtaining the best possible solutions is a must for a person’s profile, for which professional mobility has more advantages than limitations, and for which mobility represents a pole of professional success and development. Below we can see the results for the following important question: *Do you consider that the continuous training program you had benefited from helped you in finding a solution to these crisis situations you have met during your career?*

To a very high extent 10,2	To high extent 27	To medium extent 19,4	To small extent 21	To very small extent 22,4
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An interesting issue regarding the Romanian initial training underlines the fact that we deal with different vectors, with a state of discontinuity, the training programs being different one from another as far as their quality is regarded. At the present question we notice that for some of the subjects the continuous training contributed to a great extent in solving the crisis situations in their career (27%), and for others to a small degree (21%) or even to a very small extent (22.4%). We can see that almost half of subjects agreed that in-service training contributed to a small and very small extent to the development of the ability to deal with critical situations. Consequently the in-service training of teachers contributes to a small extent to the development of the psychological elements needed by a modern teacher to perform in a modern, diverse, multicultural and complex Europe.

### 3.3. Discussion and suggestions

The globalisation brings many opportunities, but it also challenges the teacher education system. This system should offer answers; these new aspects (regarding multicultural problems and diversity) should become a common practice in the united Europe. As Schartz (2010) posits referring to what he calls *European professionalism*: “the European Teacher has an education which enables him/her to teach in any European country”, the needed elements for “constructing” a successful European educator profile are: flexibility, adaptability, tolerance and these should have a visible place in pre-service and in-service training of teachers, whatever the system which prepares them is or whatever the system they would work in is.

Redefining the profile of teacher training from the perspective of mobility is a question of mentality, because we are talking about the success or failure of developing the next generations. The providers of the curriculum must change the paradigm which should send the teacher to those modern competences needed for understanding, developing and innovating in any cultural climate. The concept of migration tends to become more and more redefined through the related concept of mobility which will induce deep changes in our status in the future.

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