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Introduction.
Teacher Education in Central and Eastern Europe:
Issues, Policies, Practices

It is my great pleasure to be writing this editorial for the *Eastern European Journal of Transnational Relations* (EEJTR) together with Prof. Davide Parmigiani, President of the Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE) – a network that has been actively involved in research and policy analysis on teacher education in this continent and beyond for many years. The Association has significantly increased its involvement with Central and Eastern European countries over the past few years through various initiatives (e.g., books, conferences, and workshops) in order to facilitate a better understanding of trends, challenges, and future prospects for teacher education in this part of Europe.

There is widespread agreement among researchers that the quality of teacher education is a key factor in improving teaching and learning in schools, student success, and ultimately the transformation of society as a whole (e.g., Desimone, 2009; Ben-Peretz & Flores, 2018). Its role seems to be particularly important for countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) which have experienced profoundly complex political, socio-economic, cultural, and educational transformations over

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the past three decades. A growing body of research, reports, and policy documents indicates that countries in this region have been making considerable efforts to reform their teacher education systems and to implement new strategies and approaches, in line with international trends and the latest EU policy developments (Valeeva & Gafurov, 2017; Chankseliani & Silova, 2018; Gawlicz & Starnawski, 2018). However, even with these efforts, there is still a need to systematically and critically examine policies and practices of teacher education in these countries, in order to ensure that teachers are adequately equipped to support young people in developing the knowledge and competences needed for living in fast-changing democracies and a globalised world.

The collection of papers presented in this issue continues and expands upon discussions which took place during a seminar on ‘Modernisation of Teacher Education in Central and Eastern Europe’ organised by the Association for Teacher Education in Europe and MEP Krystyna Łybacka in the European Parliament (April 2019). This seminar aimed to: (1) analyse and reflect on specific aspects of teacher education in selected CEE countries; (2) discuss emerging broad issues, challenges, and urgent problems in teacher education across the whole region; and (3) explore how to tackle these challenges in new and innovative ways. The seminar brought together a number of researchers, teacher educators, policy makers, university authorities, and NGO representatives from the CEE region and beyond – all of whom unanimously agreed that the future of this region and Europe as a whole will be significantly determined by the quality of teachers’ education and development. After all, it is teachers who have a great (perhaps even the greatest!) influence on the intellectual capacities, the form, and the functioning of our future societies.

This issue of the *Eastern European Journal of Transnational Relations* comes at a point in time when relations between people and nations are being disrupted by many dramatic socio-political processes, for instance: the Covid-19 pandemic, the ongoing migration crisis, as well as a wave of demonstrations against the Belarusian regime following the recent presidential election. All of these influences have and continue to profoundly affect the education sphere, forcing us (as researchers and teacher educators) to revise some core educational concepts. For example, since the pandemic began, school life has been relocated to online spaces, meaning that there is an urgent need to rethink the potential of online teaching and learning, in order to create optimal conditions that remove all barriers to effective and comprehensive online educational experiences. Furthermore, in this difficult time filled with uncertainty, apprehension, and stress, it also would be reasonable to reaffirm humane, universal, and timeless educational values, ideas, and approaches, in which respect, tolerance, trust, and supporting others play a key role. It is therefore very heartening that some of the authors in this issue have also addressed these fundamental topics, providing a whole host of theoretical and practical inspirations.

In an era of international problems in need of international solutions, it is noteworthy that not all of the articles included here refer directly and exclusively to the situation of teacher education in CEE countries. Instead, some of the papers in this issue reach beyond the geographical borders of this region by providing some insights from China, Germany, and England: as such, they touch on fundamental issues in teacher education in the twenty-first century which are relevant no matter where we live. These include, for example, globalisation, internationalisation, and ICT technologies.

This issue begins with an article written by Anna Krajewska (Poland), entitled 'Globalization and Higher Education: the Polish Perspective.' It looks at the relationship between developments across both the Polish higher education sector and contemporary globalisation processes from an economic and socio-cultural perspective. The author pays particular attention to the following aspects of this relationship: the development of the education market and mass education; financing higher education; the quality of teaching in higher education; implementing the Bologna Process, especially in the context of the comparability of qualifications held by graduates from different universities and different countries; and changes in the missions and teaching processes of universities. Although this article refers to Polish higher education in general, it also offers some vital conclusions for teacher education programmes more widely, including preparing future teachers to be researchers, critical thinkers, and innovators.

The second paper is entitled 'Sharing practice in an International Context – a Critique of the Benefits of International Exchanges for Trainee Teachers' and has been written by Emma Whewell, Anna Cox and Kerstin Theinert (UK and Germany). They examine the role of international exchanges in preparing teachers to facilitate diverse classrooms by reporting study findings regarding 41 trainee teachers involved in exchange programmes offered at two institutions: the University of Northampton and the Pedagogical University of Weingarten. The results of their study have revealed that international exchanges are highly beneficial for trainee teachers in terms of both developing skills specific to teaching (in particular language teaching) and increasing awareness of non-teaching specific skills, such as problem solving and intercultural sensitivity. Therefore, naturally, the chapter concludes that a well-planned and strategic programme of events allows trainee teachers to develop soft skills and, in the case of teacher education, teaching- and learning-specific skills that will support them in becoming more adaptable and resourceful teachers.

The third paper, 'Initial Teacher Education in Hungary: Issues, Policies, Practices', written by Magdolna Chrappán, Erika Kopp and Csilla Pesti (Hungary), addresses some substantial changes which have taken place over the past two decades in initial teacher education in their country: the two-cycle, Bologna-type system was introduced in 2006, but a few years later, in 2013, it was restored to the 'undivided' system. In accordance with international trends along with national

processes and developments, these reforms – as highlighted by the authors – have resulted in the appearance of some new elements in teacher education, such as the mentoring system and the use of portfolios, while some other, longer established components (e.g. the pillar of practice schools) have gained even more importance. The authors summarise and reflect on these changes and elements of initial teacher education through a critical lens, focusing on teacher preparation for lower and upper secondary education (ISCED levels 2 and 3), and revealing both the challenges and the progressive elements. The paper ends with a powerful but optimistic call to improve teacher education in Hungary through close co-operation between different stakeholders: university authorities, education policy makers, and teachers themselves.

In a similar vein, the fourth paper, ‘The Project of the Research Master’s Degree Program in the Education Sphere’, written by Alexandre Bermous (Russia), focuses on some successes and challenges in implementing master’s degree programmes in one Russian university. Although these issues are explored in the socio-educational context of Russia in recent decades, the paper offers a very interesting suggestion regarding how to develop and implement master’s programmes effectively that can be applied and used in other countries. This vision depends on the creation of multi-level networks: at the level of individual courses (i.e. a system of digital resources and communications between participants and partners); at the university level (i.e. partnerships between faculties and departments in the process of developing and implementing training programmes); and on a global level (i.e. inviting visiting professors from other countries and pro-actively involving undergraduates in remote communications).

The fifth paper, ‘Measuring Instructor Self-Efficacy when Migrating Face-to-Face Courses Online’ written by Yanyue Yuan and Jace Hargis (China), reports survey-based study findings, with the aim of capturing their immediate and initial perceptions from migrating their teaching online, before identifying potential instructional and support needs. The study reveals that instructors reported initial high confidence levels in migrating their teaching courses and work online. However, they were also aware of the challenges posed by such rapid migration, and their major concerns were around whether or not the technology would work; student engagement; and course redesign. In line with these findings, the authors recommend that universities provide all instructors with professional teaching support and resources to implement online and digital tools in their everyday teaching.

The sixth paper, ‘Parents and Teachers’ Involvement in Designing Educational Programmes within the Albanian Curricula of Pre-University Education; Their Perceptions in this Context’, written by Manjola (Lumani) Zaçellari and Heliona Miço (Albania), focuses on collaboration between children and their parents and teachers in the context of the Albanian education system. It presents a qualitative study aimed at analysing the legislative measures and their implementation regarding

the participation of all three parties in creating educational programmes at a pre-university level – with the goal of greater involvement of each party in school life, as well as the children being able to thrive. From this paper, it is clear that although the participation of children, parents, and teachers in the Albanian education system has changed in recent years, there are many challenges in making this endeavour truly successful. For example, this study found that parents do not feel fully included in school life, or feel appreciated when they try to participate, even though the need for collaboration between family and school is legally enshrined. Despite the law, they neither take part in the approval of the school's curricula nor in the selection of school textbooks. Research has also shown that schools as bureaucratic and conservative institutions need to have clear, written policies in order to reach out to parents and children participating in drafting an education programme. Therefore, the authors suggest that more concentrated efforts are required for changing both the education laws and the mentality of parents and teachers, in order to allow effective collaboration between these essential stakeholders in the education process.

In the seventh paper, 'Openness or Prejudice?: Students' Attitudes to Refugees in Poland', Wioleta Danilewicz (Poland) looks at student teachers' and social workers' attitudes towards refugees in her country. Based upon survey data, the author explores three categories of respondents' attitudes towards refugees in Poland: 'positive', 'ambivalent', and 'negative'. Overall, the findings of this study reveal a very worrying trend – almost half of the participants (46%) demonstrated a negative position on accepting refugees into the country, indicating that they believe refugees possess a threat to both society as a whole and their own personal security. Therefore, this study concludes that teacher preparation and professional development are essential building blocks in developing more positive attitudes not only towards refugees, but also other minority social groups in Poland.

The final paper, 'Differing interpretations of Janusz Korczak's Legacy in Schools that take Inspiration from His Work: a Study in Four Schools in the UK and Canada', written by James Underwood, Quyen Van and Ying Zhao (UK and China), looks into how school leaders from the United Kingdom and Canada perceive the lasting impact of the ethos of the twentieth century Polish-Jewish, humanist educator and doctor: 'There are no children, there are people.' This paper, through in-depth analysis into four case studies of school leaders, found that, in each instance, Korczak's life and work were a great source of professional inspiration and, thus, they perceived him as a role model to both children and teachers. Other aspects of his influence focused on student voice, the breaking down of hierarchy, and the enabling of creativity. From this paper, it is clear that ideas developed by Korczak almost one century ago still serve as an inexhaustible source of inspiration for contemporary practitioners and teacher educators across the world.

Collectively, these papers offer different perspectives and approaches to issues and trends in contemporary teacher education in the CEE region and beyond.

We hope that this diversity of perspectives will help readers of the EEJTR to enjoy these insights, as well as to find some inspiration for their own research and teaching work. We also believe that the papers presented in this issue will encourage new contributors to make future submissions to the EEJTR – continuing our reflections on these (and other) critical issues that are so important for twenty-first century teacher education in CEE countries.

We are terribly sorry to say that during our work on this issue MEP Krystyna Łybacka passed away. Her efforts were very instrumental to the organisation of the ATEE seminar at the European Parliament – her support and enthusiasm were a real asset to us. Krystyna was an extremely distinguished woman, experienced scholar and parliamentarian, an active figure on the Polish political scene, and a fierce advocate for democracy. She was always committed to helping those who needed her most - for her there was no-one unworthy of being treated with a sense of dignity and importance.

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