

Preface

For teacher training universities, as for all university institutions, the internationalization of higher education is an issue of great strategic importance. It covers a wide variety of aspects, including in particular student and staff mobility, cooperation in research and knowledge transfer, virtual mobility, and collaborative online learning. Promoting the adaptability of individuals, organizations, and curricula in diverse and changing conditions of human activity represents a major challenge for these institutions, now more than ever. It takes on a particular character, however, in the case of university institutions providing professional training. At first sight, the need to promote increased student mobility may seem less important for individuals who are training to practice a professional activity, such as teaching, in a pre-determined environment. In other words, the adaptation required for this defined context might suggest that the adaptability pursued by internationalization takes on secondary importance. This is not the case, however, since adaptation and adaptability are not opposing characteristics: quite the contrary, in fact, for experience shows that the ability to understand how a system works, in order to fit into it, largely rests on meeting and being confronted by other systems.

Nevertheless, the internationalization of professional teacher training poses a particular challenge due to the central place accorded within the curriculum to external practical placements. Although it is relatively easy to facilitate exchanges between university faculties due to their comparative equivalence, it becomes much trickier when other institutions outside the world of higher education are also involved. European research and education programs, primarily the ERASMUS+ program, provide a form of exchange that is only marginally relevant to teacher training universities. Imagination and the creation of new exchange methods are therefore required. Under the initiative of Jean-Luc Gilles, the University of Teacher Education of State of Vaud (HEP Vaud) has

contributed to such efforts since 2011, with its implementation of the PEERS (*Projet d'Étudiants et d'Enseignants-chercheurs en Réseaux Sociaux* or Student and Teacher-Researchers Social Networks Project) program, to which this book is dedicated.

PEERS projects have several interesting characteristics that contribute to their relevance and effectiveness in the context of teacher training programs. Firstly, the length of engagement required from the participants. Each project is designed to take place over the course of a whole academic year, which requires considerable commitment from those involved, but also permits a division of labor that is compatible with the other demands of the curriculum. Secondly, the small size of the project teams, which favors collaborative learning in an environment conducive to personal engagement and accountability. Thirdly, each project is linked to an innovative research approach, led by a teacher-researcher who is directly involved, which requires students to be analytical, critical, and reflect upon their own journey. Considered as a whole, these features demonstrate the profoundly experiential nature of the PEERS approach, which makes it a prominent choice in the real-life student curriculum.

The integration of PEERS into a perspective of research and innovation presents other advantages for HEP Vaud, contributing to its institutional development. The direct participation of students in research activities involves methodological objectives that are key to their training, such as critical thinking and the process of objectivation. Building external links and implementing interinstitutional collaborations contributes to the visibility of HEP Vaud in the eyes of its foreign partners, in communication, and in knowledge transfer, and enables participants to encounter a large variety of economic, social, and cultural contexts. Finally, the use of social networking during the project introduces participants to the focused use of information and communication technologies in a context linked to their training and with the goal of facilitating collaborative working.

It remains only for me to note that the PEERS program constitutes, for HEP Vaud, an approach of potential benefit for the whole research community, including teacher-researchers and students. This form of

mobility is in itself a subject of interest and research, and is helping the HEP Vaud to contribute toward provision, creation, and invention in the context of what a recent European Parliament report defines as an “*open dialogue about rationales, benefits, means, opportunities, and obstacles in this ongoing process of change*” (European Parliament, 2015, p. 31).

Such is the subject of the present book, and I would like to congratulate and thank all its contributors. I sincerely hope that their work will receive the attention that it deserves.

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