

In the last decade, an increasing number of information providers have made their products available online. These providers include the Eurydice network, the main source of information on education systems and policies in Europe. The network uses its central website and a number of national websites to make its publications and databases available to all those interested. Each of these websites contains information in several European languages.

Online texts can be accessed in a fraction of the time needed to consult printed material and without help from an information resource specialist. This new-found freedom has placed the onus of retrieval on information seekers who have increasingly resorted to full-text searches using natural language. For a time, this led information providers to question the continued usefulness of thesauri for searching networked environments. However, these initial doubts have been dispelled as the drawbacks and limits of full-text searches in a content-rich environment have become increasingly apparent. The value of thesauri for resource description and research has been reasserted, with the proviso that they should meet the minimum requirements of good field-specific coverage, regular updating and an efficient user interface.

These considerations recently prompted the European Commission to ask Eurydice to compile a new multilingual thesaurus, the so-called *Thesaurus for Education Systems in Europe* (TESE). Although to some extent borrowing from its predecessor, the *European Education Thesaurus* (EET) this new publication has been specifically designed to index information on education systems and policies in a European context. The transnational character of Eurydice research activity pointed to the need for a thesaurus that not only takes account of common aspects of the education systems covered but also of their distinctive features. Eurydice publications are produced in several European languages all spoken by different visitors to its websites. Only a multilingual thesaurus enables users to search in their preferred language and to retrieve original texts, as well as their translations.

The intra-network cooperation required to compile this thesaurus relied on a semi-centralised structure, with the Eurydice European Unit (EEU) responsible for the development of all conceptual, terminological and organisational aspects. The EEU proposed the descriptors, non-descriptors and scope notes for the English language version and established the corresponding thesaural relationships. A TESE Management Group of representatives from selected Eurydice National Units acted as the final arbiter in all intellectual and editorial matters. A Group for Linguistic Equivalents, consisting of one language specialist for each of the TESE languages, was given the responsibility of finding the most suitable language equivalents plus the necessary non-descriptors in each.

During initial preparation of TESE, the Eurydice network and in particular the EEU received very helpful support from an external expert, Marisa Trigari, to whom we are indebted for her contribution to the design and development of TESE.

This first edition of TESE is the outcome of two years of intensive work within the Eurydice network, involving cooperation with our partners, Cedefop and European Schoolnet. The resultant collaboration with over 30 experts in education, thesaurus development, knowledge management, languages, information and computer science, and terminology has resulted in a publication that promises to become a valuable source of reference when indexing texts on educational policies and systems. The multilingual nature of TESE, along with its numerous scope notes and definitions, extend its potential usefulness to many other areas beyond the field of information retrieval, such as translation and work on terminology.

Patricia Wastiau-Schlüter
Head of the Eurydice European Unit
June 2006