

Reflections on the TEPE conference 2017¹ and on professor Brian Hudson's keynote: Overcoming Fragmentation in Teacher Education Policy and Practice

Limerick, 29 May 2017

I have been invited by Teresa and Joanna to give some reflections on Brian's keynote and on the conference as a whole.

First I would like to compliment Brian on his keynote, giving an excellent overview of the role of TE communities in the European policy debate on TE and a sharp analysis of the context in which TE has to play its role.

I will try to give some critical remarks and hopefully food for thought.

Yesterday I was at the parallel session with Elizabeth Mathews' paper on deaf people accessing teacher education in Ireland. And I would like to build on that, by addressing blind people in teacher education. Through this I would like to address the issue of blind spots. In that respect we all are impaired and handicapped.

I would like to draw your attention to eight possible blind spots, both in Brian's keynote and in the conference as a whole ...

BLIND SPOT #1

and maybe that is a first blind spot. Because the conference has been such a rich experience, offering so many perspectives and provoking so many different thoughts. And at the same time I have missed so many interesting presentations, so I only have a very fragmented view. This problem of fragmented views was addressed yesterday evening thanks to Brian's visionary work on the new TEPE book on 'Overcoming fragmentation in teacher education policy and practice. So if we want to get rid of fragmented views on teacher education, we at least need to avoid parallel sessions in the next TEPE conference!

BLIND SPOT #2

Different political developments, the Brexit, the Trump presidency, the rise of populism in Europe, has made us all aware that we risk living in bubbles. Due to internet, Facebook, etc. we only see those things we want to see. That can make us blind to other perspectives, opinions, and facts. We all think that we are the centre of the world and that that is all there is. We all run that risk. Looking at the first chapter of the book and to Brian's keynote, he analyses the developments in teacher education in Europe and the

¹ The 2017 conference of the Teacher Education Policy in Europe Network was held from the 18th to 20th of May at Mary Immaculate College in Limerick, Ireland. <http://tepe.mic.ul.ie/>

role of TEPE and its predecessors in this. His observations are all correct, but at the same time unavoidably limited.

Next to the TEPE bubble, there have been other bubbles that have influenced teacher education in Europe, like ENTEP, ATEE, the Tuning project, and a recent network InFoTED (international forum on TE development). The risk is that all these bubbles exist separately, disconnected. If we want to create a strong movement that can influence policies in TE, we need to connect all these separate bubbles, thus creating a strong layer of foam. Therefore I am happy that Davide Parmigliani, the vice chair of ATEE, joined us at this conference and some of us will join the ATEE conference from 123 to 25 October in Dubrovnik. We all can and need to play a role in that, by connecting the different networks we are all in

BLIND SPOT #3

Other blindspots have been addressed by several speakers: the blindspots about the dominant paradigms we use. During the welcome reception I discussed with Gert van der Westhuizen from South Africa, to what extent we are aware of the knowledge paradigms we use and are aware of other alternative paradigms. And that is a fundamental characteristic of blindspots: we don't see what we don't see. So sometimes we don't see what is in front of us, just like I don't realize anymore that I wear glasses, while you probably are extremely aware of those (and maybe even don't hear what I am saying, because they distract you). And therefore we need someone else to confront us with a mirror and to shift our perspective.

BLIND SPOT #4: The blind spot of internationalization

This is the feeling that we all have to deal with similar issues and challenges and therefore need to find shared solutions. This might lead to a neglect of local and national contexts, thinking that we can define the best teacher education structure and model, regardless of national contexts, national cultures, national histories, national systems. That we want to define common standards for teachers and for teacher education. But then we shift from inspiration to indoctrination. And I believe that that shift is for a large extent the cause that many people don't recognize themselves any more in their local context and lose ownership to a society that is not theirs any more. So we need to find a careful balance between the local, the regional, the national, the European and the global. Through international exchange we should not aim to copy other practices, but to better understand our own practice.

Not just one policy, not just one standard, not just one practice. We have been looking at Finland for years now, There are books on Singapore, Ontario's educational system, and the Dutch just presented their own book on the strengths of their education system. And I hope that more countries take the effort of reflecting and documenting the strengths but also the challenges of their system.

As a way of reflection and as a means for inspiration so eventually, inspired by that inspiration and reflection we are able to re-invent teacher education at local level with local stakeholders, in such a way that each can feel ownership to the way we construct TE at local level.

BLIND SPOT #5: The enemy outside

Brian indicated yesterday that for publishing the book, Cambridge University Press asked the editor and authors to make a connection to the concept of neoliberalism. And both in the first chapter of the book and in many other publications, the problems and dilemma's that teacher education institutes and teacher educators face, are blamed on the dominant neoliberal paradigm.

That is understandable, but it is also easy. Because then the fault is not ours, and we can't do much about it, except complain to colleagues. If our analysis is true and it is all caused by neoliberalism, then the question is how do we fight neo liberal forces in teacher education? To answer this question, my personal answer would start with the work of Gert Biesta, who provided concepts to rethink the actual purpose of education: to contribute to qualification, socialization and subjectification. With a group of colleagues we tried to unravel what that implies for teacher education.

BLIND SPOT #6: Our comfort zone

In the name and mission of TEPE there is a focus on teacher education policies. In that mission there is a strong realization that practices in teacher education are to a large extent influenced by policies, policy makers and politicians. Now of all times, that influence is extremely visible. Therefore we are confronted with the question how to address and how to influence policy processes.

And there is our pitfall that we stick to our comfort zone. That comfort zone is in the area of research, collecting data, making critical analyze, finding evidence, drawing conclusions and publishing these. However the key question is how effective we are in addressing actors in another domain, when we use the tools and language of our own domain. Einstein is famous for the quote that you can't problems with the same way of thinking that created those problems. We can't solve problems that originate from outside the world of teacher education with the tools and language from within teacher education.

As we discussed during the TEPE conference in Dundee in 2015, we need to connect to policy makers in a different way, creating the ground for dialogue and the conditions for collaborative policy making. I see many opportunities at the national and European level to engage in such dialogues. And I experience the willingness of policy makers in finding solutions in the fragmented domain of teachers and teacher education, where there is trust and recognition. Recognition of roles, mutual trust and open communication are essential in these.

BLIND SPOT #7: Power relations in our own practices

Finally I would like to come back to the theme of the conference: Education for All and Teacher education for All. I would like to thank the presenters of key notes and at parallel sessions, for offering me insights in my own blind spots. They showed me how power relations and status systems in class rooms are effected and even strengthened by class room practices, by pupil interactions, by pupil-teacher interactions, by structures and systems, e.g. by the way we select, include and exclude pupils and students. Several Irish presenters address the issue of the Irish language, but I am sure we all can find examples of hard and soft barriers for groups of pupils in our own countries. In our language we often tend to emphasize disabilities instead of abilities.

However, even if we overcome these, providing Education for All is still an enormous challenge for teachers. Two years ago during an European Commission conference, I made a comparison with Superman. We expect our teachers to be Supermen and Superwomen, dealing with all expectations that society has towards teachers. That expectation is unrealistic if we keep seeing the teaching profession as an isolated profession. Judith in her keynote emphasized that the teaching profession is fundamentally structured as an individual and isolated profession. We can't and may not expect teachers to deal with injustice that ranges wider than just schools, just on their own. We need to redefine the teaching profession as a collaborative profession. This has huge implications for how we structure teacher education and how we structure class rooms and classroom practice.

BLIND SPOT #8: Problems

And that brings me to my final blind spot: our tendency to identify problems. In several presentations I was enriched by careful analyses of problems, but at the same time was left thirsty, as there was no solution presented. TEPE might run the same risk. If we want to point policy makers to problems, we are obliged to suggest directions for solutions. Therefore I suggest that during the next conferences we try to limit presentations to 10 minutes and try to use the remaining time for collaborative discussions and brain storming on possible solutions and implications for teacher education.

I realize that there are fundamental problems, but if we want to take ourselves seriously we need to rethink our own work in recruiting and educating the best teachers. Our internal policies, our professionalism and our pedagogies.

And there I have made a connection to the next TEPE conference in Portugal and can hand over now to our chair Joanna Madalinska- Michalak.

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