

## 35<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR TEACHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE

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### INTRODUCTION\*

In 2010 the Association of Hungarian Teacher Educators had the honour to host the annual conference of the Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE) in Budapest, Hungary. The conference was jointly organized by Eötvös Lorand University of Budapest and Eszterhazy Károly College of Eger. Although the name may suggest that the scope of the event was limited to Europe, presenters, professional teacher educators, arrived from all over the world: altogether, the representatives of over 50 countries from all continents attended the conference.

After considering the major trends and policies in teacher education in the past years, the central theme of the conference '*Responsibility, Challenge and Support in Teachers' Life-long Professional Development*' was not difficult to establish. Under this title the mostly widely acknowledged researchers of the field lectured on issues which have a special importance in improving the quality of education. There is a general consensus in the profession that improving the quality of education can best be achieved through improving the quality of teaching, which, in turn, requires turning initial teacher education and in-service teacher education into one continuous coordinated process, thus providing an ideal context for teachers' life-long professional development.

Life-long development has become a must for the profession, since changes in society and new expectations towards the profession increased teachers' responsibility and diversified their job. However, facing new challenges without getting sufficient support will never result in learning, growth and success. Thus establishing a teacher-centred support system which aims to nurture teacher autonomy and professionalism is crucial for success, since it is only autonomous professionals committed to continuous development who can meet the expectations society sets for schools today.

Reflecting on the questions connected to the theme '*Responsibility, Challenge and Support of Teachers' Life-Long Professional Development*', the speakers of the conference presented remarkable papers, best practices and innovations, explor-

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\* Prepared by Erzsébet Golnhofer and by Boglárka Meggyesfalvi, based on Iván Falus's 'Greetings' and the plenary papers. Translated by Magdolna Kimmel.

ing the central idea from different perspectives.<sup>1</sup> In this issue of *Pedagógusképzés* we are presenting a selection from the rich material, namely the plenary lectures, in Hungarian.

In the first paper, *Andrei I. Podolski* deals with the necessity, feasibility and limitations of linking educational theory and practice and shares with us a practical method to achieve this goal. *His central question is what kind of psychology practitioner teachers need.* Through analysing research findings and practical examples he explores what factors may account for the success or failure of the application of scientific research in practice. The author believes that there is an intellectual procedure which may help practicing teachers to analyse the tasks of teaching through the findings of modern psychology, which, at the same time, enriches their educational competences: the so-called *Planned Stage-By-Stage Formation of Mental Actions (PSFMA Theory)*, originally introduced by P. Galperin, based on the principles and theories of Vygotszky. The study presents the most important features of PSFMA, the rules of its application and the findings of some psycho-pedagogical experiments. The author stresses that in order to be able to successfully apply PSFMA, students' character traits and the decisive features of the taught material must also be taken into consideration.

*Csaba Pléh* deals with the biological and psychological constraints and determinants of lifelong learning, with special regard to the teaching profession. First he presents two typical visions of the human life cycle, one which emphasizes flexibility and another which emphasizes predetermination and limitations during people's lifetime; then he discusses the concepts of 'street learning' and 'school learning'. Next, several important issues of educational philosophy are analysed and interpreted while discussing different approaches to nurturing knowledge, possible models of how knowledge evolves, and the effects of cultural and biological factors on learning. In the next sections important pedagogical research problems, questions and findings are presented in terms of the interconnectedness of age, the nervous system, culture, and methods of learning and teaching. The careful analysis of research findings may convince pedagogical experts that the critical periods of the human life cycle must always be considered when designing teaching and learning. The following sections, discussing the role of modern technology in learning, may help us to raise further research questions. The paper, which discusses the issue of life-long professional development from various aspects, concludes by stating that it is only through staying continuously active both physically and mentally can professionals preserve their mental flexibility and physical fitness.

In her paper *Marilyn Cochran-Smith* convincingly presents the decisive role practitioner research plays in the life-long professional development of practicing teachers. The author explores three main aspects of practitioner research: 1. the

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<sup>1</sup> To see further papers visit: <http://www.atee1.org>; <http://www.atee2010.ektf.hu>

main emphasis in practitioner research is on assuming a *critical stance* towards one's practice; 2. practitioner research, though primarily focussing on issues which are relevant in the local context, may *produce relevant knowledge* useful for a wider context, too; 3. *the in-depth reform of education* hinges on the collective intellectual capacity of practicing teachers, i.e. whether they are able to formulate valid research questions, to generate knowledge through systematic inquiry, and to collaborate so as to improve schooling and society. Cochran-Smith presents the characteristic features and the effectiveness of practitioner research through several examples at various levels of education. Based on a set of refined criteria she clearly demarcates the concepts of 'practitioner research movement' and 'professional learning communities'. The paper offers new, fresh viewpoints for the interpretation and the practice of teaching, especially for those who are prepared to accept inquiry as a stance to teaching, and develop their interpretative frameworks, which determine their short and long-term decision-making alike, based on this stance. Those who are interested in this approach to teaching will find an extensive bibliography attached.

*Marco Snoek* claims that the teaching profession is now facing a major challenge: the necessity to improve the quality of education. At the same time, he observes, the question whether teacher education is capable of training teachers who meet the new societal and professional requirements has become one of the central themes of professional discourse. The author states that this question can only be answered through clarifying what character traits new generations of teachers should develop to fit into a new, extended teacher role. Based on the professional literature he carefully maps the challenges and expectations facing the teacher profession, and concludes by describing the *major characteristics of teacher professionalism*. Through the sociological analysis of the professions he presents from five different perspectives what varied approaches and values one can find when interpreting teacher professionalism and the *qualities of the ideal teacher*. In conclusion, he lists the main features of teacher professionalism, a list, which, in his opinion, can be translated into a list of professional requirements. These requirements should constitute the basic frame of reference, including knowledge, skills and attitudes, for the design of *new teacher education curricula*.

In one of the closing plenary lectures of the conference, *Helène Clark* outlines the main targets and components of recent EU strategies and policies in terms of teacher education. She stresses that since the countries of Europe are facing similar challenges, cooperation in tackling the issues is needed more than ever before. There seems to be a general consensus in the profession that *teachers play a key role in improving the quality education*. She underlines that every member state is expected to contribute to finding ways of implementing effective and adaptive teaching, increasing levels of pupils' attainment and their acquisition of the Key Competences. *She lists some necessary measures EU member states must take:* at-

tracting the best candidates to the teaching profession; improving the quality of teacher education by providing intensive, practice oriented training and competence development; providing effective programmes of professional and personal support for beginning teachers; providing opportunities for career-long professional development for practicing teachers by diversifying in-service teacher education opportunities; re-thinking and redesigning initial teacher education. The author examines *the roles and responsibilities teacher educators* have in preparing trainees for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. She accepts that establishing a *unified teaching profession* in the EU will require extensive further efforts of all interested parties, their intensive collaboration and on-going dialogue. She concludes by claiming that the European Commission is convinced that the Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE) is one of the key stakeholders, and it will play a decisive role in improving the quality of teacher education and through this in improving the quality of education in the EU.