TSTT 2023 International Conference
Rethinking How We Train

Teachers of Tomorrow

15–17 September 2023

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Charles University

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ISBN 978-80-7603-482-2

TSTT 2023

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Special thanks to the Turkish Embassy in Prague,
Dr. Egemen Bağış,
Banu Malaman,
Ahmet Çelik,
Miriam Vicianova
for their support.

TSTT 2023: International Conference Rethinking How We Train Teachers of Tomorrow

Teacher training programs worldwide face long-standing challenges, including the theory-practice gap and the integration of digital technologies and innovative approaches. This conference provided a platform to address these challenges and explore effective approaches for bridging the theory-practice gap in teacher education.

Key themes discussed included digital literacy, gamification in teaching, inclusive education with technology, and innovative pedagogical approaches for second language teaching. Additionally, sessions focused on assessment and evaluation strategies enhanced by digital technologies and technology-enhanced Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

The conference fostered meaningful collaboration among educators from diverse backgrounds, providing networking opportunities to scholars worldwide and facilitating insightful discussions to shape the future of teacher training for teachers of tomorrow. We invite you to explore the conference book of abstracts for more insights.

Foreword

Kenan Dikilitas

The interface between theory and practice in teacher education has often been a topic of debate in the field, mainly because research conducted with, on, and for teachers has been informed by theories and aims to inform teachers. However, while this is the ultimate aim, there is still a need for facilitating that connection more explicitly. Whose responsibility is that? Teachers', teacher educators', or researchers'? My answer is multifaceted and is based on a continuing collaboration among all.

First of all, teachers need to engage in and with research by reading, using, and conducting research to access recent research-driven knowledge generated across the field. In theory, this is often found in teacher education strategies in many European countries, while in practice, there is still a lack of a culture of research-rich classrooms and course designs that prioritize research as content, practice, process, and product. Teachers need mentoring on how to approach research as learning materials. Since empirical and conceptual research they can read includes theory, they should be familiar with the common theoretical perspectives in their field, as this is systematically integrated into their course content. Such activities require them to assume diverse roles as they learn to become teachers. For example, they could be positioned as researchers of their practicum or as learners and active contributors to the research conducted by their educators. In such research, they can be active participants and engage in the research process as collaborators. These dual positions can prepare them to learn to conduct research and perceive their identity as researchers as well. However, in many research practices, they are seen as sources of information or data where they are exploited for their views, judgments, beliefs, and practices. This hardly supports their development of a researcher identity; moreover, they might find this off-putting since the influence of such research participation may discourage them from becoming researchers. It is therefore important that teachers are given opportunities to find meaningful knowledge throughout their participation in research in multiple roles such as researchers, co-researchers, co-inquirers, co-designers, reflective learners, reflective writers, inquirers, critical thinkers, critical friends, problem solvers, and research collaborators (See Jensen & Dikilitas, 2023).

Similarly, teacher educators need to develop their courses or curriculum around diverse research orientations and make their teaching research-based. According to Jenkins and Healey (2005), such a curriculum needs to prioritize inquiry-based activities over the mere acquisition of content, integrate research practices as learning activities, connect teacher-student roles, and facilitate two-way interactions between research and teaching. To achieve this purpose, Healey et al. (2014) suggest four orientations which teacher educators should consider. First, they could adopt a research-led approach where they develop course content led by the current and ongoing research in their discipline. Second, they could

adopt a research-oriented approach to develop students' knowledge and ability to learn and apply appropriate research methods. In these orientations, students learn and develop their research skills and enhance their understanding of relevant research. Third, they can organize their course design towards research-tutored orientations where students are engaged in research discussions. For example, such courses might initiate critical discussion of relevant research in a series of seminar-based sessions. Finally, they might adopt a research-based orientation for facilitating the process of students performing research and inquiry. For example, they engage students in conducting research and becoming producers of practical knowledge, not just consumers of it. The systematic integration of these research orientations in the learning process and in the curriculum could lead to greater learning outcomes and greater potential for teachers to assume roles such as researchers, inquirers, and research collaborators.

Researchers conducting research into teacher education and subject-specific disciplines could also undertake the responsibility to make their research outputs accessible to teachers. This might include providing practical implications of their findings which teachers can understand and use. They can create summaries where they discuss their findings in simple terms and involve teachers in these discussions. Many teachers do not read research since academic research is often difficult to understand due to commonly used academic jargon and conceptually sophisticated terminology. Therefore, there is still a need for simplifying research outputs into reader-friendly formats and making them openly accessible to teachers.

To bridge the divide between theory and practice, teachers, teacher educators, and researchers need to build channels through which they can communicate their needs, intentions, and expectations. Research activities serve as catalysts for mediating that interface and could contribute to the understanding of theoretical perspectives created by academic research. Teachers and teacher educators as practitioners need to closely collaborate with researchers, and vice versa. Such cooperation might make research more meaningful and purposeful, directly contributing to the practices performed in educational contexts.Teachers and teacher educators need to be recognized as key stakeholders in research activities, where their voices and choices are listened to and embedded in research designs and outputs more inclusively.

This conference has marked a milestone in the Czech Republic, where teachers, teacher educators, and researchers gather not only to discuss potential ways of bridging the theory-practice connections but also to explore possibilities for further collaboration. Such events in public spaces, where researchers are encouraged to meet teachers and teacher educators, need to be organized systematically to offer opportunities for practitioners to raise their voices. Such conferences will then become a venue for challenging the gap between researchers and practitioners, who are the key actors in bridging the divide between theory and practice. We can only address the theory-practice gap by bringing people together, rather than conducting research without involving the voices of practitioners and accommodating their pedagogical needs.

It is my hope that teachers are invited to take part in such conferences and are given space to share their pedagogical challenges and discuss them with researchers who publish research about their practical world.

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Promoting Inclusive Education through the lens of UDL. A Teacher Professional Development Action-Research

Maria Moscato, Francesca Pedone
University of Palermo

The theoretical framework of the research moves within a perspective of inclusive education as a transformative know-how oriented to the enhancement of diversity as an intrinsic quality of every educational context. Schools are called to assume universality and flexibility as goals and values since the design steps, to ensure everyone has equal access to the learning process (Booth & Aiscow, 2014; Florian & Beaton, 2018). In this sense, diverse studies highlight the framework of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (CAST, 2018) can support the implementation of curricula able to facilitate everyone's academic success while promoting equity and active participation for all. The UDL framework emphasizes the importance of building expert learners in any context; pupils who are: confident to translate new information into meaningful and useful knowledge; strategic and goal-oriented; determined, motivated, able to withstand effort and regulate emotional reactions (Mayer, Rose, Gordon, 2014). This means fostering the development of learner agency, as pupils are active protagonists of the entire learning process as they are involved in the choices regarding what to learn, why to learn it, and how to share what they have learned (Manyukhina & Wyse).

Given this, teaching quality is identified both by the scientific literature and by European policies as a strategic lever for every educational improvement, highlighting the need to rethink the pre- service and in-service teachers' training to promote – in addition to disciplinary, methodological, organizational, and social skills - the development of professional habitus based on recursive reflexivity, self-assessment, research, and agentic skills (Pedone, 2021).

The researchers have identified the Teacher Professional Development Action-Research as a suitable methodological framework. It is a specific declination of the Action-research paradigm (Nigris, Cardarello, Losito, Vannini, 2020) as a combination of research and in-service teacher training, aiming to investigate in the school context with teachers to promote professional development, and transformative changes in actors' habits and contexts, putting at the heart of the method the social identity of learning processes (Asquini, 2018). The research began in the academic year 2022-2023 and involves 21 voluntary teachers at a lower secondary school, their school principal, and 3 researchers. From the theoretical analysis and the research group dialectics, four research questions emerged: on the one hand, we wondered if the implementation of UDL can improve the inclusive teaching approach as well as have a significant impact on the pupils' learner agency; on the other hand, we asked if the involvement in the Teacher Professional Development Action-Research can change teachers' perception of their professional agency and if the professional development of agentic skills can improve the impact on inclusive practices at school. It consists

of five steps: 1) Group setup and research objectives definition; 2) Training and co-design of lessons and research tools; 3) Class implementation; 4) Evaluation, self-assessment, and results sharing; 5) Impact assessment.

To investigate different aspects of the phenomena, the research design is based on a mixed methods approach with the collection, analysis, and interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data (Trinchero & Robasto, 2019). Scientific literature highlights that giving voice to the real school protagonists allows the development of an open environment, aimed at leveraging intrinsic motivation and thus promoting the development of agentic skills (Aquario et al., 2017; OBrien, 2016). Thus, to focus on the specificity of the context and participants' needs, teachers were previously asked to state the frequency with which they adopt a set of teaching behaviors that meet the UDL guidelines (27 items, Section 1), and what they think are the potential school barriers to the implementation of the framework (10 items, Section 2), using a quantitative survey, built from existing tools (Alsalem, 2018; CAST, 2018). Within the limits of a self-report tool, the outcomes show that the involved teachers implicitly tend to adhere to UDL principles. That suggests they may be open to the reception and adoption of the framework, as they also didn't highlight contextual barriers to the framework implementation.

In light of the above, we expect that the end of the Teacher Professional Development Action- Research will lead teachers to increase the adoption of inclusive practices focused on the UDL framework as well as a sensible change about their agentic skills, with a positive impact on pupils' learner agency.

Keywords: Inclusive Education – Participatory Research – Teacher professional development – UDL

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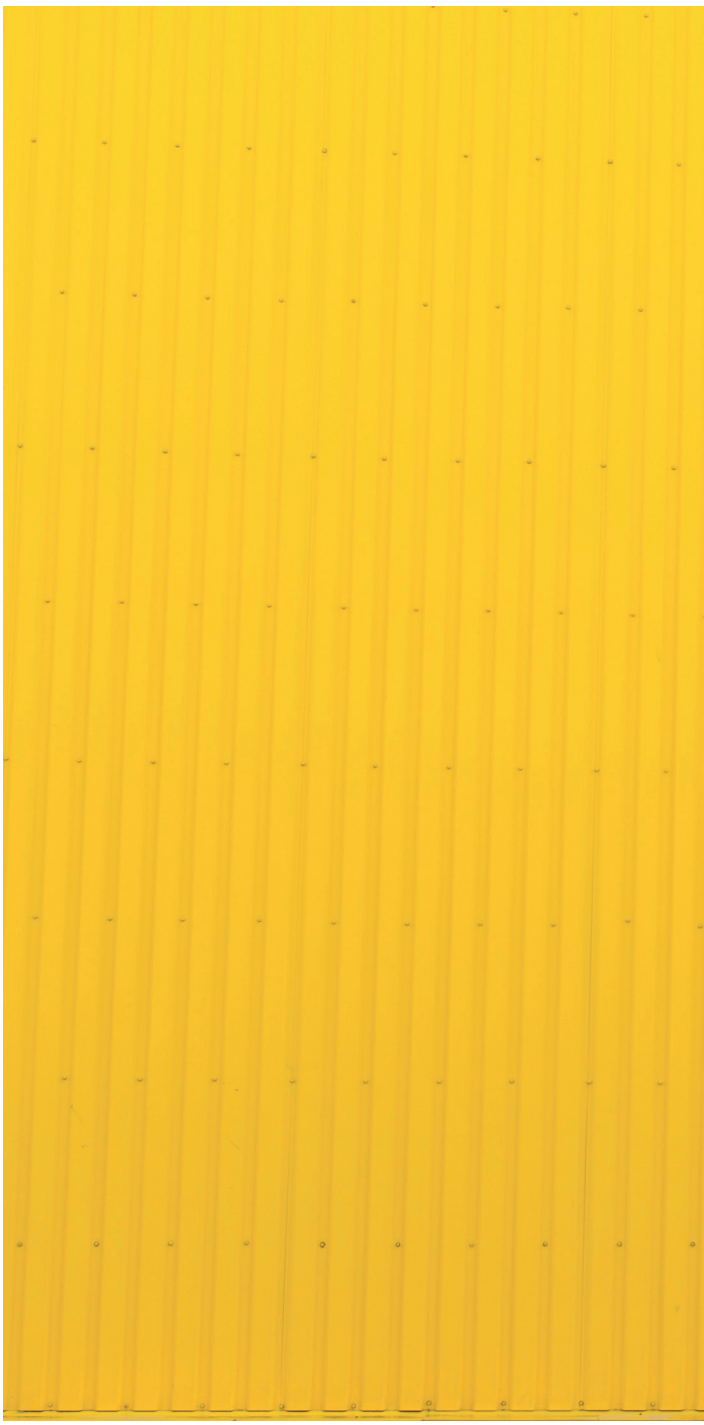

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