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Title of the chapter

Teacher Education in North Macedonia: reforms, standardization and creating communities of life-long learners

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North Macedonia has had formal teacher education for seventy years. During that time the model and philosophy of teacher education has changed to reflect the spirit of the times and the needs of the country. This chapter starts by presenting and exploring these historical changes. It then links these forward to the legacy that they have left today. It identifies how teachers in the past were trained to be sources of information but have now become facilitators of the process of creating knowledge and developing skills. We argue that this broader role of the teacher means that there is now a need for more deliberate investment in self-improvement. One way to achieve this is through collaborative groups of teachers who are connected in communities of practice. We link this possibility to the concept of teacher leadership. This model is promising because it promotes teachers' personal agency and the creation of their own vision about classroom practice in order to inform educational reform. We conclude by suggesting that support for teachers that affirms, builds communities and enables autonomy could be the most productive next step for improving teacher quality in North Macedonia.

Introduction

This chapter explores teacher education in North Macedonia and also looks ahead to possible ways in which teacher development could be improved over the next decade. The first sections address and discuss the situation today as regards teacher education and the reasons that this situation has evolved. Firstly a broad overview is presented, after this the specific context and practices of teachers' ongoing development are addressed. In the later sections of this chapter it is proposed that models of practice that could develop teachers in North Macedonia should focus on empowerment, autonomy and the creation of communities that enable extended professionals.

Context of teacher education in North Macedonia

Teacher education in North Macedonia has been affected by the political turmoil that has been typical for most of the countries of the former Yugoslavia and also in different ways for most former communist countries. This turmoil in many ways still prevails today. This is why North Macedonia as with other former Yugoslavian member states, almost 30 years after the break-up of the federation, is still often said to be in a transitional period. This affects education as well. The main characteristics of the education systems in many Western Balkan countries, especially North Macedonia, are an ongoing struggle to consolidate a traditional and outdated education infrastructure with abruptly changing, often populist education policies that are rarely based on empirical evidence.

North Macedonia has had formal teacher education for seventy years. During that time the model and philosophy of teacher education has changed to reflect the spirit of the times and the needs of the country. In the 1940s, one significant change involved how much time in formal education, it was deemed, that future primary school teachers needed to spend. This led to raising the degree level of teacher education. For some time up to the late 1950s, teaching had been considered to be a vocation, a skill-set that could be acquired through a total of two years' study. However as formal education was made available to more people, a perception grew that teaching had to become more

professionalized and therefore required a more rigorous programme. Therefore, 1964 saw the creation of “Pedagogy Academies” (in Skopje, Stip and Bitola).

The reasons for this transformation lay in the need to standardize teacher education to assure the quality of teaching for the, then, eight years of primary education. Furthermore, where secondary teachers were concerned, the aim was to elevate secondary education, and thus teaching, into effective pre-university level education. Later, at the beginning of the 1980s, subject matter studies at the academies for pedagogy were removed from the curricula and transferred to subject faculties, which contributed to raising the level of subject-matter knowledge of teachers from two-years of post-secondary education to a bachelor's degree (Kamberski, 2010). The next section explains in greater detail how lower primary (grades 1-5) teachers and subject teachers (6-8 grade of primary school and secondary education subject teachers) acquire their credentials to teach in primary and secondary education respectively. The section also summarizes the current situation in higher education for teachers, mainly regarding the effects of recent higher education reform and the process of unifying the quality of initial teacher education.

Initial teacher education (ITL)

Since North Macedonia became independent from Yugoslavia in 1990, higher education in general has undergone transformations congruent with the complex social-economic and political circumstances of the country. Teacher education has been no exception. These reform priorities have been marked by qualitative parameters, with the aim of improving educational quality and measuring it against European standards. Two crucial reforms have characterized the changing status and perception of teachers' initial education in North Macedonia. The first was the implementation of the Bologna reforms to higher education, aimed at increasing transparency, quality and international academic mobility (Benelux Bologna Secretariat, 2009). The second reform was the introduction of nine-years of primary education (Miovska-Spaseva et al., 2018). As mentioned before, primary education is free and mandatory for all students aged 6-14 years of age. Part of the reason for introducing the additional year of primary education was to provide equal educational opportunities for all school age children.

The Bologna Declaration was signed in 2003 and different Faculties (departments) started implementation in a matter of two-three years of the signing. The idea behind the Bologna process was to create a singular European standard of higher education through the transference of credits acquired through passed higher education courses (Education Credit Transfer System). In order to acquire a BA a student has to acquire 240 ECTS credits. The Bologna Process and ECTS-standards assure horizontal and vertical student mobility through pledging unity with EU standards regarding difficulty level of subjects within an academic year. However the ECTS is mainly reduced to mechanical conversion of the number of contact hours of subjects rather than an estimation of difficulty level or labour intensity. Many of the challenges in ITE are partly a consequence of the problematic and reductionistic implementation of the Bologna process which has created an uneven basis for comparison of the quality of education provided by different faculties educating teachers.

The implementation of ITE in North Macedonia differs from an institutional, conceptual, organizational and programmatic structure: 1) primary school teachers are educated at Faculties of Pedagogy, but also at faculties which educate students in areas with non-teaching competencies (i.e. Faculties for Mathematics and Science, Physical Education, Fine Arts etc.); 2) subject teachers (in upper primary and secondary education) are educated at the subject faculties that have 'pedagogical additional qualification'. Subject teachers can enter the profession through either direct training to teach (acquiring 240 ECTS credits) or through the pedagogical additional qualification at a faculty that does not specifically train teachers (240 + 30 ECTS credits). The second option means that candidates take a few extra exams (i.e. psychology, pedagogy and teaching methodology) that qualifies them to teach the specific subject on a primary and secondary school level.

The study programmes (at teaching and subject faculties) for ITE in North Macedonia are required by the state to be accredited by the Board of Accreditation and Evaluation of Higher Education in North Macedonia. Each study programme is accredited based on an elaboration of the programme provided by the Faculty. There is a series of laws and rulebooks employed to verify whether a

study programme fulfils the conditions necessary to educate future teachers.¹ These documents encompass all matters related to ITE, from the technical aspects of providing education (space, financing, staffing, structures etc.) to the programmatic aspects (offered subjects, curricula, compliance with national curricula across faculties, research, selection and graduation criteria, general and specific descriptors of programmes, etc.).

There are marked differences on a superficial and structural level between the offered study programmes on all levels: subject or pedagogical faculties, at different pedagogical faculties, even access faculties offering the same disciplines/subjects. For example subjects may have different number of planned contact-hours as well as status (obligatory or elective). Furthermore, subject study programmes are focused on a broad, academic exploration of the content rather than learning the ability to teach the content to students or to implement the knowledge. According to the “Adjustment of the Education Structure in Europe” there are several key issues regarding ITE: 1) there is ambiguity regarding learning outcomes on both modalities of ITE. Therefore it is difficult to formulate teaching competencies that students should acquire as part of their studies; 2) there is an unrealistic number of required competencies depending on the breath of the subject curriculum, contradictory to the standards which suggests six to eight competencies per subject; 3) there is a lack of correlation between the study programme and the evaluation of students’ competencies making it difficult to specify which model of content delivery on a higher education level would generate the best outcomes for students in the area of teaching (delivering knowledge, understanding and skills); 4) grading of students’ outcomes in subject programmes is conducted through tests, essays/seminar papers, presentations, class participation and final exam. However,

¹ Law for Higher Education, *National Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia* no. 35/8, 103/08,26/09, 83/09, 99/09, 115/10, 17/11, 51/11, 15/13;

Decree for norms and standards for establishing higher education activity *National Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, no.103/10; Rulebook for the organization, work, decision-making model, accreditation and evaluation methodology and other issues under the mandated of the Board for Accreditation and Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions, *National Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, no. 151/12;

Rulebook for mandatory components required from study programs from the first, second and third study cycle, *National Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, no. 25/11;

Instructions for criteria and quality assurance method of higher education institutions and academic staff in the Republic of Macedonia, *National Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, no. 67/13.

as this model is based on acquiring points for completion rather than quality there is a lack of nuance of the model into different levels of subject mastery (Miovska-Spaseva et al., 2018).

A crucial issue in ITE is how effective are the offered study programmes in providing candidates with the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities and values to be effective teachers. The Rulebook on the Basic Professional Competencies in Primary and Secondary Schools stipulate professional values, knowledge, understanding and competencies in six areas:

1. Knowledge of the subject matter and the education system;
2. Teaching and learning (planning and preparation; implementation; evaluation; educational differentiation to meet students' needs);
3. Creating a stimulating and safe learning environment;
4. Social and educational inclusion;
5. Communication and cooperation with the family and community;
6. Professional development and cooperation;

The conducted analysis suggests there are marked differences between the competencies in the faculties of pedagogy and subject matter faculties. For example, the majority of the content learned by subject teachers prepares them with the knowledge and skills required by that subject such as terminology, theoretical paradigms, etc but not so much on how to be effective teachers in that specific subject. The aspect of teaching and the educational component is underserved or lacking all together. The second area (teaching and learning) for subject teachers candidates is mostly reduced to learning on how to plan and prepare, resorting to a traditional, not very innovative or scientifically rooted teaching methodology to the extent required by the law. However, evaluating and differentiating the teaching approach to meet students' need is barely addressed mainly through offering electives which broadly target educational psychology concepts and docimology. The situation is slightly better at the pedagogy faculties as all four subareas are addressed, albeit with different quality. Creating a stimulating and safe learning environment is addressed only through two subjects (using ICT in education and Pedagogical Communication) and Social and educational inclusion not reflected in the qualification path of subject teachers. The list goes on for the remaining competencies' areas, marking a clear difference in the methodology, type of training and even philosophy of how lower primary and subject teachers (in primary and secondary schools) are prepared. It is clear that initial teacher education faces many challenges: some are in

the form of residual structures and concepts from the previous system established in socialist times, and some are in the form of the demands of the modern society that changes rapidly and requires flexible and modern study programmes that follow education science and research. The rest is from the existing, robust and inert education system which struggles between the described forces.

The second reform that affected education as well as teacher education was the introduction of preparatory year to the eight-year primary education concept, transforming it into a nine-year primary education system. Pre-primary education is not equally accessible to all children due to lack of infrastructure, opportunities or awareness. Therefore in 2007 the government decided to introduce a mandatory preparation year for all students that have turned six years old by enrolment time (Miovska-Spaseva et al., 2018). This reform added one year to the first cycle of primary education, from first to fifth grade (6-10 years of age) and is conducted by trained lower primary grade teachers, educated in one of the country's four Faculties of Pedagogy (Skopje, Tetovo, Bitola and Shtip). The schools are given the option for subject teachers to teach ICT subjects and English Language, provided they have been educated in the respective faculties and have completed a pedagogical qualification in addition to their studies (Law on Primary Education, 2019).

From a policy perspective, there are several laws that regulate the procedure of acquiring a teaching degree and what that qualifies students to do. These are the Law for Higher Education, Law for Primary Education², Law for Teaching Academy, Law for Higher Education of Educators in Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Schools³ and the Law for Primary and Secondary School Teachers⁴. The Law for Higher Education over-arches all higher education institutions offering

²Law for Primary Education (consolidated text), *National Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia* no. 103/2008, 33/2010, 116/2010, 156/2010, 18/2011, 42/2011, 51/2011, 6/2012, 100/2012, 24/2013, 41/2014, 116/2014, 135/2014, 10/2015, 98/2015, 145/2015, 30/2016, 127/2016 and 67/2017.

³Law for Higher Education for Educators in Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Schools (consolidated text), *National Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia* no. 10/2015, 20/2015, 98/2015, 145/2015, 55/2016 and 127/2016.

⁴ Law for Primary and Secondary School Teachers (consolidated text) *National Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia* no. 10/2015, 145/2015, 30/2016, 127/2016 and 67/2017.

teaching degrees, thus implying unanimity, although this is mostly to do with matters such as structural aspects of the institutions' management, students' quotas and the time frame for applications. However, this law does very little as regards regulating the quality of education that teachers acquire, as this falls in the domain of the autonomy of the higher education institution.

Decentralization in this sense allows teaching institutions to create their own programmes, select staff and award degrees, implicitly thus setting standards for the quality of pre-service training and criteria for the selection of students. However, the practice has shown the opposite: most of the students that enrol in the faculties of pedagogy (education faculties) are required to have an average of a 'C grade' (equivalent to a 3.00 in a 5.00 point system) across all subjects at the conclusion of high school, whereas other studies require at least a B as an average mark. The selection criteria for students applying for a teaching degree, amounts to admitting average and often-below average entrance qualifications. This contrasts strongly with, for example Finland, where less than a quarter of the applicants are admitted to teacher education and to teach anything above pre-school requires at least a masters' degree (Paronen & Lappi, 2018).

The low selection criteria for aspiring teachers and weak curricular programming at education institutions in the country unsurprisingly yields poor education outcomes for students. In 2015, which was the first year in which the country enrolled in the OECD PISA assessment process, students' learning in North Macedonia scored on average 127 points below the OECD average, being surpassed by countries with a similar socio-economic profile such as Serbia and Bulgaria (OECD, 2018). In 2018, when the country enrolled its 15-year-olds for the second time, the results were slightly better with an average of 88 points below the OECD average (Education GPS, 2019; OECD, 2019). These results signify that primary education in the country leaves much to be desired, and much of that is due to the quality of teachers that the system produces.

Faced with this situation, in 2017 the Government attempted to establish greater control over standards of teachers' pre-service education by introducing the Law for a Teacher Academy, which built on the laws previously mentioned. Based on this law, the Government was required to establish a new institution, separate from the teacher education institutions that are responsible for licensing future teachers. The Academy further defines the entrance criteria that students who have

already acquired a degree from the faculties of education need to have in order to be eligible⁵. However, the academic community perceived this act as blatant interference in the autonomy of higher education institutions and an attack on the legitimacy of their teaching programmes. In their view, the creation of a new institution only for the purposes of selecting candidates and of expanding their skills and knowledge of innovative teaching methodologies is impractical. The improvement, in their view, needs to occur within the existing pre-service education institutions for teachers – to do otherwise would be an expensive and unnecessary exercise. Due to these objections the Teacher Academy concept is currently frozen due to the underlying inconsistencies and questions about its meaningfulness in the existing system.

Professional development

The low student outcome, described earlier, implies a gap between teachers' pre-service education and the demands of the modern classroom, education trends and finally, labour market requirements. It has become clear that completing the mandatory four years to acquire a bachelors' degree and the negligible amount of pre-service classroom training for teachers, is not enough to thrive as a teacher in a professional capacity. As in most professions that reflect societal changes, teachers today require much more flexibility and application of transitional skills than 30 years ago. For example, according to U.S. Labor Department statistics in 2018, public educators in the US were leaving their profession at a rate of 83 per 10,000 each month, which is the highest rate since measurement commenced in 2001. There are differences between reported attrition rates globally ranging from 30% - 50% in the first five years (in the US, UK, Norway, Australia and Sweden) although less than 5% in Netherlands and Hong Kong (Carlsson, Lindqvist & Nordänger, 2019). In any case though, these figures suggest that there is low efficiency in retaining teacher education globally. No current data is available for North Macedonia regarding the attrition rate of educators although anecdotal evidence suggests that it is possibly lower than elsewhere. However, this may be due to the relatively stable status of the job of teachers as public servants, and lenient policies regarding working hours. It would be incorrect to assume that this situation can be attributed to general work satisfaction.

⁵ Law for Teachers' Academy, article 41.

The perceptions of teachers, as revealed in a range of reports, about the level of resources, skills and knowledge at their disposal to run a successful classroom, are indicative of at least a moderate level of discontent (Power School, 2019). The Report of the European Commission (2015) specifies the necessity of continuous development for teachers' professionalism. It identified that this should support teachers' learning needs, provide support structures, career paths, competency levels and school learning cultures. The current state of play regarding professional development in North Macedonia is that practising teachers should acquire 60 hours of in-service professional development over three academic years, 40 of which need to be accredited by the Bureau for the Development of Education (BDE) and financed through the budget of the country⁶. The BDE is a government institution under the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) that is in charge of devising national curricula, support for teachers and professional development. However, presently the BDE is very limited in its ability to fulfil this task, due to a lack of political independence and staff to answer the professional needs of teachers. Furthermore, there is a lack of congruence between the priorities for professional development identified by the teachers in their everyday work and BDE's identified areas (OECD, 2019).

The process of decentralization in the country also envisioned a level of independence for schools to identify their own priorities and offer training to their teachers depending on the specific needs of the students in the schools. However, schools have been left with minimal funding for this purpose as most of the funds that are available to them centrally and locally are spent on school maintenance and reconstruction, subsidies for students and salaries for teachers. In fact, the professional development of teachers does not even appear as an expenditure category recognized by the MoES⁷. Therefore the gap between professional needs and pre-service knowledge is mostly addressed via outside support: the civil society sector and international organizations, informal teachers' networks and, although much more seldom, self-financed training.

⁶ http://www.mon.gov.mk/images/documents/zakoni/Zakon_za_nastavnici_vo_osnovni_i_sredni_uchilishta.pdf

⁷ <https://vistinomer.mk/analiza-bu%D1%9Fetski-kolach-2020-godina-detali-po-ko%D1%98-osnov-i-kako-%D1%9Ce-se-troshat-parite/>

In the 1990s and 2000s as the transitional process has unfolded in the education system, organisations focused on projects related to education have usually chosen the topic of their teacher training. This has most often been based on the internal project objectives that have been approved by their funding entity. In that respect, teachers have not had many opportunities to choose topics for which they needed professional development. More recently teacher training has become more teacher-guided, for example by: soliciting teachers' priorities' lists about what kind of skills they need to develop to serve their classrooms best. Furthermore, an increasing number of teachers/practitioners from the country have become trainers as well, adding to the quality of local context and the practicality of the taught skills; as opposed to more theoretical, technical and abstract types of training.

During this time North Macedonia experienced two major societal changes which have impacted on teaching and professional development as well. In 1991 the country became independent from Yugoslavia. In the time that followed, the country's institutions were re-structured and teacher education was changed as discussed previously. In 2001, a conflict between the two majority ethnicities living in North Macedonia, Macedonians and Albanians occurred, revealing an underlying inter-ethnic intolerance and division. The conflict was put to rest with the Ohrid Framework Agreement although the agreement did little to improve inter-ethnic relations and increase integration in the country. Nevertheless, the subsequent reforms in education (especially providing mother-tongue learning for Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Serbian and Bosnian students), revealed a need for more teachers to learn the skills of how to provide positive learning experiences for different students and how to mainstream inter-culturalism, alongside teaching methodologies related to subject matter and/or learning.

External support for professional development of teachers: “Projects”

In 1994 the “Step by Step” Programme started implementation supported by the Open Society Institute from New York and Georgetown University in Washington⁸. The programme subsequently transformed into an association of civil society organizations, aimed at improving early childhood education and development through holistic intervention in pre-school institutions.

⁸ <https://www.stepbystep.org.mk/en/about-us>

This meant that pre-school educators were trained and mentored in new child-centred teaching methodologies and preschool classrooms were equipped and transformed accordingly. The overall programming of the educative processes was revised according to the Step by Step methodology. The pillars of the programme are: interactions; family and community involvement; inclusion, diversity and democratic values; planning and assessment; teaching strategies; learning environment and professional development. It is evident that the period of transition of the country was marked also by the needs to adapt education to the new trends and circumstances in the country. The first had to do with the greater professionalization of the teaching profession (interactions, planning and assessment, teaching strategies, learning environment and professional development) and the second, including students' experiences and diversity in the learning process (family and community involvement and inclusion, diversity and democratic values). Arguably, the holistic design of this programme supported the development of 'extended professionalism' (Hoyle, 2008), as a professional profile, that seeks continuous improvement and a systematic approach to one's own profession.

While this programme approached teacher in-service education in a holistic way, other projects' objectives were to provide more specific training connected to subject matter or desired competencies. For example, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Primary Education Project (PEP) provided training for more than 16 500 teachers and more than 970 school officials in order to improve students' mathematics and science skills. More specifically, the training objectives of this project were to enable teachers to improve students' critical thinking skills, use modern ICT in order to compete in the labour market, stimulate inquiry-based learning and creativity, and improve school-based assessment that supports learning quality⁹.

In the period 2013 – 2018 another important project was implemented across the territory in North Macedonia: the USAID funded Readers are Leaders Project¹⁰. The goal of the project was to improve early grade literacy and numeracy skills as key pre-requisites for future learning. The project included a comprehensive assessment of literacy and numeracy for lower primary school

⁹ <http://www.mcgo.org.mk/completed-projects/primary-education-project-2/>

¹⁰ <https://www.stepbystep.org.mk/en/proekt-ral>

students based on a sample of more than 6000 students in: Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish. The results were relatively low compared to international standards. The other components of the project focused on improving teachers' competencies to teach these skills in the form of training sessions and workshops. However, the project also incorporated school-based professional development opportunities for teachers, which was quite progressive at the time.

A particular field of weakness of teachers' competencies that has been documented in different ways is the way they are assessed as professionals and they conduct assessment on their students. The PISA results themselves indicate an absence of educational standards against which teachers grade their students and provide a realistic picture about students' achievements. However, additionally the results indicate a lack of realistic assessment of teaching quality that aims towards greater educational outcomes of students. Numerous studies have proven the importance of teaching quality for the learning outcomes of students, which is why policy changes need to be steered towards a competency-based merit system of teacher appraisal and providing merit-based incentives for teachers' career development.

In the period 2012 – 2016 USAID supported Teacher Professional and Career Development (TCPD) as implemented by the Macedonian Civic Education Center (MCEC), which had set out to create a system of teachers' professional competencies and teaching standards that would serve as the basis for their career advancement. This system additionally envisioned objective, clear and transparent teacher evaluation focused on professional development and continuous support for teachers¹¹. Among the key findings during the course of this project was that good appraisal systems also incorporate a learning culture through initially selecting teachers that have solid professional capacities to teach, while simultaneously providing incentives for teachers to expand their higher levels of expertise and areas of autonomy through their careers (OECD, 2019).

These projects are merely a selection of the many that have been implemented across schools in North Macedonia; this is by no means an exhaustive list. We have selected these because they fulfil two important criteria: they had a wide scope, including all schools in the country and they relied on cooperation with the education institutions responsible for quality of teaching (Bureau

¹¹ <https://www.mcgo.org.mk/completed-projects/usaiddteacher-professional-and-career-development-project-3/>

for Development of Education – BDE), quality of work of the school (State Education Inspectorate) and assessment (State Examination Centre). What this implies is that part of the projects' objectives was to inform policies and practices through the competent government institutions and bodies; and to devise instruments, standards and criteria that include new provisions derived from a projects' objectives (defining education outcomes/standards, assessment standards, teacher appraisal criteria etc.).

Additionally these projects aimed to build the capacities of the personnel of these institutions in order to take on the professional development component after the projects had ended. Whether this was successful or not is a difficult question to answer. On the one hand, policies and practices pertaining to teachers have deepened and improved, albeit that this is often perceived by teachers as too much regulation and additional administrative work (Joshevska, 2017). On the other hand, the resources and human capital available in these institutions is insufficient to undertake the tasks mentioned. For example, the insufficient number of BDE advisers prevents them from conducting field visits and teachers' supervisions as frequently as required for continuous support. Furthermore, projects have funding for the training they conduct, which is often far more than schools or the government can commit for the professional training of teachers.

Teachers' role, identity and professionalism

The structure of education systems in most developed countries today (and those that aspire to be) pushes teachers to 'teach to the test' or to pass only the information which is necessary for students to perform well on international assessments (Hargreaves, 2000). This situation causes confusion regarding the role of the teacher and a need to balance between the demands of a diverse student body and uniformity of testing, standards and outcomes. The role of the teacher today has changed considerably since the 1960s, becoming less that of a (sole) source of information and more a facilitator of the process of creating knowledge and developing skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, conflict-resolution and employing higher-order thinking skills. Teachers' today face the challenge of incorporating 'non-cognitive' skills (Gabrieli, Ansel & Krachman, 2015) into mainstream education while the constant need to 'show results' is unyielding.

Changes in the role of the teacher, which can also be viewed as a return to the role of the teacher who not only educates, but also promotes students' personal growth beyond that which is entailed in the curriculum, requires a different kind of a professional. This has meant that due to the changing circumstances of education, educators should reflect a sense of flexibility in the skills they have in order to answer to the changing needs of the students and the system. In other words, the requirement revolves around the pursuit for constant improvement and diversification of skills that go beyond pre-service training and beyond compartmentalized trainings in discrete teaching methodologies. We have argued elsewhere about the benefits of promoting Hoyle's (2008) 'extended professionalism' as a favourable profile of a teacher to cope with the dynamics of a modern classroom, the needs of the students and the narrowing areas of autonomy (Joshevska, 2012; 2016; 2017; Underwood & Joshevska, 2019). For the purposes of explanation, Hoyle made a distinction between models of an 'extended' and a 'restrictive' professional. Although he abandoned this later it is still useful for making the argument here.

A restricted professional was construed as a teacher for whom teaching was an intuitive activity, whose perspective was restricted to the classroom, who engaged little with wider professional reading or activities, relied on experience as a guide to success, and greatly valued classroom autonomy. An extended professional was construed as a teacher for whom teaching was a rational activity, who sought to improve practice through reading and through engaging in continuous professional development, who was happily collegial, and who located classroom practice within a larger social framework.

(Hoyle, 2008: 291)

The purpose of the distinction underpins an idea that the favourable teacher profile to answer the realities of schools and education systems is that of an extended professional. In research conducted in 2012, interviewing teachers from North Macedonia and England selected on the basis that they fit the 'extended professional' profile, the teachers provided an insight that is valuable for informing programmes that would encourage the development of this type of identity (Joshevska, 2012). The question of whether the current education system supports or even requires 'extended

professionalism' and whether the opposite, the 'restricted professional', teaching intuitively, is the more achievable goal, remains very relevant. These professionals, which Hoyle describes as restricted are actually still very good teachers, however they function in the sanctity of the classroom and school. The argument for a broader role of the teacher, to augment the profile with a more deliberate investment in self-improvement, which is what professional development and connecting in communities aims to achieve, is that it provides an avenue to re-defining the teaching profession. The way to achieve this is not only with personal professional improvement, but also with collaborative action from a group of teachers who are connected in communities of practice.

Teacher professionalism has been vastly elaborated in literature using various theoretical models and definitions. Before the 1960s in most of the Western world, the typical teacher resembled mostly an intuitive practitioner (Atkinson and Claxton, 2000): isolated in the classroom; passing on knowledge in the form of a lecture, using and having hold of limited resources, and classroom management while student motivation and mastery of the content was seen as something possibly of a secondary order (Hargreaves, 2000).

As argued before, the education paradigm has changed, more student-oriented teaching is expected, which unavoidably expands the role of teachers beyond that of just subject-matter experts. Teachers are expected to use interactive and engaging teaching methods to accommodate the learning needs of different types of students as well as attending to students' social, emotional and moral needs (Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996; Hargreaves, 2000). However, there is a marked contradiction between the need to expand the role supported by research, and government regulatory systems that focus almost exclusively on students' outcomes. This causes an ambiguity regarding the teaching role and professional identity as teachers are expected to juggle all of the demands put on them as well as their own professional goals in the classroom.

The tension between changing education paradigms and increasing demands for the universalization of education outcomes, require a re-definition of teacher quality and teachers' professional identity. We have argued before that there is a marked difference between teaching and teacher quality (Joshevska, 2012). While quality teaching can be described through a comprehensive list of desirable and research-based competencies, such as subject mastery, using

a variety of pedagogical devices and interactive methodologies, teacher quality is a much more abstract concept. It incorporates personal characteristics that go beyond teachable competencies that can be taught in traditional training models.

Professional learning communities

Teachers' professional identities can be strengthened through continuous professional development (CPD). There is a marked positive impact that comes from effective CPD on teachers' competencies. The most effective CPD helps in the improvement of teachers' practice and students' learning, it strengthens teachers' status, career prospects and even salary and it increases the retention of quality staff (e.g., Bolam et al., 2005; OECD, 2005; TALIS, 2009; Opfer and Pedder, 2010; Frost, 2011). The most far reaching CPD models promotes reflection and experimentation as a key for improving practice, emphasises peer support, promotes teacher's judgement about how to address classroom specific needs and the achievement of their personal professional goals, encourages the extension and structuring of professional dialogue for the purpose of sharing knowledge, sustains professional development and enables teachers to implement new knowledge based on teachers' individual starting points (Cordingley et al., 2003, in Frost, 2012).

Effective CPD models, however, have not been implemented equally worldwide. In many countries CPD has been implemented in a fragmented fashion covering discrete areas of expertise. Limitations of this are that it focuses mostly on teachers' individual professional needs rather than directly promoting the co-construction of knowledge and ultimately, school improvement (Frost, 2012). There is also an important need to focus on defining shared values and vision, collective responsibility for learning, reflective professional inquiry and especially collaboration as key to the concept of co-creation of knowledge (Bolam et. al., 2005). Arguably what is needed is an approach that promotes the creation of school-based, collaborative associations of teachers that create tailor-made interventions to address the immediate needs of their schools and to use that as the basis for informing policy, upward (Frost, 2012).

Teacher leadership as the basis of professional learning communities

A suggested alternative to this model is the concept of teacher leadership as a model of school-based continuous professional development (Bangs and Frost, 2011, 2012; Frost, 2010, 2011, 2012). Arguably this model is promising because it promotes teachers' personal agency and the creation of following their own vision about classroom practice in order to inform educational reform (Frost, 2012). This is an essential type of empowerment that the system needs to install in order to nurture the type of teacher professionalism that most resembles extended professional identity (Hoyle, 2008).

During the implementation of the USAID Readers are Leaders project, the established learning communities in over 90 primary schools were run on the basis of the teacher leadership methodology. Teacher leadership recognizes the potential of each teacher be an agent of change in their school, as an expansion of an existing role. In other words, there is no need for a specially created position in the school in order to promote change. Furthermore this model relies on the same pillars that are desirable in order to nurture the 'extended professional profile': reflection; professional enquiry, culture of learning; shared responsibility and personal agency. As part of the project, the teachers were mentored by other, more experienced practitioners who helped them define challenges from their practice and create systematic interventions utilizing the teacher leadership approach and action research methods, an approach that was defined as 'teacher-led development work. Teachers collected evidence and insights of their development projects in development portfolios.

Research that investigated into the perceptions of teachers about the benefits of belonging to a learning community (Joshevska, 2015; 2016) emphasized, above all others, improved cooperation. This broad concept in turn can be broken down into: initiating conversations among teachers about pedagogical practice (64%); an increased sharing of teaching techniques (55%); and an increase in the number of joint projects (43%) (Underwood & Joshevska, 2019). Additionally, teachers spoke positively about the perception of increased empowerment and self-efficacy.

The project allowed us to feel as teachers – leaders, to be able to identify a problem, to research it, to work on it and to think of practical solutions in a certain time. This gave us self-confidence.

A learning community which is based on the principles of teacher leadership, provides a connection between school realities and the knowledge and skills acquired through forms of in-service education for teachers. It provides opportunities to put them to the test and make empirically based judgements about ‘what works’ in *their* classroom and school. Our experiences implementing the TL based professional learning communities and from the study of the teachers’ perceptions, suggest several benefits from this model of professional development.

- **Professional learning communities (PLC) are cost-effective:** teacher leadership is underpinned by the idea that teachers are capable, competent and in a perfect position to lead change as part of their existing role. That means that no additional, possibly expensive, structures need be introduced into schools. Schools would be in charge of innovation and professional development. Thoughtful restructuring of the professional profile and area of control of the teacher, would increase the prospects of sustainability as the restructuring is in an already existing system rather than inventing new positions or structures with (substantial) financial implications.
- **PLCs have generated a large evidence base:** as part of the USAID RAL Project, 90 learning communities were established, with around 1650 members making it one of the most widely piloted models of professional development in the country. Teachers’ development portfolios over just one academic year have generated an enormous evidence base about locally relevant, current pedagogical issues and solutions. If these data are taken into consideration when creating new policies regarding teachers’ professional development this would serve two important principles: evidence-based reform which is highly lacking in North Macedonia and bottom-up informing of education policy. which arguably is the backbone of teacher leadership.
- **PLCs contribute towards increasing schools’ democratic potential:** learning communities largely rely on collaboration and dialogue between practitioners in order to find best possible solutions to classroom related issues. Furthermore, the key characteristic of teacher-led classroom interventions is proof of the creation of a democratic culture in the school. Additionally, using evidence to inform policy creates a forum for wider

participation of teachers in decision-making. Using teachers' experiences and documented data as a basis for informing reforms actually implies improving the school and country's capacity for democratic and participative leadership.

- **Benefits of international networks and co-creation of knowledge:** the interaction between community participation especially in extended communities and the sharing knowledge. This includes a focus on types of knowledge shared and the different value that teachers put upon these. In effective PLCs it is acknowledged that different forms of knowledge are shared. These include knowledge of specific classroom strategies but also knowledge of approaches to lesson design and of underpinning values regarding teaching. Sharing this knowledge in an ongoing discourse creates a community and affirms community members.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter we presented North Macedonia as a country that has undergone over the past three decades a prolonged and disruptive transition. It has engaged with international comparison and has demonstrated incremental improvement in the quality of education. It faces distinct challenges. Some of these are the challenges of building effective education in an unfavourable economy, others are of ensuring quality during a time of change. There are historic pressures shaping the nature of education and equal pressures on teachers to develop and change practice rapidly, all within a context of limited resources. *North Macedonia has also been influenced by global trends. This has included the codification of teaching standards and engaging with international league tables, even though the results of these are not affirming for North Macedonia. It has significantly included involving outside agencies supported by the USA and Europe in the detail of education reform. This has brought significant gains in terms of the professional development but has risked undermining the potential of teachers to effect change locally, although the most effective have affirmed teachers and built communities. Involvement in teacher led development work and in teacher leadership projects has brought a discourse of empowerment into North Macedonia, this empowerment has been reflected in teachers who have embraced the global and local challenge of engaging in the increasingly complex professional role of being a teacher. It has also brought*

a wealth of potential data regarding the effectiveness of teacher led development projects. The solution we propose has grown from our experiences in such projects. It involves giving teachers and schools greater autonomy to define their own needs and engage in developing them. This solution is not entirely new and we have identified already existing projects and approaches that do just this; which by handing agency to teachers they have affirmed and empowered them, and acknowledging the capacity of schools and teachers to lead change.

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