

European Teacher Education in the late 1990s
- updating the SIGMA report

The state, however, derives no inconsiderable advantage from their instruction [referring to the „inferior ranks of people“]. The more they are instructed the less liable they are to the delusions of enthusiasm and superstition, which, among ignorant nations, frequently occasion the most dreadful disorders. An instructed and intelligent people, besides, are always more decent and orderly than an ignorant and stupid one. They feel themselves, each individually, more respectable and more likely to obtain the respect of their lawful superiors, and they are therefore more disposed to respect those superiors. They are more disposed to examine, and more capable of seeing through, the interested complaints of faction and sedition, and they are, upon that account, less apt to be misled into any wanton or unnecessary opposition to the measures of government. In free countries, where the safety of government depends very much upon the favourable judgment which the people may form of its conduct, it must surely be of the highest importance that they should not be disposed to judge rashly or capriciously concerning it. (A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, vol. II, London-Toronto: E.P. Dutton & Co., pp. 269-270)

1. In 1994 the European Commission initiated and funded a pilot action in the field of teacher education within a larger framework of investigating the effects of the ERASMUS programme on European cooperation and of defining new measures in relation to new needs in view of the transition to the second generation of cooperation programmes (the SOCRATES programme) (see Sander 1995b). This was called the SIGMA project, comprising also other fields of university study apart from teacher education. A Scientific Committee of representatives for the 15 EU Member States was established, being coordinated by the Universität Osnabrück/Germany on behalf of the Santander Group, an international university consortium. Reports for all Member States were used as conference material for a major conference organised in Osnabrück in June 1995 (Sander 1995a; a revised updated version was edited in 1996 by Sander et al.) which combined a final meeting of all the sub-networks of the Réseau d'Institutions de Formation d'Enseignants (RIF), an earlier pilot action of the European Commission in teacher education which was begun in 1990, with a general invitation to teacher educators in Europe to discuss fundamental problems of European cooperation under the ERASMUS/SOCRATES programme. Resulting from the conference a synthesis report was published intending to summarise both the preparatory reports and the discussions in working groups at the conference (see Synthesis 1995, available on the website of Umeå universitet under <http://tntee.umu.se>).

Based on experiences of the RIF (see Barbe et al. 1993; the six issues of the RIFLET, the News Bulletin of the RIF, edited by Yves Beernaert; the reports on the four European Summer Universities published by Hogeschool Gelderland [I], Yvard 1991 [III], Beernaert/Rupert n.d. [IV], report II unpublished but results summarised in Beernaert/van Dijck/Sander 1994, pp. 148ff.; the report on

the RIF Symposium 1993 - Janssens/Loly-Smets 1994) and the SIGMA pilot project in teacher education, a group of teacher educators applied for funding from the European Commission for a Thematic Network of Teacher Education in Europe (TNTEE) under the SOCRATES programme. This network started operations in autumn 1996, being coordinated by Umeå universitet/Sweden. Within short time TNTEE developed into a large network of teacher education institutions producing various materials in a number of sub-networks working on specific themes (see website of TNTEE under <http://tntee.umu.se> where all materials currently available are deposited).

Early in 1998 TNTEE began cooperating with a group under the aegis of the Comité National d'Evaluation (CNE) in France and the Evalueringscenteret in Denmark which had received funding from the European Commission since 1997 for a pilot action preparing the establishment of a „network of evaluation agencies in Europe“. Jointly with the CNE the Thematic Network organised a workshop in September 1998 in Lyon focusing on the evaluation of teacher education and the specific problems being involved. Thus, the workshop brought together two categories of participants - specialists in the domain of evaluation, mainly from national evaluation agencies, and experts in the field of teacher education. In order to provide participants with some background information on recent trends and problems in teacher education in the second half of the 1990s, since the publication of the SIGMA report, an effort was made to assemble updates from all Member States of the EU. These updates are now published on the website of the Thematic Network of Teacher Education in Europe and will become available in a hardcopy version later.

2. What is the situation of teacher education in Europe at the end of the 1990s? It is not self-evident that we know the answers, or at least some of the more important ones, in spite of so many specialised publications dealing with developments in European teacher education. Certainly the present publication provides some insights into what experienced teacher educators in the 15 Member States see as being the current state of affairs. At the same time I suppose we are all aware of the increasingly critical attitude of the public and of the state as employer and as the major mediating institution in society towards teachers and teacher education in recent times. In the eyes of governments in many countries schools are no longer properly fulfilling their tasks, teachers are no longer effectively coping with their professional duties and existing problems in the classroom, and among others (above everything else?) teacher education should be blamed for that, as it does not provide teachers with the tools they need for dealing with growing problems. This may be a somewhat simplified and generalised version of current criticism but the thrust of the argument could nonetheless be assumed to be reproduced quite correctly. Even though some teachers and teacher educators might be prepared for beating their breasts, accepting the public criticism as being justified, I do not have the impression that the criticism is generally thought to be valid in these circles. On the other hand it should not be overlooked that teacher educators and teachers themselves have particular perspectives and specific interests, not a monopoly in defining and knowing which criticism is justified and which not.

In quite elementary ways this might already suffice for underlining that there is certainly no general agreement about the situation in teacher education in the late 1990s, rather fundamental disagreement between the interested parties. Beyond doubt school itself contributes massively to generating problems which it then desperately struggles to deal with in terms of education, it might even increasingly do so - but that is certainly not the only source of its difficulties in the present situation. The development of class society in recent decades requires ever higher levels and ever higher effectiveness of mediation which all mediating institutions, particularly the state and its various institutions, are apparently unable to provide. However, it would be rather premature and irrational to blame schools and teachers (or teacher educators) for this inadequacy, as they are far from being the prime source of more and more difficult problems and as they are simply lacking the means for dealing with them in effective ways. We are faced with a clear tendency of ignoring the sources of

problems and of projecting all failures of class society in coping with its own problems, all failures of the welfare state and its mediating functions on schools and teachers. While this correctly reflects the very central role of school/educational institutions in modern society among the mediating institutions, it simply overestimates the mediating capacity of this institution. The same would be true for teacher education.

But disagreement on the situation prevailing in teacher education in the late 1990s has other reasons as well, almost completely distorting public debate about the needs for reforming teacher education and the appropriate means of doing so. This concerns the fundamental question of the context and objectives of teacher education. In order to know where teacher education failed or succeeded, it is of course important to have a very precise idea about the role and functions of teacher education within the education system and society in general - and about what could definitely not be its role and functions. This is a more serious problem than it might seem at first sight, as the debate in the 1990s has narrowed down on functions which in my view at best represent a side aspect of teacher education, if they are of any relevance at all. Is the main objective and function of teacher education not very simply to teach prospective teachers about teaching? This would probably be the question, if not the basic widely shared assumption, among persons inside and outside the field of teacher education. Unfortunately this assumption does not reflect more than purely normative positions - a perspective dominated by what teacher education ought to do (ignoring fully the question whether it has the means of doing it) and disregarding what it actually does. Focusing sharply and exclusively on what teacher education does and not on what it ought to do, the role and functions of teacher education could be described in the following contexts which in fact do not stand in isolation but are dynamically linked among each other in a developmental process and tend to reinforce or weaken each other, depending on the circumstances:

(a) Labour market regulation in the face of growing difficulties of the occupational system. This is one of the most genuine and essential functions of the education system as such ever since the origins of compulsory schooling in modern capitalist society. The transition to compulsory schooling, in some countries already in the last century, actually followed a pattern which confirms this general statement. In industrial regions it began earlier than in agricultural regions. In the latter the transition process was only accomplished after the need for child labour had ceased to exist, and that was with the beginning mechanisation in agriculture. There is a very clear historical and logical relationship between the world of the (compulsory) school and the world of labour. It will be entirely impossible to understand the school as a social institution if not as non-labour, as the negation of the world of labour. This is particularly evident in modern history when education/school ceases to be the domain and the instrument of a particular social group (e.g. the churches, the craft organisations) to become a public institution, an institution under the responsibility and the jurisdiction of the state. It reproduces the world of labour and the divisions existing in society through negating the world of labour and its divisions and specialisations. That is the only possible legitimacy it could have.

Being separated from working life and opposing the world of labour, including its effects, separating itself from the objective of educating workers, and also separating itself from the tradition of training for specific occupations in production and circulation, the school represents a real and not just an intellectual abstraction from work in capitalist society. It is precisely this abstraction which permits school to play an important role in regulating the labour market. In the highly industrialised countries of Western Europe the education systems continued to react flexibly to growing problems at the level of the occupational system even beyond the general introduction of compulsory schooling. They have contributed greatly in the post-war period, at least for some decades, to containing unemployment within acceptable limits. Attending the higher levels of the education system and particularly gaining access to higher education were actually the privilege of a very small minority of students in relation to the relevant age group in an early phase of post-war development. Very

soon after the war this situation began to change visibly, with participation rates in upper secondary education and then also higher education rising, often rising quite rapidly. Within higher education, it was the expansion of teacher education, at university level and in other institutions, which represented the decisive factor in pushing up participation rates in the 1960s and the 1970s. More or less since the mid-1980s teacher education gradually lost this particularly effective role in regulating the labour market, with other fields of academic study succeeding teacher education in this respect. However, the role of higher education in general in relation to the labour market is still that of a very important reserve mechanism, although this role has increasingly come under attack from the side of governments in the 1990s.

(b) Social reproduction on the basis of the existing division of labour. Compulsory schooling represents a radical break with previous traditions of social reproduction, turning against systems of reproducing the existing division of labour through the churches, the crafts, the professions, the classes, the families, etc., and replacing it by a system of reproducing the existing division of labour through education in schools as public institutions. This education is characterised by involving all young persons within a certain age group independent of their social origin. Even within a vertically or horizontally structured school system there is no specific school for the children of the ruling class and another separate school for the children of the working class. Again school as an institution being centrally involved in the reproduction of society represents a process of real abstraction from classes and internal divisions of classes. Just by abstracting from the class system and the division of labour under a formal principle of equality for all, school actually succeeds in faithfully reproducing it.

This particular role gradually changed in the post-war period. As long as only a small minority of an age group was given an opportunity to attend upper secondary school (beyond compulsory schooling) and higher education, this minority was certainly not identical with the ruling class but represented mainly specific groups of privileged professionals to be employed in their vast majority in the public sector. By numbers teachers have always been the most important group within this category, and teacher education was to equip prospective teachers with the basic instruments and attitudes for maintaining selection processes in education. Among others the increasing participation rates in the upper secondary education and higher education reflected more and more massive attacks on the particular social privileges characterising the employment situation of professionals working in the public sector as well as a fundamental transformation of many white-collar jobs, wiping out many of the former distinctions between workers and employees, blue collar and white collar. That was particularly true for teacher education. In the 1980s the higher the education system in general and teacher education programmes in particular had ceased to be a jumping board for rewarding and successful careers in the professions, with jobs being more or less guaranteed for all those managing to obtain a degree. This situation is even more aggravated in the 1990s by massive attempts from the side of governments to strictly adapt the supply of academically qualified personnel to a more and more limited real demand.

(c) Ideological integration, mainly through citizenship education. The world of school and the world of university as dominated by the interests of the state are regulated by the same principle: University shares with the school the fundamental aim of educating citizens - and that has priority above everything else - but necessarily refuses the idea of professional preparation because of this very fact. University in modern times could only be understood as a world of non-professionalism, non-professionalisation, as a negation of the professions and the world of work/professional practice related to it. In just this sense university studies were reconstituted with the rise of bourgeois society around a new concept of philosophy as the *mater studiorum*, a philosophy that absorbed and reflected the revolutionary movements in the transition to bourgeois society. This was all the more logical, as philosophy and philosophical studies aimed at the education of man, not at a narrowly interpreted professional competence of lawyers, doctors and clergymen, or teachers. The education of man

presupposed the framework of democracy (imaginary or real, that was of no importance), constitutionalism and human rights and was clearly directed at preparing for participation in democracy. Hence education for citizenship became the very hub of university studies, and the perfect sense this made was nowhere expressed more clearly than in the education of future civil servants, among them specifically teachers. This is evidently a very specific historical mode of preparing for work in class society and specifically the professions through abstracting from the particular ideologies of classes - and of professions - and replacing it by the general ideology of citizenship.

Even if in teacher education this particular model of university education for professionals was perhaps more deeply rooted than in any other branch of academic study, it did not survive into the post-war period, in teacher education and elsewhere. In fact philosophy ceased long ago to be the core of university studies representing the sum of contemporary knowledge in the natural sciences and the humanities. It was replaced by the rapid development of disciplines, among them the educational sciences separating from philosophy and beginning to establish a particular framework of research and teaching practice and at the same time having to define external relations with other disciplines like psychology, anthropology, sociology, etc. Beyond that the educational sciences were characterised by intra-disciplinary developments promoting a very high degree of specialisation on particular themes and areas of study. It is a question whether any of the disciplines in their present state seriously offer opportunities for citizenship education in any sense.

There are other developments outside university increasingly standing in the way of the university succeeding in providing its clients with citizenship education under democratic assumptions, particularly so in the post-war period. Many observers not even having a particular reputation as radicals have diagnosed a major crisis of participatory democracy resulting from what has sometimes been called the „broken promises of democracy“. In this sense sharp distinctions would have been made between the democratic illusion and the really existing state. In education for citizenship, be this at the level of school or at the level of university, democracy and constitutionalism as a frame of reference are replaced by the really existing state as a hierarchical structure of social control. Quite obviously the really existing state has an understanding and a policy of education for citizenship which diverges from basic assumptions of education for citizenship under a democratic regime. In teacher education, and elsewhere in the education sector, the meaning of citizenship education has changed enormously since the 1970s and it is to be asked whether it still makes sense for teacher educators and students in the 1990s. Teacher education itself contributes to sharply reducing its own effectiveness in the matter.

(d) Preparation of teachers for performing the same functions as above at school level. While school as a public institution was characterised by its abstracting from the world of labour (and out of necessity having to do so), university and with it teacher education at university level are characterised for their part by a double process of abstraction and opposition to the world of labour. Teacher education does in fact abstract first of all in very practical and not only theoretical ways from the world of the school and the daily problems arising in it, and then also from the world of labour in general (and out of necessity has to do so). This includes abstracting from the existence of classes and ideologies of classes and from the social reproduction of the class system and the division of labour inherent in it. Otherwise university would have no proper legitimation as being separated from the processes of schooling or from experiences of labour/professional practice themselves. As mentioned above, it represents quite logically a way of reproducing the professions through the negation of professionalism and professionalisation. This is a modern, rational and not an irrational, basically inefficient way of reproducing the existing division of labour. Even if the university today has developed significantly in comparison with the beginning of the 19th century, its basic orientation has not changed at this level and will probably only change with the disappearance of the university.

Teacher preparation within university or other higher education institutions then has a clear orientation - educate teachers for performing the same tasks and supporting the same functions at school level which are linked to higher education and its role, namely labour market regulation, social reproduction and ideological integration. Quite obviously it is of no particular importance for the outcomes and effectiveness of such an education whether this orientation is given prominent place in the teacher education curriculum or not, indeed whether this orientation is reflected at all in the official curriculum. Rather there would always have been a tendency that outcomes mainly depended on the hidden curriculum of teacher education. At the same time there would have been a complete reliance on the homology of problems and tasks between higher education level and school level. It is this very homology which provided teacher education over many decades with a proper legitimation and with a basis for dealing in relatively effective ways with its fundamental tasks. However, in all likelihood these ties and links are no longer functioning today as much as in the past, for reasons largely beyond the control of teacher education institutions and educators.

3. I am quite aware that this brief overview of the role and functions of teacher education might appear somewhat strange to some colleagues, asking, eyebrows raised, about the place of being prepared for teaching classes, planning lessons, assessing students, etc. in the overall context of teacher education programmes and courses. As I said before, I tried to focus sharply on what teacher education does, not on what it ought to do. Legend has it that the competence for teaching at school level in the sense of planning lessons, keeping discipline in the classroom, etc. is acquired (or at least could theoretically be acquired) in pre-service teacher education. But it is only too obvious that this is a self-defensive legend, and nothing else. In a more sober and self-critical perspective it has to be admitted quite simply that these and similar competences have been basically acquired by generation after generation of teachers after terminating their teacher education courses, simply through learning on the job, mostly without anyone's help and assistance.

Current debates on the situation of teacher education in the late 1990s revolve around many aspects and problems - but definitely not around the basic question whether teacher education still succeeds in maintaining its fundamental roles and functions, as briefly sketched above in four points. Rather, recent debates on teacher education focus on key words like „professionalisation“, „competencies“, „qualifications“, „quality enhancement“, „accountability“, etc. There is a strong tendency, even echoed among teacher educators, of demanding that university and in particular pre-service teacher education should be more strictly oriented on „professional practice“, „professionalism“, „professionalisation“, „professional competence“ in quite a narrow sense - and of pretending that this would produce positive results in coping with present-day problems in schools. For example, a list of standards to be reached by teacher students at the end of their education which was published recently in the UK contains, among others, the following items:

Those to be awarded Qualified Teacher Status must, when assessed, demonstrate that they use teaching methods which sustain the momentum of pupils' work and keep all pupils engaged through

- stimulating intellectual curiosity, communicating enthusiasm for the subject being taught, fostering pupils' enthusiasm and maintaining pupils' motivation;
- matching the approaches used to the subject matter and the pupils being taught;
- structuring information well, including outlining content and aims, signalling transitions and summarising key points as the lesson progresses;
- clear presentation of content around a set of key ideas, using appropriate subject-specific vocabulary and well-chosen illustrations and examples;
- clear instruction and demonstration, and accurate well-paced explanation;

- effective questioning which matches the pace and direction of the lesson and ensures that pupils take part;
- careful attention to pupils' errors and misconceptions, and helping to remedy them;
- listening carefully to pupils, analysing their responses and responding constructively in order to take pupils' learning forward;
- selecting and making good use of textbooks, IT and other learning resources which enable teaching objectives to be met;
- providing opportunities for pupils to consolidate their knowledge and maximising opportunities, both in the classroom and through setting well-focused homework, to reinforce and develop what has been learnt,
- exploiting opportunities to improve pupils' basic skills in literacy, numeracy and IT, and the individual and collaborative study skills needed for effective learning, including information retrieval from libraries, texts and other sources;
- exploiting opportunities to contribute to the quality of pupils' wider educational development, including their personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development;
- setting high expectations for all pupils notwithstanding individual differences, including gender, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds;
- providing opportunities to develop pupils' wider understanding by relating their learning to real and work-related examples. (Department for Education and Employment, Teaching: High Status, High Standards. Circular 10/97, pp. 10f.)

It is certainly the authors of such lists whose „errors and misconceptions“ about education and teaching need very careful attention indeed, although there might actually be no way of „helping to remedy them“. For any critical observer this (and the rest of the catalogue contained in circular 10/97) is nothing but a mass of vague and hollow phrases which definitely could not serve in any way as an orientation for beginning teachers in understanding how to organise their work in the classroom or how to structure processes within teacher education courses with the aim of gaining the required competence. The need for interpreting the respective requirements in their complete vagueness (what is „good use of textbooks“, what is „effective questioning“, what is „well-paced explanation“ outside highly specific contexts and beyond personal interpretations - more circulars by ignorant technocrats needed to explain this!) makes it perfectly impossible to regard them as appropriate standards which could be used in any rational way for assessing specific classroom behaviour of students. Requirements could be deliberately interpreted in widely differing and even opposite ways. Whatever behaviour students demonstrate in practice, it could be regarded at will as corresponding with the standards or as not corresponding, as there are absolutely no criteria or only hints for knowing whether specific behaviour of specific students in specific situations does correspond with the standards. On top of this, it is completely unclear how such competences could be acquired at all in pre-service teacher education, be this at university or in schools. It is only too obvious that university does not have the means of promoting the acquisition of competences in this very narrow sense and it is definitely not its role to deal with such matters. Therefore teacher educators should be very reluctant to promise results which could never be achieved. At the same time it is very clear that schools are not more effective in this respect. The often heard claim that students would be better prepared for their job, if more elements of practice, practical experience, school experience, practicum, etc. were introduced into the study programmes of prospective teachers, has no foundations whatsoever. This is just thoughtless propaganda.

The very idea that teacher education, as taking place at university or at other higher education institutions, should have the aim of preparing students for lesson planning, keeping discipline in

the classroom, knowing all about accurate well-paced explanation in lessons, etc. etc. could only appear to be extremely misguided and hopeless, failing to grasp the meaning and role of university and teacher education in history and to understand its actual limits, possibilities and achievements. If such petty matters were indeed all prospective teachers had to learn and know, then there would be absolutely no need for teacher education in a separate educational institution called university, there would not even be a need for any kind of teacher education in any place or institution. One would just throw beginning teachers into the water and ask them to swim - which they have done with satisfactory results for ages.

If the present debate about professionalism, professionalisation and professional practice of teachers is not to get even more confused and disoriented, much to the disadvantage of teachers and teacher educators themselves, a thorough critical analysis of teacher education is needed. It does not really matter if that analysis is undertaken as internal or external evaluation, as long as it is undertaken at all. Certainly it would be a sign of the healthy state of the profession if teachers and teacher educators themselves were able to demonstrate their ability for producing a realistic picture of developments in the education sector, instead of adding another brilliant plan for the reform of teacher education to the hundreds of plans which have not worked in the past.

4. Such reflections do have consequences for the current debate about evaluation and quality assessment in teacher education which will certainly become more heated in coming years. Quality is such a vague and meaningless concept if it is not tied firmly to a very precise understanding of the functions and role of teacher education (Sander 1995c). It could not be seen as an accident that few attempts are made to arrive at such a precise understanding and the vagueness of the quality concept appears to be its very advantage for governments in using it for increasingly massive attacks on the education sector. In my view there are three fundamental aspects to be taken into account concerning evaluation processes as they are now being introduced into teacher education all over Europe:

(a) Evaluation attempts to eliminate its political context, i.e. its instrumental value and functions for austerity policies and hierarchical control in the education sector, and instead prefers to present itself as a simple rational mechanism of quality control according to a technical model (as e.g. in car production) which could not possibly be refuted by anyone not being out of his senses.

(b) Evaluation claims to provide indicators for the quality of teacher education but never enters into a proper debate about the social functions of teacher education and instead proceeds from assumptions about aims and objectives of teacher education as a frame of reference for assessment which quite clearly teacher education institutions do not and cannot achieve.

(c) Evaluation tends to employ methods for assessing the quality of teacher education which presuppose the readiness to radically ignore the wealth of critical reflection on methodological problems having been produced in the so-called empirical sciences and with alternative scientific orientations in the past five decades or so, be this in the field of sociology, psychology, ethnology, the educational sciences or whatever branch of reasoning.

If the political context is left aside quite intentionally, if functions are ascribed to teacher education which it never had and could never fulfill and if methods are applied which which are at best pre-scientific - could we really expect under such circumstances that evaluation, systematic as it might be, is going to provide the kind of critical insights needed in order to understand the specific achievements and failures of teacher education at the end of the 20th century?

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