

Challenges for Teacher Education

Professor Charles Berg
University of Luxembourg

Dear colleagues and friends – I'll skip the introductory joke because I fear that my academic English is not evolved enough to come through with such a typically British practice, for as a student my education did not include academic language development.

My talk is under the angle of European teacher education in our project, so I will step back and try to contextualise our work in that larger framework.

I feel excited about the international co-operation we have experienced in the project and also about the outcome. I will not only praise the project and its achievements, but I cannot refrain from also speaking about doubts. So my talk will not only not follow a rhetoric of marketing, but moreover I will explicitly decline too optimistic expectations. Nevertheless I invite you to a critical consideration of the model presented. Please take it into account by developing national curricula at your own personal practice as teachers and teacher educators.

My presentation is comprised of three parts: Firstly, I set the scene by making a few general remarks on education in the light of Pinocchio's adventures. In a second step, I will point to specific aspects of the project and finally, I will try to explicitly state what are the central challenges for European teacher education.

From Pinocchio to the project

My first part will refer to a chapter of Philippe Meirieu's book *Teaching Scenario for a new Profession*. It is typical for Meirieu as an author to use figures from literature in order to make his theoretical thinking understandable. One of his books is dedicated to Dr Frankenstein. As I thought it somewhat cruel to refer to Mary Shelley's novel, I opted for Pinocchio.

I Avventure di Pinocchio was written by the Italian author Carlo Collodi. Its first half was published between 1881 and 1883 as a serial. Later on it was completed as a book for children. The beginning reads as follows:

Centuries ago, there lived ... 'A king!', my little readers would say immediately. No children, you are mistaken. Once upon a time there was a piece of wood. It was not an expensive piece of wood. Far from it. Just a common block of firewood, one of those thick, solid logs that are put on the fire in the winter to make cold rooms cosy and warm.

'Once upon a time', seems to announce the narrative genre of the fairytale, but then the kind of fictitious dialogue with the reader indicates a change of direction in the course of the narration. The genre conventions are modified, the story is not about a king or a prince, but about an ordinary log of wood.

Consequently, the genre shifts, the story transmogrifies into a reflective parable about the work on others. Applied to our case to the work on the linguistically different. The first analogy consists in how the log enters into the world of those who will work on it. In an open democratic society - even more so under the conditions of traditions of super-diversity Constant has evoked - children come by surprise. Teachers and educators have no influence on their qualities and nature. In the very beginning they even don't know where their students come from.

Antonio, who is called Master Cherry because of his red nose, first finds the log. And he utters the instrumental desire, which is not at all surprising in the case of teachers. They want to make something useful out of the children they find in their class. But students have their lives, they react, they have a voice to do so. The difference between Antonio or Master Cherry, and Geppetto Polendina is very significant. Geppetto is poorer than Antonio, but whereas Antonio is a carpenter, Geppetto is a woodcarver, kind of an artist. Antonio has an instrumental dream, making the leg of a table, Geppetto has a more social dream. Antonio is frightened and he gets rid of the strange log as soon as possible. The choleric Geppetto, not at all inclined to excesses of tantalism on the other hand becomes emotionally involved, he grumbles and cries, but

nevertheless sticks to his work, as a good teacher would do in a difficult situation.

Teaching, and especially failure of teaching, can become a matter of public discourse very easily. The popular opinion does not refrain from blaming teachers exaggeratedly and unfairly. And in the end, teachers also have personal voices, which may be perceived by their students. Teachers and students establish a dyadic relationship, in which both find a voice, which is heard by the other. It is all.

At the end, the marionette becomes a beautiful boy. It is the work of the blue-haired fairy – here the analogy does not work. Fairies don't exist in the world of real education. In the earlier version of the novel without a fairy, poor Pinocchio was hanged as a criminal.

But like the work of a fairy there appears a surprising convergence between narrative fiction, educational theory and educational linguistics. This convergence leads straight into the core, where the challenge will be for European teacher education. On the one hand, we have departure, rupture, failure - Pinocchio's dangerous and twisty way of becoming autonomous. On the other hand the educationalist Philippe Meirieu speaks about making the other emerge in the very act of teaching. Finally, we know nowadays that there are no deficient languages as such. In terms of identity function, a low prestige language such as my mother tongue Lëtzebuergesch weighs as much as Southern British English. East London Cockney may in some contexts be as relevant as Parisian French from the Académie Française, and the argot of the Banlieu can be one of the media by which I live as much as Oxfordese is for others.

What actually happens is that through my biographical trajectory with its specific ruptures and counters, turning points, successes, failures, I develop a self-constructed, multilingual identity. The task of school education will be to provide activities and interactions ensuring that knowledge and school-relevant language skills as elements of common underlying proficiency will be included in the linguistic patchwork my multilingual identity will become.

About the project

We were working on the new-founded project for a period of two years, there were eight nations involved from all over Europe, communication was intensive, face-to-face consortium meetings, national team and teacher education partnership meetings with a total of two hundred people or even more involved, the e-learning platform RIAS, internet sites in different countries, more than a thousand e-mails exchanged in increased intensity of context.

So we managed to gather a unique set of competencies and expertise which constitutes the communicative and cognitive basis for the proposal we start to publicly present today. I'm going to point a few aspects of the project:

Needs analysis: I will not repeat what can be found in the project documents, but I will give my appreciation to show the challenges for teacher education.

The needs analysis indicates a basic challenge for European teacher education systems, consisting of three elements: the first point concerns the demographic of allusions, the second point deals with the scientific of allusion in disciplines like linguistics and educational linguistics, the last point speaks about the inappropriateness of language educational work in today's schools.

They are confronted with a growing linguistic diversity in the European multilingual, multicultural population. After what I like to call the post-Chomskyan revolution, we have had, on the other hand, at our disposal amazing insights provided by linguistics and educational linguistics. But we don't manage to avoid school failures for students of immigrant background. The reason is: schools all over Europe are factually multilingual with a monolingual habitus. They don't use available knowledge on language acquisition and multilingualism, the teachers lack skills and competencies to deal with linguistic diversities.

Main content elements for teacher education: The modified status of language development consists of the fact that language cannot be considered as a subject matter alone, but as a transversal teaching aim in or even beyond the curriculum. Language learning is no longer compartmentalised in English, French, or German. The individual language

repertoire is constituted not through addition but through integration, and the acquisition of underlying competencies. Second language acquisition happens not as segregated foreign language instruction, but in the course of mainstream education: the body of practically relevant knowledge concerning language and language development; that teachers understand language as a socially constituted set of acts of meaning which ground a language-based pedagogy beyond direct language instruction, linked with knowledge acquisition and cognitive growth. Methods of classroom interventions comprise content and language-integrated learning, the basic mechanism consists of a double scaffolding. At one time the scaffolding of knowledge acquisition and a scaffolding of language development. Thus the European core curriculum generally provides innovative criteria for understanding and shaping learning tasks, educational problems and educational situations.

Schools can be a language-development promoting or harming environment, so teachers must be able to link language education and school development in a whole-school language policy.

The European core curriculum is not a curriculum in the sense of stricture. We have never been a mandative body delivering a curriculum through an educational authority. The European core curriculum is more a playful and tentative reflection on possible norms, owing its existence to educational imagination rather than a corpus of prescriptions enforced by power and authority. Neither is the European core curriculum a magic device ready to be employed. We don't pretend to have found 'what works' (as they would say in the US) and we have not invented a tool that brings salvation for everyone. The European core curriculum is more about how teaching work realistically is and could be. It represents an expertise and experience-grounded contribution to a public debate on how new tools can be given to language education as an institutional practice of socialisation. So it again is more an element in a dialogue, an invitation to conversation, than a corpus of laws.

Teachers in all our debates are considered as independent professionals, as reflective practitioners who manage and develop their

knowledge in action. Generally we strongly recognise the autonomy of their personal action and we are aware of their self-constructed dynamic professional identities. Teachers are not puppets on a curricular string – they can transfer elements from the European core curriculum into their personal, everyday classroom practice. Transformations will happen in the gaps, we have not woven a perfect curtain but we look for chinks in order that change will happen.

Moreover, we are well aware of cultural and institutional differences between European countries, indeed work on the project has actually increased this awareness. So an important element of the conversational process we aim at is a translation into a national context. National adaptations will have a threefold function: they are validation of the initial proposal; a contextualisation; and finally it will hopefully generate part of the sustainability of the conversational process we want to initiate.

Finally, we don't understand educational practice as being derived from theoretical assumptions. Educational theory does not consist of technological axioms ensuring success; they are narrative, metaphorical elements which can inspire practitioners in their actions.

Coda: The European core curriculum is less a monolithic design for the future than a modest invitation to play – an invitation to explore possible alternatives and to experiment new contours of language education in curriculum development and everyday practice. It is a conversational proposal for professionals by professionals.

The core challenges for teacher education

I was influenced and inspired by my enthusiastic reading of Tamara Bibby's *Education – An Impossible Profession*. The core challenges for teacher education consist in qualifying teachers to bind learning, growing up and language development; to be aware of the dilemma structure of teaching as a relational practice; to refrain from a terribly aggressive desire to do good, to cure, to rescue, which simultaneously strips the deserving, the ill, the uneducated of their humanity and the professional of the illusion of selfless care (I am quoting Bibby); –and finally to accept 'good-enoughness' also in dealing with diversity and

super-diversity in the sense of Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott.

And of these more general assumptions beyond teaching techniques, the language related aspects of the European core curriculum will make practical sense. Accepting a student's language means accepting his inner life. That is a condition of giving him a subjective access to academic language and to powerful knowledge he will own and by which he will live.

Challenges for higher education institutions

We can take into account the double complexity of teaching practice and of contemporary societies. This consequently has challenges for higher education institutions. This is not an easy game. Academia has a strong reluctance to change, as illustrated in the quotation I borrowed from a colleague, "Universities have at least three essential assets at their disposal. The challenge is if we are able to use them."

Universities can use for instance international exchange and networking. This will provide the relativising factor, making the familiar strange and opening paths towards new possible solutions. The second asset is the dialogue between disciplines, sub-disciplines and professions. In our case I apply linguistic, socio-linguistic, intercultural education and general education. We had in our team both specialists and go-betweens; the challenge for university is to put into context complementary competencies for producing professionally relevant knowledge and skills.

Finally, the challenge for universities is to bridge gaps between practice, research and theory building by promoting both theory-driven and practice-driven research may be that universities have to function as 'multiversities', where practical arts like education are given a fairer chance.

Thank you for your attention. All of us now know that we live in very uncertain times, and they are uncertain in a number of ways. Certainly the professional institutional situation for us is far from clear in terms of what our future might hold as teachers and as researchers and so on. But also

in terms of the kind of issue that we are dealing with, and that is ethnic and linguistic diversity, because we are actually living in a time where almost everything that we held true in the last fifty years or so might not be the case anymore.