

Research-Based Teacher Education Reform: Making Teacher Education Work

Editorial

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This special issue of *Reflecting Education* brings together a selection of papers presented at the fifth annual Teacher Education Policy in Europe (TEPE) conference hosted by the University of Vienna in 2011. The initiative to establish the TEPE Network was agreed at the University of Umea (Sweden) in 2006 and the first TEPE meeting was held at the University of Tallinn (Estonia) in 2007 and attended by participants from eight countries. The Network has grown significantly since its inception with the most recent 2012 conference (Warsaw) attracting over 100 participants. Over the course of its six years, the Network has emerged as a leading voice on teacher education policy in Europe, building on the work of previous European collaborative projects in the field of teacher education policy, notably TNTEE and EUDORA. The TEPE Network goals relate to: advancing research in and on teacher education; increasing mobility and extending the European dimension of teacher education; and enhancing quality through the renewal of evaluation cultures in teacher education. Central to its mission is the dissemination of research in the field of teacher education policy and recent publications include Hudson and Zgaga (eds.) *Teacher Education Policy in Europe: A Voice of Higher Education Institutions* (University of Umea, 2008); Hudson, Zgaga and Astrand (eds.) *Advancing Quality Cultures for Teacher Education in Europe: Tensions and Opportunities* (University of Umea, 2010); Eischmidt and Lofstrom (eds.) *Developing Quality Cultures in Teacher Education: Expanding Horizons in Relation to Quality Assurance* (Tallinn University, 2011) and Harford, Hudson and Niemi (eds.) *Quality Assurance and Teacher Education: International Challenges and Expectations* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012).

Over the past decade, and prompted in many respects by the Bologna process, teacher education systems across Europe have undergone considerable reform, with teacher education shifting from representing a national concern towards becoming part of the discourse around Europeanisation (Harford, 2010). Nonetheless, as Hudson and Zgaga (2008, p 18) caution ‘the Europeanisation and internationalisation of teacher education in particular is a much more complex and complicated process than Europeanisation and internationalisation in higher education in general.’ Arguably, such reform on this scale has not been accompanied by the same level of interrogation or critique surrounding the impetus for or impact of this reform. Is this reform indicative of a major shift in teacher

education and education policy more broadly or is it merely indicative of national requirements to adhere to a wider European agenda? Is it research-led and how can research best shape and inform teacher education at a European level? Taking as its guiding theme the first of the TEPE goals – advancing research in and on teacher education – this special issue addresses the theme of ‘Research-Based Teacher Education Reform: Making Teacher Education Work.’

The papers in this special issue are drawn from seven countries (Austria, Denmark, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden), and collectively present a series of case studies, which examine various aspects of teacher education evaluation and reform supported by research data or guided by theoretical models.

In ‘Does teacher education matter? Newly graduated teachers’ evaluations of teacher education in Sweden’, Bjorn Astrand reports on findings from a national questionnaire administered to student teachers who graduated from a Swedish university in the academic year 2007-8. Contextualising the survey, Astrand notes that teacher education programmes in Sweden were subject to national evaluations in 2005 and 2008, which led to calls for root and branch reform. The national association for deans with responsibility for teacher education led an internal discussion around quality, which led to this collaborative nationwide research. Astrand notes that despite decades of reform aimed at merging the two traditions of teacher education (the academic and the seminar), significant differences still obtain in terms of how subject teachers (secondary school teachers) and class teachers (primary and pre-primary school teachers) experience and evaluate their teacher preparation programmes.

In her interrogation of the ‘Relationships of teachers’ professional competences, active learning and research studies in teacher education in Finland’ based on an empirical survey of student teachers in two universities, Hannele Niemi examines how teacher education has provided student teachers with particular key competences, also interrogating what kinds of relationships can be found between difference competences. This study also investigates the kinds of relationships found between professional competences and active learning methods used in teacher education, and between professional competences and research studies in teacher education.

In ‘Evidence of bridging the gap between formal education and informal learning through teacher education,’ Hannu Salmi reports on the results of an integrative science education course developed in Finland, a collaboration between the University of Helsinki and Heureka, the Finnish Science Centre, which combined formal teaching and informal learning opportunities. The article presents evidence-based results related to open learning environments as well as best practices developed in cooperation with teacher education institutes, universities, educational administrations and schools. Salmi argues that teachers as researchers as well as practitioners, who use an evidence-based approach, is a movement which is gaining momentum in several parts of the world, and is supported by the European Commission. The future dilemma, he suggests, is whether or not it will be possible to create a stable European network linking formal and informal learning with the input of TEPE.

In 'In pursuit of good teacher education: How can research inform policy?', Jens Rasmyssen and Claus Hol pose the question 'How can research inform policy about what good teacher education is and about how it can be implemented?' This article focuses in on the debate concerning the relationship between research and practice and in particular educational research and political practice. Four different strategies, which each attempt to explain the problem of making research results useful for practice, are discussed. Those are: the linear pipeline approach, the mode-2 research approach, the boundary work approach, and the structural coupling approach.

Marco Snoek, Sanne Spil, Ellen van den Berg and Ednee Suasso de Lima de Prado in 'In search of teacher excellence: honours programmes and the recognition of teacher excellence in the Netherlands' examine the way in which teacher policy and teacher education are strongly focused on ensuring that teachers meet certain minimum standards. Such an objective, they argue, can result in the emphasis being placed on the 'average' student leading potentially to a 'middle-of-the-road perspective on teachers and teacher education curricula.' As a counter to this kind of culture, a number of initiatives have been introduced in the Netherlands to develop programmes of excellence and honours programmes, which recognise and accept student diversity. These programmes provide 'excellent' students with new challenges to further advance their professional development. Two examples of teacher education institutes, which have developed such programmes, are presented in this paper.

Christian Kraler and Michael Schratz examine the perennial issue as to how teacher education systems, embedded as they are in a complex network of social developments, political interests and national cultures and traditions, can face up to the evolving and ever-changing demands being placed on them. They describe how change and development can be implemented by combining a teacher education programme with research on teacher education in what they term 'a special way'. The Austrian system of teacher education is employed as an example.

In their examination of 'Developing the policy of teaching practice in teacher education at the national level', Teibi Torm, Erika Lofstron, Eve Eisenschmidt and Karmen Paul provide a framework at the institutional and national policy levels for enhancing the integration of theory and practice in teacher preparation programmes. Providing an overview of the systems of six Estonian higher education institutions, they provide an analysis of relevant documents, which regulate student teachers' teaching practice at strategic and national level. They suggest that the goals of pedagogical practice focus in the main on the need to apply knowledge and skills to gain teaching experience. There is, however, less of a focus on student teachers' personal working theory. While strategic documents highlight the importance of integration of student teachers' practice in the school as an organisation, this idea is not supported at policy level. They thus propose a series of recommendations for institutional and national policy development.

Looking at recent developments in teacher education in the Croatian context, Vlasta Vizek Vidovic, Vlatka Domovic and Maja Drvodelic examine the relationship between extensive empirical research on teacher education carried out in Croatia since 2003 and educational reform of university curricula for prospective teachers within the Bologna process. The

research overview provides a comparison between different initial teacher education models in EU countries and empirical data on teachers' educational needs in the Croatian context. The authors conclude that one of the principle challenges facing Croatian teacher education is enhancement of the professionalization of the teacher through: the introduction of national teacher competence standards as a basis for curriculum development; meaningful linking of academic learning to school practice experiences; partnership between universities and schools in conducting educational research projects; the enhancement of critical and reflective learning of both teacher educators and student teachers; creating opportunities for CPD for those teachers involved in the supervision / mentoring of student teachers and greater involvement of universities in the consolidation of beginning teacher competences during the induction and CPD phases.

Collectively, these papers advocate the centrality of research-based teacher education reform by providing a critical analysis of a number of research initiatives across a range of case study countries. Emanating from a variety of paradigmatic and epistemological perspectives, they build on the emerging research agenda of the TEPE network, making key linkages between theory and practice. Whilst in the main the articles address critical questions relating to quality enhancement within initial teacher education, they also point out further important avenues of exploration, most notably the role of research in quality enhancement as it pertains to teachers' continuous professional development; the role of research in the examination of teacher professional identity through induction; and finally the role of research in the design, implementation and evaluation of teacher education curricula.

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