Pan-European training and networking for education professionals: the Pestalozzi Programme of the Council of Europe

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Abstract

Over the past decades (since the 80s of the 20th to the first decade of the 21st century) we have witnessed a strong move towards considering education principally as a technical issue, probably also inspired by the technological revolution during these decades. “How to teach?” became more a question of “How to structure the learning process?” than providing an answer to the more fundamental questions like “What shall the society look like for which we are educating?” or “How does effective learning take place?” Efficiency, benchmarks and a close to obsessionial addiction to evaluation have taken up the main space in public debate and in practice.

A change of direction in education is needed. This is not new. Change is the only permanent feature. Many have expressed this wisdom in one or the other way. For example Herakleitos of Ephesus¹ “Everything flows, nothing stands still.” This doesn't imply that any change is desirable. We need to agree on the direction of change and we need to be active, be the actors of the change we would like to see.

So, the first question certainly is the one about direction “Where do we want to go?” The second question will definitely be “How do we best get there?” The Council of Europe proposes a vision of “Sustainable democratic society” based on the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in all the concrete manifestations they may take when applied as underlying guiding values for living together in peace.

The Pestalozzi Programme of the Council of Europe adopts and advocates an approach to teaching and training based first and foremost on the conviction that education must mirror the principles and values of the society we want to live in today and we want our children to live in tomorrow.

The contents of our teaching and the desired learning outcomes must be in line with what we want to achieve. Most people will agree to this. However, this implies that our pedagogy and the methodology must change too.

Key-words

Sustainable, Democracy, Education, Training, Learning, Council of Europe
I. Are we doing the right things? Are we doing them right?

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It is time to look at the underlying philosophy of learning and at the desired effects of education. The Pestalozzi Programme currently bases its work on the following assumptions:

- The principles and values of the Council of Europe, its standards, frameworks and guidelines in education are the basic ingredients of education for sustainable democratic societies.
- Training, in order to be effective, needs to build on trainees’ knowledge and experience. It needs to be interactive, learner-centred, and offer an opportunity to learn by doing and to work collaboratively over time to find fit solutions suitable for different contexts.
The competences education professionals need are varied and need to be acquired in a balanced way. Training has to encompass the development of sensitivity and awareness, of knowledge and understanding, of individual and societal practice.

- The medium is the message. Training needs to be organised and delivered in a way that models its content and the competences we wish to develop.
- Trainees should become multipliers of their acquired expertise. For this to come about effectively, issues relating to the cascading and dissemination processes must be built into the training itself.
- The promotion of intercultural understanding is central to each training activity, whatever its specific topic.
- The training activities help to create networks of education professionals across the continent; these networks need continued support and are maintained and strengthened through virtual platforms.

II. The Pestalozzi Programme of the Council of Europe

1 Background

The Pestalozzi Programme of the Council of Europe builds on a long history of cooperation in the field of teacher education and training within the framework of the organisation. It has evolved from an early teacher training bursary scheme and has been developed to respond to the challenges identified by the Third Summit of Heads of States and Governments in 2005. At this summit leaders called for a concerted effort of the Council of Europe to ensure that its values of respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law are placed at the centre of educational practice in our member states and they emphasised the key role of education professionals in this process. In their plan of action for the coming years they stipulate that “The Council of Europe will enhance all opportunities for the training of educators, in the fields of education for democratic citizenship, human rights, history and intercultural education”.

This Call from the Summit leaders underlines the importance of reaching out to the practitioners in the field of education. The fundamental principles and values of the organisation need to be reflected not only in education policy, but they need to influence the day-to-day practice of education in the classrooms across the continent. Only then can we hope that our European societies will manage to maintain the level of democracy and respect for human rights they have reached and to further develop towards sustainable democratic societies in the face of the challenges of the 21st century.

The Pestalozzi Programme attempts to build and maintain this bridge between policy and practice. It looks at how education policy can best be transposed into the everyday practice of teaching and learning so that the desired change influences the day-to-day experience of all learners. It acknowledges the vital and crucial role of education
professionals in this process of change and builds on the convergence of competences: specialist and subject-specific competences need to be complemented by transversal knowledge, skills and attitudes if we want them to bear their fruit for politically, socially, economically and environmentally sustainable, democratic societies in the Europe of today, and above all, tomorrow.

Through its range of activities, the Pestalozzi Programme seeks to offer a space where education professionals have and take the opportunity to learn together, to elaborate fit answers in the diverse contexts they work in, answers which are based on the fundamental values the Council of Europe was created to uphold.

2 Functioning of the Programme

Every year the programme offers a wide range of pan-European training opportunities for different categories of education professionals such as teacher, teacher trainers, school heads and other actors with an educational role as well as parents as important stakeholders in education. All together about 50 pan-European training events for a total of about 1000 participants from the 50 countries party to the European Cultural Convention and beyond are organised annually. These comprise:

- European Workshops which are hosted and organised in the countries
- European Seminars which are co-organised by the Secretariat and partner institutions (Academy of Bad Wildbad, Baden-Württemberg, Germany; European Wergeland Centre, Oslo, Norway)
- European Modules for trainer training organised by the Secretariat with the support of particular member states
- Targeted cooperation and assistance (such as training courses for teachers in the framework of Joint Programmes with the European Commission).

Education professionals from all over Europe can participate in these events free of charge subject to available places (for details consults the “How to participate” section on www.coe.int/pestalozzi)

Beyond the training activities, the Pestalozzi Programme also provides a platform for the exchange of experience and the collection of practice examples as well as collaborative reflection on practice and the development of workable answers to challenges based on Council of Europe values.

The programme is led and monitored by the Steering Committee for Education and implemented by the Secretariat in cooperation with a network of national contact persons (National Liaison Officers (NLO)) and partner institutions and organisations. It is funded through the ordinary budget of the Council of Europe.
Education and Languages) and through voluntary contribution either in the form of direct financial support or through the hosting of activities.

3 Teaching and learning

The Pestalozzi Programme is a tool of the Council of Europe to make its voice heard in the practice of education through the promotion of its values and standards in the field of education and through the promotion of an appropriate pedagogy.

What is appropriate pedagogy then? This is a long overdue debate in teacher education in Europe. For decades, it almost seemed that people believed more in just providing the right input, the right content and didn’t care which way this content was transmitted, thus neglecting whether real learning did actually follow.

The Council of Europe has adopted the name of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi for its training programme, as the best symbol of its focus on developing learning methodologies which have a lasting effect and which place the individual’s needs at the heart of the learning process. Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi developed a holistic pedagogy focusing on the development of every faculty of the learner: intellectual, affective and manual (“The head, the heart and the hand”).

But the Pestalozzi Programme draws from a wider array of pedagogical thinking in its attempt to identify a pedagogy which models the values the Council of Europe has been created to uphold: a culture of democracy and respect of human rights and the rule of law. Currently a publication is in preparation which shall shed more light on this to initiate this long overdue debate. What is central is the conviction that methodology is not neutral.

The way we train and teach needs to reflect and model the principles we train and teach for. In other words: the medium is (also) the message. Participative, democratic skills and behaviour cannot be taught in the same way mere knowledge can be transmitted. The training approach adopted focuses on collaborative work and knowledge construction, learning by doing and it builds on the potential and expertise of the trainees as much as on the expertise of the trainers. It aims to mobilise the trainees’ knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to further develop them through a collaborative process of challenge, experience and reflection. Such a process needs time. The learning outcome of a training process that covers a certain period of time, with phases of face-to-face meetings and phases of individual work coupled with mentoring and peer support largely exceeds one-off training activities that do not build on organised and structured follow-up.
4 Converging competences

The importance of so-called soft skills has long been underestimated and the challenge presented by their assessment is central to their recognition. Today we start to realise that only through the convergence of competences, specialist and subject-specific competences on the one and transversal, “soft” knowledge, skills and attitudes on the other, will it be possible to reach the nature and level of learning outcomes which are essential to making our societies politically, socially, economically and environmentally sustainable and democratic in the Europe of today, and above all, tomorrow. In this context “Education for all” also takes on a new dimension. It is not any longer enough to offer some education provisions for all citizens. If we want to meet the challenges our global world faces today, the education offered needs to develop the full potential of every citizen in our diverse democracies so that they can contribute with all their experience and expertise to the way forward. This has moved beyond a humanistic wish, it has become a necessity for the survival of our democracies.

5 And what about higher education?

There is a lot which could be said about higher education and the general approach to teaching and learning which is believed in and promoted by Europe’s higher education institutions. Some say it is “a barren field” for pedagogical innovation, others take a less pessimistic stance and point to modes of collaborative research and similar initiatives. This is not the place to go deeper into this debate although it needs to be led too.

We should however ask ourselves whether the experience of participation in pan-European teacher training as it is offered through the Pestalozzi Programme could not become an integral part of every teacher’s professional life be it as part of the initial preparation for the profession or as part of life-long professional development. The structural changes in European Higher Education brought about by the Bologna Process, creating a European Higher Education Area, could be instrumental in changing the place and importance of international exchange and involvement in teacher education. The 3 + 2 formula (BA and MA) applied to pre-service teacher education could offer the opportunity to dedicate part of the MA to involvement and participation in European training activities dedicated to the knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions necessary for sustainable democratic societies in Europe.
III. Social networking for education for sustainable democratic societies

There are hundreds of thousands of education professionals in Europe and many of them share our concerns for a more just and democratic society, a Europe without dividing lines, people living together based on mutual respect. They also share our belief in the important role education has to play in this respect. Teachers are probably the one group of professionals who are in close and intensive contact over a long period of time with ALL citizens of Europe. Their role in forming the knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions cannot be underestimated.

However, the day-to-day struggle in educational institution may also lead to disenchantment, burn-out and loss of motivation. Furthermore there is a constant lack of opportunities to share one’s successes and one’s failures, lack of supportive discussion and exchange, lack of stimulating examples of practice and ideas from colleagues.

Bringing all these education professionals in contact is a challenge which can potentially be mastered with today’s communication and information tools and it is a challenge the Pestalozzi Programme is preparing to take up together with partners.

Illich’s vision of learning webs already pre-empts today’s technological developments which make such learning webs a realistic and feasible option:

The operation of a peer-matching network would be simple. The user would identify himself by name and address and describe the activity for which he sought a peer. A computer would send him back the names and addresses of all those who had inserted the same description. It is amazing that such a simple utility has never been used on a broad scale for publicly valued activity. (Illich, 1971)

Visibility helps to maximise the impact of activities. Comprehensive and updated information attracts a wider audience and potential target group of users. User-friendly documentation of background information and documents as well as of the concrete products for training and teaching allows a wider professional public to benefit from them. Following these considerations, the Pestalozzi Programme has completely remodelled its web pages and continues improving them.

However, this is only a first step towards effective communication and networking.

Two-way communication and communication channels are a key factor when working with networks and individual professionals from about 50 countries on an ongoing basis. For the time being an online platform (social networking platform) was put into place so that the participants in the training activities of the programme can communicate and exchange before, during and after the training activities and document their work online. This does not only provide a convivial space for exchange and communication,
but above all it increases the quality of the work and the exchanges and feedback from the peers and the opportunities for monitoring and follow-up. Currently there are about 500 education professionals participating in this social network which constitutes a living resource and reinforces the identity of the training programme. It also offers the possibility to develop into a real community of practice of education professionals across the continent upholding and disseminating Council of Europe standards and values.

Currently the Pestalozzi Programme is working on a customised social networking platform together with the European Wergeland Centre\(^ {10} \) in Norway which is intended to provide an open networking space for education professionals from all over Europe who share the principles and values of the Council of Europe and our concerns to base the practice of teaching and learning on these values. The platform will offer amongst others information and relevant news, spaces for topical discussions and exchange, online databases for expertise and resources, and spaces for collaborative work on activities and projects.

You are already invited to participate in and contribute to this open, collaborative project as soon as it will be launched in the course of 2011.

**Bibliography**


**Notes**

1 Ηράκλειτος (Herakleitos; Heraclitus) of Ephesus (535 BC - 475 BC)
2 Ηράκλειτος (Herakleitos; Heraclitus) of Ephesus (535 BC - 475 BC)
3 Named after Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), Switzerland
5 In this document, the terms ‘training’, ‘education’, ‘capacity building’ are all used in the meaning of “offering opportunities to learn”.
6 For several years now, the Pestalozzi Programme offers places to participants from countries south of the Mediterranean in parts of its activities in order to increase the opportunities for intercultural dialogue in the field of education.
7 See list of the National Liaison Officers on www.coe.int/pestalozzi.
8 Academy of Bad Wildbad, Baden-Württemberg, Germany; the European Wergeland Centre, Oslo, Norway, the Anna-Lindh Foundation, and others.
9 From the Greek παιδαγωγέω (paidagōgeō); in which παίδ (paíd) means “child” and ἁγω (ágō) means “lead”; so it literally means “to lead the child”.
10 More information on the European Wergeland Centre on www.theewc.org
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