



DISCUSSION PAPER

Standards and the Quality of Teachers and Teacher Educators

Discussion paper to clarify ATEE's position in the
standards debate

October 2005

Academic Committee 30th Annual ATEE Conference Amsterdam



Standards debate during the ATEE Conference Amsterdam 2005

Theme of the conference

At its 30th annual conference in Amsterdam, ATEE will spark debate on standards for teachers. Defining the quality of teachers is not only important for teachers, but also for teacher educators and for institutes for teacher education. The theme of the conference will be addressed in keynotes, in paper presentations and in RDC meetings. Conference participants are also invited to engage in an interactive and ongoing debate during the conference.

Aims and intentions of the standards debate

The quality and the education of teachers are important issues in both national and European policies. ATEE aims to improve the quality of Teacher Education in Europe through active dialogue and international exchange of research and practice in pre-service and in-service teacher education.

When developing policies around teacher quality, it is important to incorporate professional and academic perspectives on teacher professionalism and teacher development.

ATEE's involvement in European policies can only be successful when we have clear and consistent views on teacher quality and standards for teachers. During the Amsterdam conference, the development of ATEE's views will be stimulated through a debate. Input for this debate is a discussion paper on quality of teachers, written by the Academic Committee of the conference. If possible, the outcomes of this debate will be used to write a policy statement after the conference.

Input and activities for the debate

Fuel for the debate are the keynotes on Sunday 23 October, the parallel sessions, and the discussion within the RDC's. As input for the debate, the Amsterdam Academic Committee developed this discussion paper, containing statements that focus on the main issues of the quality of teachers and standards for teachers. After the keynotes there will be group discussions revolving around questions that arise from the keynotes, and the statements in the discussion paper. In addition, RDC-chairs are asked to discuss the paper with their RDC-members during the RDC business meetings.

On Monday 24 and Tuesday 25 October all conference participants have the opportunity to reflect on the statements and on the discussion paper by adding their comments to the poster wall in the main hall.

On Monday 24 October the Administrative Council of ATEE would like to welcome you in session 30, a round table discussion where the policy ambitions and strategy of ATEE will be discussed. Questions that will be raised are: How to develop ownership and trust? How to stimulate visibility outside ATEE? How to communicate within ATEE?

On Wednesday 26 October we will summarise the debate and draw conclusions about ATEE's views on standards and qualities of teachers in Europe.

Outcome of the debate

The debate on teacher quality and standards of teachers is a new activity within ATEE that aims to involve ATEE-members in defining the policy position of ATEE. Whether we will be able to draw clear conclusions from the debate and to mould them into a policy statement will depend on the comments made. We therefore invite you to take an active part in this discussion that is so vital for ATEE's position and for Teacher Education in Europe.

Amsterdam, October 2005

Academic Committee 30th Annual ATEE-conference



Standards and the Quality of Teachers and Teacher Educators; Discussion paper for the 30th annual conference of the Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE)

Throughout Europe, there is growing attention for the quality of teachers. The cause of this attention is a strong awareness that education plays an important role in the need for social and economic stability within Europe. The improvement of the quality of teachers will affect the quality of schools and the learning of pupils, and also contribute to the appeal of teaching as a profession. The need to increase the quality of teachers is motivated by the awareness that changes in society lead to new expectations of the role of education which in turn will lead to new demands on teachers and the need to formulate new competences.

The concern about the quality of teachers has led to policies that stimulate further development of the teaching profession. These policies are often focused on the development and definition of indicators that stimulate and support the quality of teachers and teacher education and that can be used to compare teacher quality by means of benchmarking. Many descriptions of competence and standards for teachers are examples of such indicators.

Definition of quality indicators takes place both on a national and on a European level. On a European level, the need of such indicators is expressed (and the first descriptions of indicators are given) in a variety of documents, including the OECD-document *Teachers Matter*¹, the EU documents *Common European Principles for Teachers Competences and Qualifications*² and 'Changes in Teacher and Trainer Competences' and the ENTEP document *The European Teacher*³.

ATEE supports the effort to develop the quality of teachers. As an association for teacher education institutes and individual teacher educators in Europe, teacher quality is the very core and essence of our activities. From recent discussions within ATEE, it has become clear that the national debates on the quality of teachers differ from country to country. In some countries standards (or similar related concepts) are developed and used, while in other countries no formal standards exist. There are strong differences between the European countries with respect to:

- the involvement of teachers and other groups in society that define standards for teachers;
- the way in which the use of standards or other descriptions of teacher quality is restricted to initial teacher education or also relates to the work of teachers in schools;
- the amount of detail or broadness of the descriptions of standards or other quality descriptions;
- the amount of freedom of individual institutions to define standards or to interpret national standards on a local level (guidelines or regulations);
- the attention towards standards for teacher educators.

We believe that teacher educators in European countries and ATEE as an 'umbrella' association for teacher educators have to be involved in the debates about teacher quality, teacher standards and standards for teacher educators.

From our observations we wish to highlight five issues in the debate that should be discussed by teacher educators and ATEE:

1. The need for conceptual clarity;
2. The need to involve different perspectives on teacher quality;

¹ OECD (2005). *Teachers Matter*, Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers. OECD, Paris.

² European Commission (2005). *Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications*. European Commission, 2005. See http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/testingconf_en.html

³ European Network on Teacher Education Policies. See: <http://www.pa-feldkirch.ac.at/entep/>.

3. The need for a balanced view on teacher quality;
4. The need for a consistent use of indicators for teacher quality;
5. The need for quality standards for teacher educators.

1. The need for conceptual clarity

The concepts of 'competence' and 'standard' are complex. In international discussions on standards, the use of the words 'competence' and 'standard' can create confusion, since in each country different words and definitions are used and different emotions are involved. In some countries standards are seen as instruments to safeguard and control quality of teachers and teacher education (which may lead to negative emotions concerning reduction of professional autonomy of teachers and teacher education institutes). In other countries standards are seen as instruments to stimulate professional development of teachers (often associated with positive emotions concerning increasing professional autonomy of teachers). These different interpretations and emotions are seldom addressed in international policy debates and this may result in conceptual confusion. As a result, there is a risk that each individual, each institution and each government can use and interpret descriptions of standards and indicators as it suits their own situation. There is also the danger that only one interpretation becomes dominant without explicit and thorough discussion of the interpretation used.

We believe that international exchange and cooperation will contribute to the quality of education in Europe. Condition for this international exchange and cooperation is the use of a shared frame of reference on concepts for teacher quality.

2. Perspectives on teacher quality

A variety of actors is involved in the debate on quality of teachers: governmental delegates, school leaders, teacher educators and last but not least teachers themselves (and in some countries also parents and pupils). Each of these actors has its specific concerns and uses its own perspective on the quality of the teacher.

The government is concerned with maintaining and safeguarding the quality of education. This concern leads to formal regulations including the explicit definition of standards of teachers.

School leaders are responsible to create a teaching staff that supports and guarantees the quality of the learning process of pupils and students. To support the quality of the teaching staff, an attractive and challenging learning environment must be created. Standards for teachers can be used as instrument within the human resource policy of the school for selection of new staff and for continuing professional development of the teaching staff.

Teacher education institutes need an explicit definition of the quality of teachers for two reasons. They need a frame of reference to be able to supervise students in their development towards competent teachers and to assess the students to guarantee the quality of future teachers.

Teachers at last have the responsibility for their own continuous professional development. Explicit expectations of the quality of teachers can help teachers to monitor and navigate their learning. Formal descriptions of competences and standards can create a shared language and frame of reference for communication between the different actors. Since the aims and motivations of each of the actors differ, the descriptions of competences and standards should be written in such a way, that all these different aims are included. In many cases standards are developed from only one single perspective, e.g. on controlling and safeguarding the quality of teachers, which makes them less suitable as an instrument for teachers to monitor their own learning.

Including all different perspectives in the formulation of standards also implies the active involvement of all actors in the formulation of those standards which will lead to an increased ownership for all actors.

3. Indicators for the quality of teachers

To identify indicators for teacher quality, a variety of resources can and should be used. Teacher quality is an overall concept which does not only depend on knowledge and skills, but also on personal qualities (like respect, care, courage, empathy, etc) and personal values, attitudes, identity, beliefs, etc.

The way in which these characteristics are implicitly or explicitly included in teacher standards reflects the dominant social, cultural, economic and educational views about the quality of teachers.

In many cases teacher standards are dominated by economic arguments and concerns and focus on knowledge and skills. Or they are dominated by educational values about validity of assessment or objective tests (focusing on knowledge and skills).

Teaching, however, is a complex profession and it is impossible to measure the quality of teachers

through standardised tests. Quality aspects like attitudes, values and identity are difficult to define and to 'measure'. But since these characteristics are vital aspects of teaching and teachers, it must be avoided that, due to problems in assessing such personal qualities, a narrow and simplistic perspective of teacher quality becomes dominant.

We strongly support a concept of teaching in which teaching is seen as a profession involving reflective thinking, continuing professional development, autonomy, responsibility, creativity, (action) research and personal judgments. Indicators for the quality of teachers should reflect those values and professional attributes.

Although standards and competences mostly focus on individual quality, the teaching profession is not an isolated profession. Teaching pupils and students is a collective responsibility and each team member contributes to this process with his/her personal quality. The indicators and the use of those indicators should reflect this collaborative perspective in such a way that they give room to flexibility, personal styles and professional profiles. No two teachers are the same and within a team of teachers a variety of profiles and teaching styles is necessary.

This collaborative perspective is not only restricted to the teaching of pupils, but extends to innovation processes in the school. Teaching, school innovation and knowledge development are connected. Therefore teachers also need qualities with respect to innovation and knowledge development.

4. A consistent use of indicators

Identifying quality indicators is just one step to improve the quality of teachers. The second step is the use of quality indicators to support and stimulate professional development of teachers. The way in which the indicators are used should be congruent with the indicators themselves. E.g. if professional growth, trust or responsibility are important values to be developed in pupils, then teachers themselves should be given trust and responsibility and their professional growth should be stimulated. In some countries there seems to be a kind of schizophrenia since the contents of standards seem contradictory to the way teachers are supported.

5. Quality standards for teacher educators

When we expect teacher educators to be role models for (student) teachers, then teacher educators should be explicit about their own professional standards and about the way they use them to develop professionally in a systematic and self regulated way.

However, in most countries, the growing attention for the quality of teachers is not connected with concerns about the quality of teacher educators. Little attention is paid to what teacher educators should know and (are able to) do. Attention for the quality of teacher educators is crucial because improving the quality of teacher educators will not only affect the quality of teacher education and the learning of the student teachers, but will also affect the attractiveness and quality of the teaching profession.

In the process of the development of standards for teacher educators we can see the same conceptual confusion as in the debate about standards for teachers, we see the same variety of actors and the same discussion about the definition and use of quality indicators. So teacher educators can benefit and learn from the discussion about quality for teachers.

We believe that the development and the use of professional standards for teacher educators are important for teacher education. Those standards will differ from the standards for teachers, because teacher educators are explicit role models for teachers and because they have to support adult learning and the development of the professional identity of teachers.

For the Association for Teacher Education in Europe, as a professional community of teacher educators in Europe, not only teacher quality should be one of our core activities, but it is also necessary to focus explicitly on the development of the quality of teacher educators in Europe.

The fact that only a few European countries developed standards for teacher educators is a challenge to start a discussion about quality standards for teacher educators. It makes it possible to identify (the importance of and possibilities for) shared European quality requirements and professional standards for teacher educators and the teacher education profession.

Amsterdam, October 2005
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Summarising statements and questions

1. To empower teachers and teacher educators, ATEE needs to engage in the European debate about the quality of teachers, teacher educators and teacher education
2. To stimulate the quality of teacher educators and to facilitate international exchange in (teacher) education, a common frame of reference for the quality of teachers and teacher education in Europe is needed
3. Teacher standards should be formulated in such a way that they take into account the needs and concerns of different actors:
 - the teacher (and his/her professional development),
 - the school (and its responsibility to create powerful learning environments for both pupils and teachers),
 - teacher education (and its responsibility to educate and assess teachers) and
 - the government (and its responsibility to safeguard the quality of education in society)
4. Standards for teachers should allow for different profiles and teaching styles of teachers
5. Quality descriptions should focus on the quality of teams instead of quality of individual teachers
6. Standards for teachers should be developed by teachers
7. ATEE must take the initiative to develop professional standards for teacher educators in Europe as part of its ambition to stimulate the quality of teacher education in Europe
8. Indicators for the quality of teachers and teacher educators should include more than just lists of knowledge and skills