

Teacher Education in the Multicultural Setting of Europe

By Michael van der Dussen

Introduction

The nations of the European Community (EC) raise a perspective on the blending of many different cultures. A new multicultural entity has been created through political decisions. Now, questions as to the role education can play in the development of a new market with a free flow of capital, goods, and people make it necessary to rethink the professional and political responsibility of the education workforce.

The professional responsibility of teachers is under attack each time political decisions ask for new curricula which should prepare for understanding other cultures; it is inevitable to start a discussion on the political role of teachers all over again. Also, the choices of subject matter and instructional methods for the development of a new regional awareness cannot be made without a theory on the nature of knowledge acquisition in relation to a theory on values; it is not clear which

hidden theory on the transmission of “data” policy-makers have in mind. In any case, the new task of the “European” teacher calls for a kind of mental flexibility with respect to several cultures and different education systems.

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Recently ideas have been developed on how to

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help teachers understand their new role. One of the ideas is that a module on internationalization should be included in national teacher training programmes. Training programmes from one of the other countries of the European multicultural setting are also promoted. This paper identifies the background of the policy on education in the EC. The professional and political responsibilities of teachers will be discussed in relation to the problem of knowledge acquisition in a multicultural setting.

Europe 1992: The Policy on Education

The impetus to new education programmes in the EC stems from *Europe 1992* as the target of the twelve cooperating member states. The Internal Market is the option to open borders between member states, which consequently means a kind of separation from non-member states. **The main objective of the internal market is the free flow of capital, goods, and people. The contribution of education is recognized as a prerequisite to this objective.** A document from the Commission of the European Communities (1988) says: "Without investment in the present and future workforce, and their skills, versatility, and entrepreneurial capacity, Europe's capacity to innovate, to compete, to create wealth and prosperity will be impaired. In this sense, education and training lie at the heart of the process of European construction."

Another quotation from the European Commission in Brussels (1988) describes the contribution of education more specifically: "The Community's role here concerns **the improvement of foreign language learning; support and stimulus for Member State measures in preparing young people for their future as European citizens; concern for multicultural education and the elimination of racism and xenophobia; and the continuing intensification of European awareness in the minds of education policymakers and practitioners at all levels.**" (My emphasis)

These quotations may be useful for understanding how specific the objectives of *Europe 1992* are. Although in the EC the meaning of education is expressed in economic terms, the programme for social cohesion in the EC is not unique. Language learning and multicultural education, together with a programme to eliminate racism and xenophobia, are objectives for many more European countries, e.g., Europe as it is represented in the Council of Europe. The Ministers of Education of the Council of Europe also expressed their policy on education.

A wider concept of Europe meaningful for the development of ideas on education in a multicultural setting already existed even before the peaceful revolution in Eastern Europe took place. But the concept of Europe with no clear political and geographical boundaries gives contradictory perspectives when it comes to the design of curricula for cultural cohesion. It may be clear that the process of the construction of *Europe 1992* is conceived as a process in which only

the twelve member states are involved. As an aside, now that the former German Democratic Republic is included in “fortress Europe,” it means that the education objectives formulated by Brussels from now on are also the objectives of this new part of the Federal Republic of Germany.

The Europe of the twelve member states is just “a region.” But the political decisions taken by Brussels have created a new multicultural setting. Region-specific objectives for education have been formulated. In order to understand fully how complicated the situation in the EC actually is, it is important to know that on the one hand the collective education goals for the Community are formulated in general terms while on the other hand education is excluded from the EC Act (with a slight change in the Maastricht decisions) (Maastricht, 1992). For example, on the one hand the principle is defended of a free common market for teachers with different qualities, while on the other hand it is recognized that the quality of all teachers in the EC should be improved. The introduction of “the European Dimension” in education can be seen in light of national or international interests, or both. So, it all depends on the perspective.

The Professional and Political Responsibility of Teachers

It is remarkable that in the political documents which define the new role of the teaching force—the role of teachers as being politically involved in the economic and cultural development of the region is hardly ever mentioned. What is stressed is that teachers obviously are sellers and wanters of goods: knowledge of cultural differences, skills, learning experiences, flexibility, adaptability. But in the official political documents these “goods” are not well defined. That is quite understandable, for they are drawn into the world of products that can be sold and bought. The choices for subject matter and the presentation of this subject matter will always include political decisions in which the values of curriculum designers and teachers are included.

Therefore, the curriculum will always be a kind of political education in the sense that students will learn how values and decisions in different political structures shaped the different cultures. The fundamental questions are: “What core of knowledge, insight, and skills does a pupil need in the developing, pluralistic society of today and tomorrow?” “Which values have a fundamental meaning for the curriculum, *e.g.* considering that history and geography, as part of ‘civic education,’ are dangerous subjects in a pluralistic society?” (van der Dussen & Hooghoff, 1989) This is the world of choices. These choices can be analyzed as the professional and political responsibilities for teachers.

The Professional Responsibility of Teachers

The choice of specific instructional methods to reach the goal of this education for cultural cohesion is closely related to the content and the theory of knowledge

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acquisition behind it. There are no “neutral” instructional methods. In a curriculum aiming for “social awareness” not only the content but also the way of introduction in the classroom is value-laden—think of discussions and the actualization of conflicts. In fact, one of the problems is that awareness of different values may cause cultural fragmentation instead of cohesion. So, there are contradictory perspectives on knowledge acquisition and the role teachers have to play in the cultural cohesion of cooperating nations.

Teachers are the knowledge experts. These experts know that knowledge does not have the quality of a physical commodity. Knowledge originates from another world. It stems from the world of concepts. The word indicates an umbrella category which asks for complex distinctions. The debate as to what in fact should be called knowledge still continues.

Scientific knowledge is generated if words are used to formulate logically coherent and intersubjectively-accepted propositions. This is the cultural knowledge of disciplines, textbooks, and many subjects. This knowledge can be experienced consciously—as epistemic awareness (Klatzky, 1984)—and can be reproduced by learners. It supports the idea that knowledge does exist apart from a person; and knowledge can be objective because in the reproduction of cultural knowledge personally bound cognition does not play a role (van der Dussen, 1990a).

These knowledge domains can be processed into data that can be transferred to all kinds of information networks. Most probably this gave birth to the optimistic idea of knowledge as a commodity that can be bought and sold. Many people inside or outside the world of education can comfortably ascribe to a conscious rule interpreter what happens in learning. They can derive other comfortable explanations from folk psychologies (Churchland & Sejnowski, 1988; Stich, 1983).

But nobody will deny the existence of personal, individual knowledge. Quite often this part of a person’s cognition is also called knowledge. This is confusing because it is different from cultural knowledge. This knowledge “is not publically accessible or completely reliable, and it is completely dependent on ample experience” (Smolensky, 1988). But it is responsible for a huge portion of human behavior. Cognition is a mixture of many cognitive and affective (often unconscious) experiences. It concerns all kinds of facts about nature and social life in general. It provides people with much contextual knowledge and many plans for purposeful actions.

Also from the point of view of teachers as knowledge experts, it is quite clear that the idiosyncratic information processing of each individual learner is quite different from data exchange as it happens in data networks. Personal reconstructions or interpretations of knowledge cannot be avoided because new information will be embedded in idiosyncratically-organized domains of cognition (Salomon, 1990). Values and feelings cannot be suppressed because they are concomitant or even governing phenomena of information processing.

At this point **it remains uncertain what theory of knowledge acquisition is presupposed in the objectives of the EC**. A theory of value-free objective data is included in the objectives. But, especially in social education, there is no value-free “knowledge.” There are value-free data, but without interpretation these are meaningless or irrelevant. In other words, there are no simple programmes to counteract xenophobia and to promote mutual cultural understanding, while at the same time the goal is cohesion.

The conclusion must be that in the EC the professional responsibility of teachers is under attack. Only teachers can judge what is possible or not as a learning process in a specific school subject area. They know how closely possibilities are related to desirabilities. The possible choices should be defined not only on the buyers’ side but also on the producers’ side of the knowledge market.

The Political Responsibility of Teachers

Teachers have to develop a political responsibility when they are asked to play their role in a multicultural setting. They are the negotiators between human resources, in terms of learning capabilities, and the needs formulated by integrating communities. Therefore they have to develop a political awareness on their political role as the executors of programmes for the understanding of different cultures.

One of the characteristics of an Open Europe is the creation of a conglomerate of different cultures which should mutually understand each other. Complicated decision processes can be foreseen in order to sustain the new network society. This implies at least free access to all kinds of information. Only well-informed and motivated people can understand the cultural differences and can take part in decision processes with cross-border implications. It means that they have to know how different social groups form part of society and how these groups are “actors” between others. Only in this way can people help create the new society of tomorrow.

But the very idea of the introduction to information (which is a prerequisite for achieving the goals of mutual understanding) is not politically neutral at all. For some conservatives in England, it means the development of a political awareness which implies the extension of the rights of citizens. The conservatives consider this a threat to the existing social order (Robins, 1989). The conservative view is plainly contradictory to the demands formulated by the protagonists of an Open Europe. It may be clear enough that the introduction to cultural differences will always be a kind of political education in the sense that students will learn how values and decisions in different political structures shaped the different cultures. It may be clear that this is also a discussion on the borderline of political education and political socialisation. But it is impossible to escape from this discussion because it should be determined which values are fundamental in a curriculum that aims for “social awareness” which always turns out to be a kind of political awareness.

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I think no more arguments are needed to defend a political attitude for teachers and teacher educators. When they are asked to design a curriculum for an introduction to cultural differences in order to promote mutual understanding in an Open Europe, the programme will always be a kind of political education in itself. Teachers and teacher educators themselves have to be aware of the fact that their own value-based decisions (in the different educational structures of their own different cultures) are also politically decisive factors in the promotion of mutual understanding in an Open Europe with so many different communities. In my opinion **the curriculum for teacher education should include a programme for the development of political awareness in terms of knowing the field of actors in the politico-educational arena.**

Programmes for the New Multicultural Setting

The introduction of “the European dimension” in schools means that for a number of school subject areas new programmes have to be developed. For example, education in history and geography and civic education need new curricula. The initiatives for these new curricula are taken by national bodies.

An interesting project financed by the European Commission is the LINGUA-programme aims to diminish the language barriers. New programmes for the communicative use of language in the member states have to be developed. Teachers can be trained and re-trained. Exchange programmes, have been made possible both for college students and teachers. Many secondary schools have also exchange programmes for the improvement of the use of foreign languages by their students.

The European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (the ERASMUS programme) provides the money to study a few months in another member state. It can also be used as an exchange programme for cooperation between institutes of higher education in different member states. There are more of these programmes, *e.g.* COMETT—the Community Programme for Education and Training for Technology.

Many more initiatives have been taken; for example, the creation of new Associations of Teachers and Secondary Heads in Europe. In order to promote cooperation, exchange, and mobility of the education workforce, information networks of addresses of European schools and other educational institutes have been developed.

Teacher Education

For *Europe 1992* teachers and teacher educators need a new “mental flexibility” representing a new European awareness. This is necessary to be able to introduce new programmes. Therefore a new dimension in teacher training is needed. It means the internationalization of teacher education. Recently a Dutch

Advisory Committee published a Report on this problem (Deckers *et al*, 1991). The report may play an important role in the future development of teacher training curricula in Europe. A number of recommendations has been made to the Minister of Education.

These recommendations include that teacher education departments should internationalize their curriculum. There should be at least one compulsory module in education in international perspective included in the curriculum, and a number of optional modules with more specific aims offered as a form of specialization. These could be set up by an international network. The teacher education departments should internationalize their research. They should also offer inservice teacher education courses on internationalization. For teacher education these recommendations may be the start of a new orientation to teaching in the multicultural setting of *Europe 1992*.

Not only do teachers have to become more flexible, but they also have to become more mobile (van der Dussen, 1991b). Previously, it was almost impossible to get a job in another member state because of the differences in school systems, the differences in teacher training, and the differences in the certification system for teachers in member states. In 1989, the European Commission issued a Council Directive (89/48/EEC) that from January 1991 on all teaching certificates will be recognized in all member states with only minor exceptions. This gives teachers the right to teach in all the member states ("the free flow of people"). It does not change the diversity and differences of the national teacher training courses but the political decision on the recognition of the certificates in order to promote mobility may influence the different teacher education curricula so that they will converge a bit more in the future.

Never before has so much cultural exchange and rethinking of education programmes at all levels taken place in the EC. Although the impetus to these new activities stems from political and economic decisions, the new situation contributes largely to the mental flexibility of many people working in education. Because the implementation of the new directives cannot be implemented from above, there is a call for creativity in each member state.

The option of the EC to open borders between a number of culturally diverse countries creates a specific multicultural setting. It provides an experiment on a very large scale in understanding other cultures. The future needs of *Europe 1992* are expressed in economic terms from which educational objectives are derived. But when teachers have to be prepared for a new task, it becomes inevitable to discuss also new responsibilities. These professional and political responsibilities of the education workforce concern in a specific way the curriculum for social awareness that should be developed. Different perspectives on knowledge acquisition and values should be taken into account.

No longer can teachers base their work on a relatively stable design of the curriculum giving them some rest to do their job. This idealistic situation of a long

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pax educativa (van der Dussen, 1988f) has gone. The imbalances generated by economic, social, political, and other forces destabilize the educational system almost permanently (Holmes, 1985). Education—teacher education included—has become the disputed territory of conflicting tendencies. It is the territory of the conflict between innovation and tradition, change and stability. But education always wants to make the most of human resources with the intangible capital (Coyne, 1990) of the creativity of a new generation.

The solutions to the new educational demands for *Europe 1992* may be different from experiments in education in a multicultural microcosmos of a town, a province, or a single state somewhere in the world. But in any case it will provide ideas on how to introduce an awareness of living in the multicultural setting of a large region. In my opinion, the experiments in Europe should also be studied carefully in the light of the quest for global education in the multicultural setting of the world as a whole. Important organizations like the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development have already decided to focus on global education (ASCD, 1990). In fact, **the European experiences can be seen as a real try-out for all who have to deal with education in the multicultural setting of the globe.**

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