

Chapter 10

Teacher Networking, Professional Development, and Motivation Within EU Platforms and the Erasmus Plus Program: Teacher Networking Dynamics in the Knowledge Society

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ABSTRACT

This chapter deals with the continuous professional development required in the teaching profession with a focus on the European Union, embracing the education sector as a whole socio-anthropological structure with similar needs and expectations. In particular, the topic of professional networking and mobilities, analyzed under the effect of the Erasmus Plus program, emphasizes the need for a new perspective. Social network analysis improves the understanding of particular behavioral patterns promoted by the implementation of European education policies in public education networking. The chapter contributes to policymakers in the field of education and training in the education sector.

INTRODUCTION

The first part of this chapter offers a bird's eye view of the role of social networking in the professional development of teachers and the relevance of this subject within some research approaches. The second part focuses on the EU's strategies and surveys to analyze the top-down policies implemented nationally and locally to foster the exchange of best practices among EU teachers in the digital and networking contexts. Lastly, the third section presents some reflections on research performed by professors and

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scholars affiliated with the MTA-PE Budapest Ranking Research Group and the Hungarian Academy of Science (Gadár et al., 2020). The investigation presents a spacial analysis of an Erasmus mobility network, promoting a line of research that applies Social Network Analysis (SNA) to education networking in the EU, in particular to University students' mobilities. This research perspective is what should be promoted to better understand the behavioral patterns generated by the implementation of the European education policies in public school networking. These self-organizing education networks can reach high levels of complexity and reveal recurrent patterns that may appear from the international and local interactions, thus, disclosing unknown elements that contribute to these systems. Notwithstanding the great peculiarities emerging from the different education grades, this investigation shows the potential of SNA when applied to education networking. Thus, this third section offers the opportunity to reflect on a promising line of investigation with a growing interest due to the cross-disciplinary teams and collaborations that may be formed around this specific research topic.

ABOUT TEACHERS' AWARENESS OF THEIR SOCIAL ROLE IN THE EU

Worldwide, only 26% of teachers in OECD countries and economies that participate in TALIS surveys (OECD, 2020) think their profession is valued by society. Moreover, senior teachers are more likely than their younger colleagues to perceive their profession as undervalued, suggesting a gradual degree of professional disillusionment throughout their careers: "14% of teachers aged 50 years or less express a desire to leave teaching within the next five years, i.e., well before they reach retirement age" (OECD, 2020, p. 13).

Despite the need for improving the awareness of their social role, there are some encouraging signs of a growing attitude toward sharing and mutual collaboration, as the TALIS report declares:

Teachers in OECD countries and economies in TALIS are quite likely to employ basic collaborative practices like discussing the development of specific students with colleagues (61% of teachers on average do this) and, to a lesser extent, exchanging teaching materials with colleagues (47%). However, far fewer teachers engage in the deeper forms of professional collaboration... with only 9% of teachers saying they provide observation-based feedback to colleagues, and 21% engaging in collaborative professional learning at least once a month. (OECD, 2020, p. 14)

Concerning public school policies in the European Union, notwithstanding the common frameworks and strategies aiming to harmonize the socio-economic and educational discrepancies among all member states (Commission of the European Communities, 2000; European Commission 2013; 2020; European Council, 2010, 2017; Redecker & Punie, 2017), the EU national education system is still a mosaic with profound differentiations (European Commission/Eurydice, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). In addition, the European Commission surveys show that the teaching profession is going through a problematic stage since it does not always receive high social recognition in many EU countries, and salaries are not rewarding according to the level of responsibility and work efforts. Thus, "the teaching profession is becoming less attractive as a career choice" (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018a, p. 17). Also, the notorious annual report *Global Teacher Status Index* provides a view showing EU countries not ranking at the top of the list for teachers' recognition and social reputation, and the surveys performed explicitly

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