Teacher education reforms between higher education and general education transformations in South-Eastern Europe

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

Pantić, N. (2012). Teacher education reforms between higher education and general education transformations in South-Eastern Europe: Reviewing the evidence and scoping the issues. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal* 2(4), 71-90.

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Abstract

The present paper considers reforms and developments in teacher education in South-Eastern European countries as part of overall reforms in higher education, and in light of changes in general education that impact teachers and their preparation. The paper reviews the literature and reports from the region that offer some evidence of and insights into the issues surrounding teacher education reforms in the contexts of post-socialist education transformations in South-Eastern Europe. It scopes the issues relating to: structural and curricular changes in teacher preparation; coordination of reforms across different levels; development of a common vision of good teaching in cooperation between teacher education institutions, schools and communities; and quality assurance of teacher preparation. The identified issues include: the superficial nature of structural reforms and the neglect of substantial curricular changes; the dearth of opportunities for reflection linking theory and practice; insufficiently developed cross-curricular approaches to teacher education reforms; the fragmentation of teacher education along a number of lines; the absence of a common vision of quality teaching, and of formative links between quality assurance systems for teachers, schools and teacher education providers. Finally, the paper outlines potential avenues for future developments and implications for teacher education policies and practices.

Key words: educational change, higher education, teacher education, South-Eastern Europe.

Introduction

The reforms of initial teacher education programmes are part of the reforms and developments in higher education. They include changes in programme structures, a shift from input-based to outcomes-based education, competence-oriented curricular changes, new ways of thinking about accountability in education, and new links between higher education and graduates' future employment. At the same time, one of the basic functions of teacher education is to prepare the teaching workforce for education systems that, in the countries of South-Eastern Europe (SEE), have experienced major changes since the early 1990s, and that continue to change.

The importance of teachers and their education and development for changing educational practices is increasingly recognised. Teachers are found to be critical for building competences for knowledge-based societies, for making education systems and processes more inclusive, for preparing future citizens to participate in democracies, and so on. This implies the need to develop teacher education in which academic, school-based and community-based knowledge come together in new ways of teacher preparation that can better serve the new demands upon future teachers.

However, researchers often point out that initial teacher education is slow in adapting its programmes to the changing needs of 21st century teachers. Some authors attribute this lagging behind, at least partly, to the marginalised position of teacher education within higher education developments (Vizek Vidović, 2009; Zgaga 2003). Moreover, post-socialist contexts and traditions of teaching and teacher education provide limited opportunities for reform initiatives to be realised.

The paper presents issues identified in the literature and relevant research reports from the region. It first outlines the author's understanding of the requirements for teacher education on the basis of the international literature and in the European context, and then reviews the evidence collected in the region against these requirements. It scopes the issues and concludes with some suggestions for improvements.

Teacher education and change

An attempt to identify issues involved in reforms, or to evaluate the effects of reforms, needs to start from consideration of their purposes. Calls for change in teacher preparation are not a regional specificity. Claims that teacher preparation needs to change radically to meet the changing demands on teachers in the changing contexts of education have been voiced internationally (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Goodlad, 1991). Yet, the implementation of reforms critically depends on the contexts in which they take place. Influential theories of change developed by Michael Fullan (1993) and his colleagues (Anchan, Fullan & Polyzoi, 2003) suggest that implementing educational change is far from a technical matter and has to take into account the enormously complex interaction of various forces in the change process.

Let us start by considering the aspirations that SEE countries share with the rest of the world. Tatto and Mincu (2009) point to the increasingly global patterns of education reforms, and to global notions of the knowledge, skills and values that are worth teaching. Teachers are found to be critical for building competences for knowledge-based societies, and reforms addressing teachers (such as teacher standards for entry, redesign of teacher education curricula, new systems of accreditation and certification of teachers and schools) are gaining salience internationally as a policy tool to improve the quality of education (Tatto & Mincu,

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2009). Hargreaves describes teachers who are catalysts of the knowledge society and illustrates their actions, observing that such teachers:

- promote deep cognitive learning (to help all students achieve high standards);

- learn to teach in ways they were not taught (applying and undertaking research);

- commit to continuous professional learning (by trial and error);

- work and learn in collegial teams (engaging in collective problem solving);

- treat parents as partners in learning (cooperating with different kinds of people);

- develop and draw on collective intelligence (in broader learning partnerships);

- build a capacity for change and risk (in relation to expanding knowledge, new demands and shifting communities); and

- foster trust in processes (e.g., through openness to shared work); (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 23).

A number of reforms in teacher education addressing some of these new demands on teachers can be found in different countries. Examples from Europe reported in the present journal include the Finnish orientation toward teacher education committed to the development of an inquiry and research-based professional culture (Niemi, 2011), and a collaborative strategy for teachers' professional development and innovation at the University of Alcala in Spain (Margalef Garcia, 2011). The effects of such reforms on teaching and learning relate to the contexts, policies and politics where reforms occur.

Studies of education reforms in post-socialist countries (Anchan, et al. 2003; Webster, Silova, Moyer & McAllister, 2011) show the scale and complexity of changes in these contexts. Since the countries embarked on reforming their education systems in the early 1990s, virtually no aspect of education has remained untouched. The contexts of educational

change in SEE countries are characterised by transition processes, implying market liberalisation, decentralisation of education and other systems, diversification of values, and multiple other transitions that affect education (Anchan et al., 2003; Leclercq, 1996; Radó, 2001; 2010), as well as changing settings of teacher education (Zgaga, 2003; 2006).

Fullan (1993) suggests that changing systems are typically characterised by the coexistence of the old and the new 'state of things'. The emergent new state may have common elements with the old one, and the wider apart the two states are initially, the more difficult the transition process (Anchan et al., 2003). Accounts of the 'old' state of teaching in some of the countries in the region seem to suggest that it is rather distant from the aforementioned teaching for the knowledge society described by Hargreaves (2003); for example, Closs (1995) describes the teaching practices inherited from former Yugoslavia as having strong normative and even authoritarian connotations, with 'academic' curricula laden with facts and pseudo facts often to be learned by rote memory, and the use of a single textbook. The valuing of 'academic excellence' (or its appearance) left a limited tolerance for diversity or individual difference of any kind (Closs, 1995, pp. 203–208). According to Pantić, Closs and Ivošević (2011), teacher education institutions and schools in the region remain unduly disconnected from each other and from the increasingly multifaceted environments in which they operate. These authors compare reports from seven countries in the region, providing evidence that teaching and learning seem to be predominantly perceived as individualistic teacher-class activities rather than as a collaborative school-based activity, with insufficient collaboration among school staff and the wider school community, as well as insufficiently mutually supportive home-school relationships (Pantić et al., 2011) – all of which are desired for Hargreaves' teachers for the knowledge society. 'New ways', such as collaboration with parents and other stakeholders outside school, remain a challenge for teacher education even in some of the most successful systems in Europe (Niemi, 2011).

The preparation of Hargreaves' (2003) teacher for the knowledge society implies the need to develop teacher education in which academic, school-based and community-based knowledge come together – an enormous change for teacher education in the region if we consider the current perceptions of the teaching profession presented above. Moreover, Hargreaves (2003) suggests that today's teachers and those of the future need to be prepared for teaching beyond the knowledge society, for building more inclusive education systems and processes, and for fostering public good. Values, social justice, and caring would need to be central to teachers' development for teaching beyond the knowledge society, whereby teachers:

- promote social and emotional learning, commitment and character;

- learn to relate differently to others, replacing strings of interactions with enduring bonds and relationships;

- develop cosmopolitan identity;

- commit to continuous professional and personal development;

- work and learn in collaborative groups;

- forge relationships with parents and communities;

- build emotional understanding;

- preserve continuity and security; and

- establish basic trust in people (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 59).

Studies from the region show that teachers and other education professionals recognise the importance of values and relationships in education, but are perplexed about how to deal with the value-driven aspect of their job (Pantić, Wubbels, & Mainhard, 2011). Broader cultural, social and value-oriented understandings of teaching are particularly relevant in contexts of

change if teachers are to develop into reflective professionals and 'agents of change' who consider broader social purposes and competing values in education. Hargreaves (2003) illustrates how treating educational change as a technical, neutral process can ultimately undermine reforms. Anchan et al. (2003) use Fullan's Triple I model (Initiation, Implementation, Institutionalisation) to describe the processes of educational change in post-socialist contexts in which major structural reforms occurred with insufficient attention to implementation capacities, and without concomitant changes in infrastructure. They proposed a framework for educational transformation that includes:

- development of structures that support change;

- coordination/planning across all levels;

- articulating a vision and developing it in practice across all stakeholders;

- establishing pressure and support strategies for developing capacity and monitoring results (Anchan et al., 2003, p. 114).

In light of these aspects of educational transformation (structure, coordination, vision and quality assurance), the present paper reviews the reforms of teacher education in the region with a view towards identifying the issues critical for preparation for teaching for the knowledge society and beyond.

Method

Three major types of studies dealing with teacher education in the region have been reviewed:

1)   Studies from the region found in various international and local journals through international and regional academic databases, such as Kobson. Journals relevant for teacher education as part of higher education have been identified and searched for

articles reporting evidence from South-East Europe. Examples of such studies are Miclea's (2003) review of reforms at higher education institutions in South-East Europe published in *Higher Education in Europe*, and Vujisić-Živkivić's (2004) article about the role of schools in teacher development published in the local journal *Pedagogija*.

2) Studies conducted as part of regional projects that compare and analyse teacher education, such as a cross-national survey of pre-service and in-service teacher education '*The prospects of teacher education in South-East Europe*' conducted by the Centre for Education Policy Studies at the University of Ljubljana (Zgaga, 2006); or the report '*Teachers for the future - Teacher development for inclusive education in the Western Balkans*' prepared by the Centre for Education Policy from Belgrade for the European Training Foundation (ETF) (Pantić et al., 2011). These reports compare and synthesise the data and findings of individual country reports about teachers and their education, collected through questionnaires and interviews with teachers, teacher educators, education policymakers and various other stakeholders, including parents and community representatives. Evidence of issues relating to one of the above four aspects of teacher education (structure, coordination, vision and quality assurance) has been sought in these reports.

3) Finally, the review relies on publications describing reforms at particular teacher education institutions in the region, such as the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Zagreb (Vizek Vidović, 2009) and the Teacher Education Faculty in Jagodina at the University of Kragujevac (Savović, 2006). Such publications, as well as the above reports of the regional studies, have become known to the author through her

engagement in collecting policy-informing evidence in a number of projects dealing with teacher education in the region.

Teacher education reforms in the region

Structural and curricular changes in teacher preparation

The restructuring of initial teacher education programmes in SEE countries takes place as part of reforms at higher education institutions in line with the Bologna process. The 'Bologna agenda' includes the alignment to two-tier degree structures, the implementation of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), the redesign of curricula, the development of quality assurance systems, and the reintegration of universities. Analysts by and large agree that in the region structural changes have received more attention than those related to curricular goals and content (Miclea, 2003; Pantić & Wubbels 2012; Zgaga, 2003; 2008). Discussions of how to best structure programmes, questions of their adequate duration, allocation of ECTS credits and assessment have became common currency in SEE academia, while substantial changes in the students' learning experiences within the new curricula are still described as sporadic at best, and often as exceptional individual efforts (Macura Milovanović, Pantić & Closs, 2012; Pantić et al., 2011).

As in other study programmes, structural changes in the area of teacher education are often understood as an arithmetic question of the most suitable formulae for the bachelor and master's tiers, usually as a 3+2 or 4+1 dilemma (Zgaga, 2003). A related question is that of the nature of graduate and master's qualifications. Is a teaching licence to be ensured by a graduate degree or a research degree? In Albania, for instance, the four-year university programme of teacher education and training (equivalent to the bachelor level) is reported to be gradually changing to the 3+2 'Bologna system' (Ikonomi, Musai & Sotirofski, 2010). In

Croatia, teacher education has been 'upgraded' to the university level and organised as five-year study programmes adopting a consecutive model: at undergraduate level, students learn content related to various academic fields, and then acquire teacher competences at the postgraduate level through education science, *Methodiks* (subject didactics) and school practice, with a minimum of 60 ECTS (or 20% of the study programme) – an increase compared to the pre-Bologna 7–12% (Vizek Vidović, 2009). Thus, 'Bologna' alignments of pre-service teacher education sometimes involve higher levels of education being required for teaching (typically a master's degree), while it is doubtful whether these changes contribute to the improved quality and greater relevance of teacher preparation for changing school practices (Pantić et al., 2011; Vizek Vidović, 2009).

Curricular transformations are varied, just as preparation of teachers varies for pre-primary, primary (usually prepared at teacher education institutions, faculties of universities or professional colleges), and secondary teachers, whose preparation further varies for those teaching academic subjects (usually educated at the faculties for the relevant academic discipline with some teacher preparation as part of a teacher track), and for teachers of vocational subjects (usually graduating from faculties or professional colleges that offer education and training in their vocation, e.g., medicine, law, engineering, economics, etc., and often few courses such as subject didactics, pedagogy, and psychology) (Zgaga, 2006). Most teacher education institutions in the region reported that they were reforming their curricula. More than half have been active in either planning or developing learning outcomes and competences-based curricula as part of an effort to improve the employability of their graduates and make their programmes more compatible with European programmes (Zgaga, 2006).

Examples of concerted efforts to reform teacher education curricula can be found at different levels (of study programmes or institutions preparing different teachers), usually as part of EU TEMPUS projects (see, e.g., Hytonen, Pucko & Smyth, 2003 regarding restructuring primary teacher education at the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana), or through other kinds of international or bilateral assistance. Macura-Milovanović, Gera and Kovačević (2010) describe curricular reforms at teacher education faculties in Sombor and Jagodina supported and financed by the government of Finland (2004–2006) in the Serbian Teacher Education Project (STEP). Curricular reform in Jagodina was realised through action research (Savović, 2006) that aimed at improving the competences of teacher educators, providing more opportunities for student teachers to observe and practise teaching, interdisciplinary approaches to lesson planning and delivery, and new courses on child rights, developing tolerance and working with children with special education needs. The faculty then continued the reforms via an EU TEMPUS project from 2007 to 2009, focusing on improvement of student practice by preparing teachers and mentors to lead, monitor and evaluate students' practical placements (Macura-Milovanović et al. 2010, p. 46). Vizek Vidović (2009, pp. 62–63) and her colleagues describe a TEMPUS curricular reform at the level of a study programme for foreign language teachers at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Zagreb, setting subject-specific and education-related competences as curricular goals, and linking them to students' workload expressed in ECTS, as well as changes in content, teaching and assessment in all areas (education sciences, subject-related academic disciplines, subject didactics and student practice).

Unfortunately, such comprehensive efforts are rare, and changes implemented by higher education institutions within the Bologna process are more often described as superficial, modest and cosmetic (Miclea, 2003; Zgaga, 2011). There is little evidence of substantial changes in teacher preparation for inclusive education practices, for instance, even

when the reformed programmes are formally based on competences (Batarelo Kokić, Vukelić & Ljubić, 2010; Pantić et al., 2011). Sometimes programmes have been mechanically split into two parts to satisfy the 3+2 or 4+1 requirement, or ECTS credits have been put in place of hours. Such reforms show little consideration for the fundamental change in teaching philosophy brought by the orientation towards learning outcomes and ECTS credits to be gained through independent study and research on the part of the students, and not for listening to lectures (Zgaga, 2003; 2011).

One of the problems with curricula that is shared and recognised in the region is that of overloaded curricula incompatible with student-centred approaches, as workload leaves little room for 'active learning' and for interactive, problem-focused methods of teaching. Curricular change requires not only reducing content but also parallel changes to learning and teaching methodologies, and degrees expressed in terms of learning outcomes and competences require much more than adapting existing curricula (Miclea, 2003; Zgaga, 2003). Problems with teacher education curricula can illustrate these and other identified issues that preclude a more systematic change in teacher education to better suit the changing teaching profession.

The restructuring and reorganisation programmes also relate to concerns for the interdisciplinary nature of teacher education and its convergence with 'European standards' (Plevnik, 2003; Vizek Vidović, 2009). Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications (European Commission, 2005) observed in the reforms of teacher education in the region (Pantić et al., 2011; Vizek-Vidović, 2009) imply teachers' working with knowledge, information and technologies, with people, with and for the community. This and other key EU reference documents, such as Improving Competences for the 21st Century: An Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools (European Commission,

2008) suggest that teachers should be able to respond to the needs of individual learners, that their education should ensure an understanding of the social and cultural dimensions of education and of the contexts within which they work, and should present teaching as a problem-solving or research-in-action activity (European Commission, 2008, p. 5). Reviews of teacher education from the region (Pantić et al., 2011; Zgaga, 2006) suggest that emphasis on teacher reflectivity and capacity to contextualise teaching strategies represents a substantial challenge for many higher education institutions for a number of reasons.

Firstly, pre-service teacher education continues to be focused on disciplinary knowledge rather than on building competences. Teacher education in the region has inherited an academically oriented tradition with an undisputed primacy of academic disciplinary knowledge, while pedagogical and other practical skills are sidelined (Pantić et al., 2011; Vujisić-Živković, 2004). Across the region, content has been characterised as irrelevant and lacking in contemporary theories of teaching and learning and student-centred approaches. Teacher education in Serbia has been described as disconnected with actual changes in real school life (Macura-Milovanović et al., 2010, p. 45). In Montenegro, "academic subjects prevail, making up 90% of all courses in most of the faculties" (Milić, Marić, Bošković & Šćepović, 2010, p. 49). In Macedonia, "the curricula for subject teachers are mostly the same as the curricula for the various fields of study for non-teachers, although some students may choose to complete the optional teachers" programme of psychology, pedagogy and teaching method' (Spasovski, Ballazhi & Friedman, 2010, p. 37). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, teaching and learning methodologies are described predominantly as traditional lecturing in education science courses (Kafedžić, Pribišev Beleslin & Džemidžić Kristiansen, 2010, p. 50). In summary, teachers seem to by and large adopt the traditional image of a teacher inherited from their own school education – that of an authoritative lecturer who stands in front of the class and transmits knowledge by covering lectures (Vujisić-Živković, 2004).

Secondly, the dearth of opportunity for student teachers' reflection linking theory and practice is one of the most cited deficiencies of teacher preparation in the region (Pantić, 2008; Pantić et al., 2011; Zgaga 2006). This view is spread among teacher educators, students and school mentors alike (Pantić & Wubbels, 2012). The lack of teaching practice as a substantial, routinely required and systematically supervised part of teacher education is readily recognised as part of the problem. Where it exists, teaching practice largely consists of observation of more experienced teachers, which risks limiting learning to the preconceptions of teaching that students' already have when they enter the observation, often uncritically (Vujisić-Živković, 2004).

The issue of the relationship between theory and practice as a knowledge base for teachers is much more complex than suggested in the views common in the region, which seem to imply an understanding of professional practice as applied formal knowledge, and fail to recognise the formative influence of practice in the use and creation of knowledge (Pantić et al., 2011). Teachers' professional activity involves encountering specific situations that do not occur as defined problems (Schőn, 1983). Defining the problem is, in fact, one of the most difficult tasks in a profession and, therefore, is not a matter of the straightforward application of theoretical knowledge (Verloop, Driel & Meijer, 2001). The missing element in teacher development in the region seems to be knowledge of how to identify and deal with problems in a concrete setting – a combination of cognitive and practical knowledge, skills, experiences and strategies, as well as emotions, values, motivation and attitudes. Thus, a central consideration for teacher education is how to help teachers understand the practical implications of knowledge construction and use in real contexts. Teachers develop such knowhow in different ways and settings, through contact and sharing with other people, e.g., through discussion and interaction with families or through critical reflection on and challenges to traditional conceptions of teacher and learner roles, subject matter and pedagogy

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(Huizen, Oers & Wubbels, 2005; Kidd, Sanchez & Thorp, 2008; Tatto, 1999; Vygotsky, 1997).

The review of research from the region suggests that teacher education provides few structured opportunities for such contact and sharing, and for extending teachers' professional development to the community they serve. There is a widespread view that teacher education only takes place at teacher education faculties (Vujisić-Živković, 2004). There are only rare opportunities for future teachers to experience diversity; for example, through experiencing different cultures, through recruiting student teachers with special needs, from marginal groups or ethnic minorities (Zgaga 2003), or through interaction with socially and culturally diverse families. The necessary collaborative ways of working are rarely modelled by teacher educators (Pantić et al., 2011). Students have few opportunities to integrate theoretical and practical knowledge and develop their personal orientation and reflexivity, e.g., through discussion, through dialogue with various relevant players, in action research, or through school-university partnerships (Radulović, 2007). Only a quarter of the institutions reported that they had cooperated with teachers' professional associations or other stakeholders in the process of restructuring their curricula (Zgaga, 2006). Student teachers continue to be educated in and assessed predominantly on subject matter and pedagogical knowledge and skills. There is hardly any explicit focus on values in present teacher education in the region (Pantić, 2008), even though teachers themselves perceive their roles in the promotion of values as very important (Pantić & Wubbels, 2012).

Coordinating reforms

A major issue identified as a barrier to a comprehensive meaningful change in teacher preparation to better respond to the changing contexts of education is the absence of cross-

curricular approaches to teacher preparation (Pantić et al., 2011). It is sometimes emphasised that such a meaningful change would require a commitment by complete institutions (Vizek-Vidović, 2009). One of the reasons why relying on individual course designers is insufficient, cited by Pantić and colleagues (2011), is evidence suggesting that, despite some exceptional individual efforts, the overall capacity and motivation of a great number of teacher educators to initiate and adapt to change in higher education is limited, and that job-for-life attitudes and behaviours have become entrenched. The idea that established senior professors might research and run new courses or develop new ways of working with students, colleagues and communities seems alien in all but a few cases (Pantić et al., 2011). A teacher educator from Kosovo explained: "Faculties plan only as many courses as they have professors and therefore there is no room for new courses and philosophies" (Rexhaj, Mula & Hima, 2010, p. 36).

Teacher education programmes that are effective in more comprehensive teacher preparation include clear and consistent visions of teaching and learning that guide the programme (Zeichner, 2006). Accounts of reformed study programmes for teachers also stress the need to engage in a process of consultation with a range of stakeholders when defining the desired learning outcomes (Vizek Vidović, 2009). It seems that curricular innovation in the region has mostly occurred through the introduction of new curricular units relevant to 'new' educational topics, such as inclusive education, child rights, citizenship education, and so on (Pantić et al., 2011). As in other study areas, new courses and programmes seem to have elicited less resistance as channels for introducing reforms (Miclea, 2003) than the rarer cross-curricular approaches to reforms. The problem with this is that many of the competences that are found to be critical for these 'new' areas of teacher expertise such as inclusive education – competences like communication with other stakeholders in education (including families) or reflection on values and their impact on diverse learners – remain outside the remit of current pre-service teacher education, especially in subject teacher programmes. According to Vizek

Vidović (2009), the development of a competence-based curriculum requires the final step of verification of whether all of the necessary competences are covered by the programme units, whether the descriptions of the learning outcomes are coherent, whether particular units follow the intended progression in developing a particular competence, and so on (p. 71). Clearly, unless the staff conducting the units of a particular programme work together, the chances are that elements of teaching might be omitted under the assumption these would be covered by other course units.

Developing a common vision

Creating such a common vision is more difficult, if possible at all, when the preparation of teachers is fragmented across different types of institutions (Zgaga, 2003). Multiple fracture lines in the education of teachers have been cited as a barrier to a more holistic and more relevant preparation of teachers and other school staff. Teacher education for different levels of education is delivered in different programmes by different higher education institutions that pay different amounts of attention to teacher education. Collaboration between faculties of education and faculties that educate subject teachers is hindered by long-established faculty autonomy within universities functioning as a loose association of faculties (Miclea, 2003; Zgaga, 2003). No links exist between the faculties that prepare teachers and those that prepare other education professionals, such as pedagogues (school-based educational advisors), psychologists and others, and training for principals is rare (Macura Milovanović et al., 2012; Pantić et al., 2011). This is not a favourable setting for introducing a comprehensive shift of paradigm in teacher education and for the development of cross-curricular and interdisciplinary approaches. Yet, there are rather strong convictions within academia in the

region that there is nothing wrong with class teachers being prepared at faculties of teacher education and subject teachers being prepared at faculties of mathematics, arts, sports, etc.

Many countries in Europe have recognised a more appropriate institutional setting for the education of future teachers in a growing number of faculties of education that promote teacher education as a single inter-disciplinary area of study rather than as a sequence of various other disciplines that are seen to be useful for teachers. In the SEE region, an example of this tendency was reported in the transformation of the Faculty of Education in Pristina, established in 2002 by Kosovo's Ministry of Education (with support from the Canadian-funded Kosovo Education Development Plan, Finnish Support for the Development of Education in Kosovo, Save the Children Denmark and other organisations). This new faculty offers a Bachelor of Education degree in pre-school and primary education (class teachers) and lower secondary education (subject teachers) (Rexhaj et al., 2010, pp. 39–40).

Quality assurance

Another issue that is often cited as a missed opportunity for building a common vision of quality teaching and the relevant teacher preparation relates to quality assurance systems and the accreditation of teacher education providers and programmes (Pantić et al., 2011). Pre-service teacher education in the region is subject to national quality assurance procedures that apply to all higher education institutions and programmes. External evaluation criteria include: basing the programme on the latest scientific knowledge and skills, accordance with the professional needs and national priorities of the sector, and often comparability with the other European higher education programmes in the same fields of study (Plevnik, 2003; Vizek Vidović, 2009).

In a number of countries in Europe, governments increasingly set teacher standards. In the SEE region, such standards are at an early stage of development, which is sometimes seen as another barrier to the harmonisation of teacher competences being defined as desirable outcomes for teacher education programmes, especially for vocational subject teachers (Vizek Vidović, 2009). In addition to external standards set by governments, the accreditation of teacher education programmes also depends on universities or on their faculties that traditionally participate in teacher education provision, such as arts and science faculties. Quality assurance is generally a relatively new concept in the region, and 'a culture of quality' is yet to be built within universities (Miclea, 2003). Teacher education quality assurance is reported to provide few formative links between quality criteria for teachers, schools and teacher education providers. Yet, feedback from research on the concept and use of competences to establish teacher standards has tended to be positive among teachers, teacher educators and student teachers (Pantić, 2008; Zgaga, 2006).

Conclusions and ways ahead

In the present review, teacher education in SEE has been viewed within the context of implementing Bologna process reforms. These reforms have given precedence to drafting and implementing new legislation, while curricular reforms have often been sidelined. This situation seems to have brought about discrepancies between the (formally) modernised systems and obsolete teaching and learning practices. In teacher education, the new second cycle programme is particularly crucial, as there is a danger that it will become a mere extension of the old curricula focused on disciplinary knowledge rather than on building teacher competences.

The issues identified in this review do not seem helpful for promoting teacher education as a comprehensive, interdisciplinary, inclusive, problem-oriented, learning outcomes-based study area. In the context of fragmented teacher education, there is a risk of setting narrow learning outcomes in accordance with the institutional vision, or lack of vision, of their role in the preparation of future teachers; indeed, such outcomes could even reinforce the fragmented education of education professionals.

Curricular changes towards degrees expressed in terms of learning outcomes and competences require much more than adapting the existing curricula. One of the most urgently needed changes seems to be building a more meaningful relationship between theory and practice in teaching. Innovative ways of integrating theoretical and practical knowledge could be sought by building communities of practice, action research and formative evaluation of changing practices; for instance, evidence of teacher behaviour and its educational impact on students could be systematically incorporated in teacher education programmes for formative purposes and revision of teaching approaches based on learning from practice.

Another increasingly popular practice in teacher development programmes is engagement in action research. As opposed to the long-established idea that practitioners implement the findings of research undertaken by others, in action research the researcher is at the same time a teacher practitioner, and is thus affected by the results. The underlying rationale is precisely the belief that the relationship between theory and practice is reciprocal, and that teachers are more likely to change their behaviour if they engage in exploring the problems that concern them. Clearly, changing approaches to theory and practice calls for a dramatic change in relations between schools and teacher education institutions; it also requires research to evaluate the implemented changes and inform the direction of future

practices. There is therefore a need for pre-service education providers in higher education institutions to build partnerships with schools, e.g., through working with practicing teachers in order to improve their own programmes and thus meet the real needs of changing schools.

In conclusion, the state of teacher preparation in the region leaves much to be desired in order for Hargreaves' (2003) vision of the teacher for the knowledge society and beyond to be realised. In this vision, teacher preparation should be regarded as collaborative and continuing development. The fragmented education of teachers, head teachers and specialist staff does not seem to be the most effective way of developing professionals who would later work in teams in schools. The direction of the process of integrating faculties into universities is yet to be determined in many countries in the region. In the meantime, a possible way to start overcoming the fragmented education of teachers and other education professionals could be sought through linking pre-service teacher education institutions to in-service education and training institutions, considering that the latter have developed some useful teacher development programmes in recent years (Pantić et al., 2011).

When it comes to overcoming institutional and curricular fragmentation and building interdisciplinary and inclusive approaches in teacher education, organising teams of interested 'model' teacher educators from various scientific fields could be a first step to improvements in curriculum quality, and to developing a culture and practice of inclusion at faculties (Miller & Stayton, 2006, pp. 56–68). As part of the ETF's regional study (Pantić et al., 2011), researchers from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia described teacher educators whom they considered to be good at their job, and how these successful teacher educators had developed, maintained and enhanced their professionalism despite the obstacles. The researchers described these model teacher educators as committed to lifelong learning and self-improvement, but also to collaboration with colleagues, students, practising

teachers or other education-related professionals. They were described as taking their work seriously, being enthusiastic and gaining pleasure from their work, being open to new ideas and experiences, and seeking to work in schools and/or in education projects with NGOs. They learned from practice and from conducting research, and did not see themselves only as consumers and transmitters of academic learning. They learned a great deal in terms of new approaches to their profession, including methods of working with students, by developing international links (sometimes studying abroad), by developing shared programmes or collaborative research, by attending international conferences and learning through the Internet, journals and books, as well as through personal/professional correspondence with international colleagues and working with international NGOs. Although some of the teacher educators identified were young, others were nearing retirement but were described as remaining fully committed and young in spirit.

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