

Chapter 1

International Teacher Education Network: Innovation, Research, and Good Practices

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents an overview of the design and development of a research project aimed at setting the foundation of an international teacher education network to enhance teacher education from a transversal and interdisciplinary perspective. The network partnership explores the impact of applied educational technology, including digital and transmedia storytelling or augmented reality, to upgrade teacher education. This approach provides tailored training to equip lecturers, teacher trainers, pre- and in-service K-12 teachers, and students with specific competencies, skills, and strategies in instruction and assessment. This training also intends to raise their awareness of educational, social, sustainability, and environmental challenges. Within this framework, educational technology, language, and narrative genres become the articulatory axis of teaching and learning within bilingual and intercultural education contexts. This chapter also serves to define the scope and rationale for the edited volume.

INTRODUCTION

Networking is not a new phenomenon in education since teachers and other education professionals have a long history of collaboration. However, the concept of developing collaborative practices designed to stimulate educational change through formalized networks has only recently become central to policymaking across educational systems (cf. Chapman & Hadfield, 2010). In this sense, networking and collaborative school improvement programs have emerged in diverse cultural and geographical contexts (cf. Harris & Chrispeels, 2006; Hopkins, 2001). McLaughlin et al. (2007), in *Networking Practitioner Research*, provide a critical examination of existing research and thinking, drawing implications for school-based research's active policy and practice. In this sense, the use of technology through virtual

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exchange networks, teleconferencing, and even email supports people locally, regionally, and globally to generate and transfer knowledge faster than has previously been experienced. However, as Sliwka (2003: 63) argued at the beginning of the century, a precise assessment of the impact of innovation networks and their effectiveness in education is still limited by lack of empirical evidence. Despite their rising popularity, the literature concerning their purposes, design, and function remain partial or incomplete (cf. Vander Ark & Dobyms, 2018). Furthermore, their effect on schools, teachers, and students is even less clear. Within this background, this chapter aims to present the design, development, and outcome of a research project leading to an international network on teacher education with a transversal and interdisciplinary philosophy and approach.

More specifically, this chapter reports on the initial stages of this Network and explores the exchange of research, innovation, and good practices regarding teacher education in different countries and contexts (Europe, US, Canada, Australia, and South America). This chapter focuses on advancing transversal and interdisciplinary approaches to upgrade teacher education in terms of competence quality. Among others, these approaches include the use of STEAM-Project based learning, applied technology, and digital storytelling in bilingual education and intercultural contexts (cf. Ramírez-Verdugo, 2013). STEAM stands for science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics. The project's initial research outcome served as the foundation to establish an *International Teacher Education Network* (ITEN). Professional learning communities sharing common goals and interests integrate this *Network* to value and enhance education as a critical factor to prepare better professionals for an ever-changing world. One of the specific research objectives was to design and implement a transversal methodological approach that may facilitate and enrich the interdisciplinary teacher education collaboration to heighten teacher preparation. This educational approach aims to provide teacher educators and students with competencies and experiences to face current and future educational challenges. Within this framework, language, narrative, educational technology, and the interest in sustainability, environmental, and social issues become the articulatory axis of the teaching and learning processes.

BACKGROUND

A network is generally defined as a group of people or institutions with a connection with each other or the same interests to work together as a system (adapted from Cambridge and Collins dictionaries). Educational networking refers to the use of social networks for educational purposes or in educational environments. Mainly, networks help overcome the isolation of teachers, schools, and educators by providing organized, professional exchange, development, and enrichment opportunities. Teachers and schools may perceive networks as support structures for strategic development (cf. Otcu-Grillman & Miller, this volume). They fulfill different purposes, such as sharing and disseminating innovative and good practices, the professional development of teachers and principals, and organizational advancement through critical feedback. In this sense, Hopkins (2003:154) suggests the following definition:

Networks are purposeful social entities characterized by a commitment to quality, rigor, and a focus on outcomes. Networks are also an effective means of supporting innovation in times of change. In education, networks promote the dissemination of good practice, enhance teachers' professional development, support capacity building in schools, mediate between centralized and decentralized structures, and assist in restructuring and re-culturing educational organizations and systems.

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