

EDUCATION AND CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

D. Kostadinovic

Danijela Kostadinovic¹

Abstract: General social demands, tasks and expectations placed upon schools and universities are becoming ever more complex. One of the most current issues in that multitude, placed by the ministers of education of the OECD member countries, refers to the improving quality of learning that can be achieved provided that all students are offered high quality tuition. Bearing in mind numerous differences in education systems in various countries, one particular feature common to all education systems stands out, showing that most countries have developed specialised centres oriented towards teachers' professional development. The quality of teacher education, which relies on the improvement of the selection criteria for teacher education and employment, includes ensuring and improving theoretical and practical preconditions for gaining education, as well as the capacity for its quality transfer to those who it is meant for within the education system

Keywords: education, professional development, education policy, education system harmonisation, continuing professional development.

Introduction:

Modern society is characterised by rapid scientific and technological development. Therefore, the question of teacher education and professional development is a key issue in any country, having in mind that the quality of the teaching staff is one of the main factors influencing the level of students' educational achievement. Regarding the improving quality of teacher education, one must bear in mind that this refers not only to teachers' initial university education but, from the perspective of the continuing education concept, to their professional development, too. The demands placed upon schools and teachers are ever more complex and one of the goals set by the ministers of education of the OECD member countries is the improving quality of

¹ danijela.kostadinovic@uf.bg.ac.rs

learning that can be achieved provided that all students are offered high quality tuition.

Comparative analysis of teacher education systems in various European countries indicates the existence of numerous differences among those systems with very clearly expressed tendency of European countries towards the harmonisation of education systems.

The key issue of all studies dealing with the improvement of teacher education systems is the question of organising initial and professional development which is necessary for teachers to successfully motivate their students for high education achievements. Regarding the organisation and structure of studies, there are certain differences in the level of centralisation-decentralisation of political responsibility. There are also differences at the institutional level, so that teachers in some countries are educated at vocational colleges whereas in most other countries their education is realised at university level. The issue of retaining and developing quality teachers is also one of the most important questions of national education policies and measures by which to do so include ensuring good social and material conditions, creating a stimulating working environment and the possibility of continuing education.

The question of the purpose of research in the area of learning/teaching and teacher education is important in terms of determining a wide range of variables and empirical verifications of their relationship, with the aim to expand our knowledge about the existence of the cause-effect relationships relevant for the processes and outcomes of learning and teaching. Recent studies point to the need of placing teachers in the foreground, and the need for their education in the area of research logic and methods. Within education policies, the key issue lies in the quality of teachers, which relies on the improvement of the selection criteria for teacher education and employment, constant evaluation throughout the teaching career as well as providing resources and support to teachers in order for them to meet high expectations.

What we find particularly important here is high quality and continuing professional development organised by different institutions in different countries. What they all have in common, however, is the existence of specialised centres for professional teacher development, be it faculty sectors or regional professional development centres. A comparative analysis will help notice that professional development in

different countries is organised in different ways. However, most countries provide professional development at both the level of specialised centres and the level of faculties. Similarly, most European countries provide an opportunity for postgraduate specialisation in the education sphere and another programme being currently considered is that of European doctorate in education. Furthermore, there is a noticeable trend of efforts being made to ensure greater interrelatedness of theoretical and practical aspects of education, the aim of which is harmonisation among teacher education systems. This includes mutual cooperation among university institutions, research centres, school administrators and quality assurance agencies.

Teachers in the system of professional development

Continuing education leads teachers to professional development and enables teachers of the modern “society of knowledge” to take upon themselves new roles and responsibilities. Professional teacher development includes raising teachers’ awareness about what they can improve in the education process and how to do so. Teacher roles and needs have changed through history, enriched over time and adapted to the needs of the society. Traditional approaches to teaching can still be found in modern educational practice, so teachers must show greater openness to and readiness for certain changes in their work (supervision, greater involvement of students in work, application of modern technologies, etc.).

Modern communication technologies and rapid development of informatics have generated the need of adjustment to various teacher requirements. The term “learning in different life contexts” indicates three forms of education in the modern society.²:

- *Formal Education* – limited, regular, hierarchically structured, degree/diploma-oriented education in primary and secondary schools or universities;

- *Informal Education* - unplanned, individual, mainly personally initiated education. Gained on the basis of everyday experience through socialising, reading books and literature, communicating with others, watching educational TV programmes;

² Bjekic, D. (1999). Profesionalni razvoj nastavnika. Uzice: Uciteljski fakultet, str. 56.

◦ *Non-formal Education* – organised and planned contents learnt beyond the scope of formal education (seminars, trainings, courses, etc.).

System of professional teacher development

The phases of continuing education and life-long learning lead us towards teacher professionalisation, i.e. towards professional teacher development. Professional teacher development is a long-term process during which learning and practical and research work bring about the improvement of knowledge, skills and capacities. Professional teacher development is defined and based on four components:³

- The first phase starts with compulsory education and a period of apprenticeship and ends with the introduction into the job and obtaining working licence. This is a way to officially verify the teacher's proficiency for individual work. According to the CPD (Continuing Professional Development) Rules, at the end of their apprenticeship, the teacher should know and understand the importance of continuing professional development and the ways of their own professional development, be familiar with and participate in various forms of professional development and continuously follow the development of contemporary professional literature.

- The second phase is the phase of professional development which is conducted in compliance with the Rules of continuous professional development and acquisition of the teacher, pre-school teacher or educator's degree. According to the Rulebook, the teacher, pre-school teacher or educator has the right and duty to pursue their professional development, and the institution has the obligation to ensure the realisation of these rights. Compulsory professional development includes realisation of various forms of institutionalised professional development and attendance of accredited programmes.

- The third phase is a system of monitoring and evaluation. The aim of monitoring is modification, development and improvement of the teaching practice. Therefore, what needs to be evaluated is not only the results themselves, but also the process which generated such results. Evaluation is the essence of intervention or action. The conclusions reached after the evaluation serve as correctors for future work.

³ Bjekic, D. (1999). Profesionalni razvoj nastavnika. Uzice: Učiteljski fakultet, str. 63.

- The fourth phase is marked by further professional development by means of gaining degrees. The aim is to ensure and support individual teacher's professional development, their active participation in the planning process and realisation of educational and pedagogical work, development of professional independence and enhancing the quality of educational and pedagogical system. Obtaining degrees in schools and institutions is only possible by means of professional development and the application of the gained knowledge in practice.

These forms of teacher development contribute to higher quality of work, increased motivation and establishing a system of evaluation and self-evaluation. Professional teacher development is an open, dynamic and continuous process which also includes the transfer of new knowledge from various professional areas of interest and scientific disciplines into the world of practice, as well as monitoring European trends in terms of improving the quality of education. Teacher's education and professional development must be grounded in the national and regional policies and their respective development plans which, on their part, should also include financial support. The objectives and activities to strengthen teachers' professional development are:

- University education of teachers – all teachers must have a university degree, and those who do not ought to be offered a possibility of additional education. This principle requires from the teachers to possess the following:

- knowledge in the subject that they teach,
- general knowledge in pedagogy,
- skills and capacities necessary for the work with students, and
- an understanding of the social and cultural importance of education;

- Occupation set in the context of lifelong learning – through education and continuous professional development, the teacher becomes a reflective practitioner who plans activities to meet the needs of everyday life and who relies on the use of information and communication technologies;

- Mobile occupation – which means opening up education to the outside world and strengthening European cooperation. Teachers who are mobile are recognised both in the country in which they work and in their home state. There is also a possibility of moving towards other professions;

- Occupation based on partnership – which means strengthening cooperation with other schools, universities, training centres and other institutions dealing with education. Teachers need to strengthen the links between work, research and the entire society.

Problems which, for instance, students of the faculties of education in the Republic of Serbia are faced with are lack of practice and developing practical skills. It is clear that education at faculties must be more efficient and contents at different European universities better harmonised. That is the only way for university education to become more successful.

Integration of various requirements for quality higher education has been offered by the Bologna Declaration (adopted in June 1999). The Declaration requires harmonisation of systems, organisation, duration and contents of academic education, i.e. bringing into concordance the conditions for gaining academic degrees and titles. The Bologna Declaration does not envisage the possibility of additional education for the already functional teaching staff without university degrees. However, it stipulates three levels of higher education: undergraduate academic studies (180 to 240 ECTS) and three-year vocational studies as types of studies of the first degree (180 ECTS); graduate Master studies (at least 60 or 120 ECTS), as well as specialised academic-vocational studies (at least 60 ECTS) as the studies of the second degree. Third level courses are doctoral academic studies (at least 180 ECTS).

For the Declaration to be successfully implemented, it is necessary to dispense with the traditional view of the teacher's vocation, according to which the student is supposed to master the content of a certain subject in the first place and then to start applying the acquired knowledge in practice only when they start working.⁴ Important principles which must take an important place through the reform of teacher education are: decision making based on information, achieving consensus, development of professional practice which is based on interrelatedness of all the study areas and which involves students in all kinds of educational and pedagogical activity, professional practice which motivates students towards a self-reflexive, creative and innovative teaching approach.

⁴ Gordon, Tomas: Kako biti uspešan nastavnik, Beograd, Kreativni centar, Grupa Most, 2006, str. 89.

The introduction of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is, among other things, supposed to show the teacher resources literature read as well as seminar papers written. Credits can also be accumulated from extracurricular academic education (permanent education).

Successful realisation of students' education largely depends on the teacher's systematic knowledge, capabilities and skills, i.e. on their professional competences which reflect their capacity for doing the job. Teacher's professional competences or crucial capabilities are divided into three main categories: pedagogical, programme-based and communicative competences.

Teacher's professional competences are defined by the term of standard of the teacher's job, skills and capabilities. Teacher's job standard represents socially expected teacher roles which should provide the basis for facilitating faculties in defining contents of the training necessary for future teachers, and for helping supervisors in their work with apprentices.⁵

Standards can also be helpful to institutions and professional associations engaged in professional development and to teachers in determining their own professional development needs. The aim of professional teacher development is to direct the development of students so as to help them become capable and educated, intellectually independent and socially integrated.

Teachers in the INSET

The system of professional development along with work, the INSET (In-servis Education for Teachers) system of education, is designed as an upgrade of formal education, updating the knowledge acquired during training for the job of teachers, improvement of skills, application of knowledge and practice gained and continuing professional development of teachers. Continuing professional development is included in the INSET. In-service education is a communication system that provides cooperation and contact among teachers and ensures the improvement of skills that will enable them to enhance the quality of work. This definition accentuates the exchange of

⁵ Hebib, Emina: Individualni razvoj nastavnika u školi, *Nastava i vaspitanje* - ISSN 0547-3330 Vol. 56, (2007), str. 176.

experience through learning, practical work and research, which result in complementary knowledge, skills and capabilities.

The most commonly applied methods in various forms of professional development are interactive methods, which enable active participation, teamwork and focus on developing teacher style. They are focused on solving problems through role-playing, simulations and situational approaches. Outcomes of professional teacher development can be seen in increased self-confidence when doing the work. This way, teachers' knowledge, skills and capabilities are complemented and improved, and their need for the exchange of experience is met.

Schools also benefit from professional teacher development. Improved cooperation with students results in their better overall achievement, closer cooperation with the interested parents and colleagues and a higher level of motivation of the teachers who act as course designers and implementers and who do so by applying new methods. All these indicators of change lead to the promotion of the institutions and the results achieved. Professional development of teachers cannot be reduced to occasional seminars and gatherings of colleagues, but represents a long-term and continuous process of learning and applying knowledge⁶. Managing professional development of educators is necessary because the training conducted so far has been done with no systematic monitoring, evaluation or an adequate offer coordinator and primary mediator. As a result, many European countries have established special INSET-oriented institutions. Teachers' awareness of the importance of professional development is becoming increasingly present in their mutual discussions, post-lesson evaluations and in their application of modern teaching methods.

One of the factors of increased presence in informal forms of teacher education is the working license. The important areas of professional development that need to be more prominent include the following:

- practical issues related to problem situations in the class and in the teaching process in general, and improvement of competences connected with specific areas of interest,

⁶ Alibabic, S. (2005). Upravljanje profesionalnim razvojem nastavnika. Beograd: Učiteljski fakultet, str.38.

- improving competences related to specific aspects of children's development (emotional development, disabilities and impairments, motor development etc.),
- improvement of mentor skills, apprentice supervision and preparations for the license exam,
- prevention of violence among students,
- prevention of drug abuse.

Teachers need to be strengthened in the areas of teaching methodologies for certain subjects, the application of new teaching methods and skills and in the ways of monitoring and evaluating student achievements.

A number of teachers are aware that professional development is not just a matter of free choice, but also a professional obligation, as the reform has imposed changes that need to be implemented in work. The only way to achieve this is most likely to be by means of various types of professional development.⁷

Conclusion

With the changes taking place in modern society, new demands are being placed upon education, requiring a wider range of teacher roles and competences. Within the framework of the reform changes in Serbia, initiated in 2001, attempts were made to form a regulatory system that would enable the convergence to contemporary European trends in the area of teacher training and professional development. This area requires immediate action, which will change the situation in schools for the benefit of students.

The teaching process is expected to make of students competent, independent and active people who think, check facts, doubt, seek solutions, ask questions, draw conclusions and use their knowledge effectively. Today's education and its purpose should be a priority of any society. With reference to Serbian education system, some important changes will be achieved through changes in the education of teachers, and some of them will require substantial social intervention in order to ensure promotion of the teaching profession among quality students and to retain the most competent teachers in the profession. The most important changes that should be accelerated are:

⁷ Hebib, Emina: Individualni razvoj nastavnika u školi, *Nastava i vaspitanje*. - ISSN 0547-3330 Vol. 56, (2007), str. 180

- change in the generally low socio-economic status of the teaching profession;
- acknowledgement of teachers as equal partners in educational policy design and their strengthening through education for the role of an autonomous, creative and competent expert;
- wider opportunities for postgraduate specialist and doctoral studies in the teaching profession;
- improvement of continuing professional development by better interrelatedness of professional development and the conditions for professional promotion by harmonising the themes and enriching the contents of professional development and also by stronger engagement and influence of practitioners and professional associations in the design of professional development courses.

Professional teacher development is one of the particularly important factors for the development and efficiency of education itself and education reforms, as stressed in all declarations of international conferences devoted to education. Being successful in any profession under the conditions of major changes, which are typical of our age, is almost impossible without permanent professional development. Given the essence of the teaching profession, teachers should represent the avant-garde in the process of permanent professional development of employees in comparison to other professions.

An effective system of professional teacher development is an imperative requirement in the countries which consider education to lie in the basis of development and progress. The efforts and attempts to have professional teacher development systematically solved have resulted in the establishment of the INSET concept in almost all European countries. In-service teacher education as an informal way of continuing professional development is a broad communication system that provides contact among teachers as well as between teachers and the results of the development.

The seriousness of the problems related to research is also reflected in numerous activities in the field of higher education in the region. Thus, for instance, 11 law faculties in Southeast Europe have formed a kind of consortium to ensure coordination in the context of future EU membership. In cooperation with the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and the Open Regional Fund for legal reform in Southeast Europe, these faculties have tailored the first regional master's program on EU business law. The aim of the joint

program is to "increase the international competitiveness in European higher education, particularly with reference to curriculum design, inter-institutional cooperation and integrated syllabuses at the regional level." In this way, the context of new quality has clearly been given new dimensions and directions, indicating that the future requires vision, mental effort, great concentration and vast knowledge, undeniably making us address the present time with much more efficacy.

In conclusion, we can say that teacher education, just as any other area of education, imposes a need for the improvement of its quality. This refers to both initial education and professional development, and vast majority of the changes should focus on the design of high quality psychological and pedagogical syllabuses. This would largely reduce the stress of students' transition from study to work, and provide the future teachers with opportunities for acquiring skills and competences much needed in their work with students and school in general.

Bibliography:

- Alibabić, Š. (2005): *Upravljanje profesionalnim razvojem nastavnika*. Beograd: Učiteljski fakultet,
- Bjekić, D. (1999): *Profesionalni razvoj nastavnika*. Užice: Učiteljski fakultet,
- Bolonjska deklaracija.
- Gordon, T. (2006): *Kako biti uspešan nastavnik*, Beograd, Kreativni centar, Grupa Most,
- Hebib, E. (2007): *Individualni razvoj nastavnika u školi, Nastava i vaspitanje* - ISSN 0547-3330, VOL 56, str. 174-187.
- Kostadinović, D. (2010): *Theoretical and legal foundations of the school legislation*, Teacher Trainig Faculty, Belgrade.
- OECD (2010): *Education at a Glance*. OECD: Paris