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From face to face to online teacher professional development

Paving the way for new teacher training models?

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The untapped potential of ICT to support innovative teaching and learning practices (collaborative learning, problem-solving, self-assessment, etc.), even in cases of large-scale infrastructure has been demonstrated in many studies since the SITES 2006 international survey. Such evidence can be related to the fact that a sizeable percentage of teachers (25% on average) report a need for "Information and communication technology (ICT) teaching skills", in TALIS (OECD, 2009). A need partly related to the rapid evolution of technology as well as to a training offer often focusing on the operational rather than pedagogical use of ICT. A need that could explain the fact that a large majority of teachers (72% on average) declared having engaged in personal learning about ICT in their spare time, in the *Survey of schools: ICT in education* (European Commission, 2013).

Experimental projects intend to test ways to tap European teacher readiness to use ICT in teaching and learning (they are positive about using technology as shown in the *Survey of schools: ICT in education*, and do use it outside the classroom). Designing and proposing courses bringing together knowledge and experience from expert teachers and teacher trainers is at the core of such experiments. These peer-learning opportunities implement very practical, hands-on approaches, organise the sharing of ideas amongst peers, familiarise teachers with different technologies, which they might otherwise not be able to test elsewhere, and encourage them to rethink their own teaching practices. An example of such a project is provided by European Schoolnet's CPD Lab (Continuous Professional Development Lab) aimed at secondary school teachers and organised in the fully equipped Future Classroom Lab (http://fcl.eun.org) based in Brussels. A few similar labs exist in countries such as Norway, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. In all cases, geographical location and physical capacity nevertheless represent a limit to scaling up such experiences to a large number of teachers.

Updating teacher-training models for the 21st century is a quantitative as well as qualitative challenge. On the one hand, both teacher populations (an ageing profession) and student demography (increasing, also under the pressure of immigration) suggest the need for large-scale teacher training models. On the other hand, the role of the teacher in contemporary education systems requires

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reflective and multi-skilled professionals, able to design efficient and differentiated learning environments offering ubiquitous technology for better learning, with a high capacity for contextual judgment on which to act. Rather than one who has finished learning how to teach, the 21st century professional teacher is becoming one who permanently learns from teaching, within a lifelong and life wide context (Darling-Hammond, 2006). A complete change of paradigm for initial teacher training as well as professional development is probably difficult to achieve through existing teacher education and training models.

Approaches interrogating technology may be helpful for designing new models of teacher professional development. Research has already revealed how online practice teaching videos filmed in real classroom situations efficiently affect on teacher perceptions of self-efficacy (being able to perform in a certain manner to attain certain goals) as an effective way to put innovation into practice (Karsenti & Collin, 2011). The potential of online communities for teachers to collectively and permanently build their know-how, and online repositories and platforms is usually considered high and is supposed to represent relevant vehicles to give access to complementary services and tools. But strong evidence about the effectiveness of such potential is not yet available and rigorous investigations still need to address the conditions for such online communities of practice and platforms to become effective new teacher training models.

A recently implemented pilot project, the European Schoolnet online Academy, is precisely meant to contribute to a better understanding of the conditions for ICT based approaches in teacher training to support the development of such new models. Online participative courses organised around modules of 6 to 8 weeks, based on teaching and learning innovative practices and material developed in European pilot projects and in the Future Classroom Lab mentioned above, are about to be proposed to teaching staff from different education systems. This online Academy will be tested both as an in service training platform as well as a complement to initial teacher education. In the midterm, it will also host national courses in national languages. A rigorous evaluation of the online Academy as a possible contribution to the development of new teacher training models will be fully embedded from the start of the project.

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