

A journey of professional learning



Narrative from an ATEE perspective

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Thrown into deep water



The ATEE

The Association of teacher education in Europe (ATEE) is an association I joined as far back as in 1985 when the conference was held in Tilburg in the Netherlands. It was my first international conference and I was supposed to accompany the director of my organization to this conference. Shortly before leaving my home town to go to Tilburg I got a phone call from my director (Theo Oudkerk Pool) to inform me that due to an illness he was not able to attend the conference. I didn't realize the impact of this message, so I said: "Take good care of yourself and I will manage in Tilburg".

The working group

Upon arrival I contacted the two chairpersons of the working group Theo had told, we would attend, since he was a long standing member of it. It was the standing working group on in-service training of teachers.

The group had not been very successful yet in acquiring funding for an international project, but what seemed to be more important was it had a history idealism and friendship (some of its members were founding fathers of the association) which

manifested itself in long nights with music, and storytelling and drinking. The Association was still in its early days and it behaved accordingly, so did I must admit.

I joined the group

When I met George Chadwick and Kingsley Evans, who were co-chairs of the Working group, they told me that the group attracted too many attendants this year that it had to be split in two halves in order to make this a manageable exchange of ideas. For reasons I still do not grasp they felt I would lead one half of the group with Kingsley Evans as reporter, and George would lead the other half. It was a hell of a job and I still wonder why I accepted this proposal and how I made myself find the courage to do it. Maybe because of the energy I invested, I convinced myself that this was a group I wished to be part of for the sake of the group and for my own professional development.

Not just conferences

The group met once a year during the international conferences of the ATEE, and since we had additional funds for our projects, we also managed to organize at least one extra meeting per year, the so called interim meeting. The meetings were partly focused on projects, and partly on ATEE business, such as how to attract new colleagues, how to plan for new projects, and how to organize next interim meetings. Apart from that, we always had a social event, and excursion to stress the international dimension and to pay respect to the cultural heritage the host wished to introduce us to.





More than papers

During the ATEE conferences the emphasis was very much on exchanging research and other papers in time frames of about 20 minutes each. I produced quite a few such papers myself, and listened to many people presenting such papers. However I felt a need for more coherence and consistency of our activities. Rather than fragmented papers, I would work on a project together, and thus have a sense of direction and purpose.

Trend watching

During a train trip to I don't remember where, I had a brainwave and I thought to myself, Whenever I go there I have the opportunity to speak to professional educators of ALL European countries, couldn't I make better use of this opportunity. So I decided to make a list of what I felt were dominant trends in the domain of in-service training of teachers and asked the working group to respond to that list, so I could update and upgrade it and share that with again other colleagues.



Whenever I attended conferences or met audiences in other settings, I included a brief survey to find out whether people recognized the trends I had listed; to what ex-

tent they felt these trends were to be welcomed and how would they prioritize the trends as direction for future policymaking and development. In the Working group which at that time had renamed itself. It had become a research and development centre on in-service education of teachers. We felt education was a broader and more useful word than training, which we associated with skills and drills only. We wanted professionalization to be more profound.

The start of a series of project on school based in-service

It was at that time that Kingsley Evans, the Chair in those days, and for many years after, initiated a project on school based in service education. We had to leave the university and college centred way of thinking in which we would explain to school leaders and teachers what was best for education, and now join them in identifying their professional learning needs, we helped them to identify goals, set up programs and ways to evaluate those programmes. School Based In-service (SBI) became our message which we radiated through ATEE channels but also beyond. Members of the RDC travelled Europe as consultant to spread the approach in Sweden, Germany, Portugal, Slovenia, and even beyond Europe in the USA and in Russia. After the project on in-service education two related projects followed, one focusing on how to train school based in-service educators, and one project in which we analysed the professional careers of successful in-service educators.



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Three projects in a row made us stick for many years to this concept of school based in-service. I enjoyed the projects and the products they brought us, but at the same time I felt the concept had turned too much into dogmatism.

From education towards learning

I believed there was more than school based in service education. Furthermore I felt there was a need to make shift from education towards learning. This implied that we would focus much more on what teachers learn and how they learn things and how they might optimize their learning than to just how a school might support learning for the benefit of the school mainly. I felt, and we felt, there was a need to change our name again. The RDC became an RDC focusing on in-service learning rather than on in-service training, or education. The role of the in-service educators would shift towards a more facilitating role, rather than to an educator's role. In-service facilitators might be everywhere, not only in in-service education institutes. They could be senior colleagues, they could be external experts, they could be superiors, peers, managers, HRD people etc.

Widening the scope of in-service

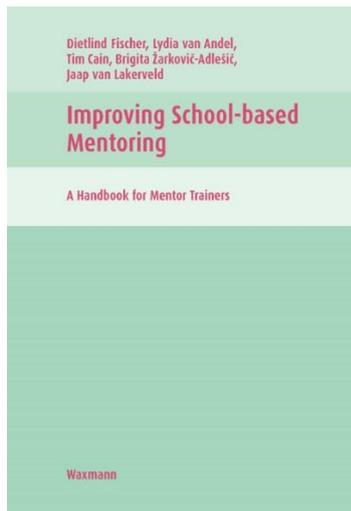
After the completion of these three projects and a few others we took on board as a kind of side projects (among those we did a project on the European Dimension in In-service, evaluation of EU projects, Information technology on In-service education, Induction of newly qualified teachers, Prevention of Truancy and Absenteeism in schools, and a project on how to prepare school for International Co-operation). All

the project we had been doing, in spite of the shifting emphasis from training, towards educating towards learning still showed a rather In-service professional centred focus.

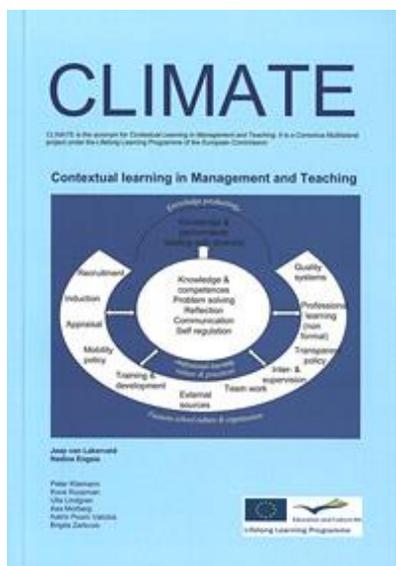
Promoting teachers' learning

We had to plan for new projects. In those days I worked on a doctoral thesis on organizational learning and on what it takes to make an organization offer an optimal learning environment to its members, its employees. The concept I studied was the concept of corporate curriculum, a partly hidden, partly noticeable, partly intentional and partly unintentional work learning environment promoting learning as an integral part of professionalism, and of work. I tried to convince the RDC to move in that direction but not everybody could accept the relevance of it. For the time being we decided to focus on mentoring in in-service education as a kind of first step towards a more facilitating role of in-service professionals. In those times we were not able yet to set the idea of us being educators aside, and to shift towards a role of organization developers, facilitators of learning in wider sense than educating. I was a bit frustrated about all of this since I wanted to make the move forward on the journey I felt we were making from university centred in-service training to school based in-service education, to school based professional learning, to school based learning environments.





Work- learning environments for teachers
After the completion of the mentoring project, which by the way was very productive and successful, the RDC appeared to be ready for the next step. So we applied for a project on schools as learning environments for teachers (Contextual Learning in management and teaching, CLIMATE).



As always, again this new concept appeared to be too narrow in the end. I felt the focus was too much on organisational issues, the corporate curriculum, I myself had come up with. It was based on the as-

sumption that learning is basically promoted by the organisation in which people work, or in this in case in which teachers, teach. In reality the learning environment had extended enormously by the Internet and invaded in a larger virtual environment. At the same time this implied that people were in much closer contact with people beyond their organisations. It was time to extend our ideas of the learning environments for teachers to professional work learning communities within and beyond organisations. That is why the idea arose to initiate a project on professional learning in its full range. In my research I had noticed that people often feel enthused the concept of professional learning, but when it is not linked to particular themes, or challenges they are facing, or issues relevant to them, the enthusiasm fades away again. That is why we felt we should focus on a particular theme. In an international group it is often difficult to reach consensus on priorities, so we decided the content would be to a large extent up to the project members and to their local partners, while we would focus on processes of professional development in general as teachers develop throughout the stages of their careers. Still we wanted to have a kind of umbrella theme. Inclusion was suggested, and explored, but appeared to be too controversial. In the end we settled for dealing with complexity. We began to explore what we felt were the complexities education has to cope with.



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My feeling is that we still have a challenge here to articulate in more detail what we mean by it, how it is visible in our local and national situations as well as in our international contexts, and how our ideas on professional learning relate to these complexities. We may use dissemination/multiplier events to open a dialogue on these issues.

Whilst being involved in this project already again new horizons begin to become visible. I happen to have been involved in international studies on the future of professionals in the police force and in the heritage sector. One would not immediately assume many similarities between those sectors, but I found out there are many and what is more, maybe they do not only apply to these fields, but also to education.

Among the trends I spotted in these professional fields are:

- *Technological developments* including the social and cultural impact they have (Robots, drones, Internet of things, 3 D printing, gamification etc.);
- *Multidisciplinary co-operation*, the increased necessity not to stick to one's own discipline but to extend the scope to other fields (in education these might Care, Social work, Entrepreneurship, etc.);
- *Information/knowledge society*. The profound changes of the environment connecting people to tremendous amounts of information and data which affect the expertise balance of teachers and students. They increasingly become partners in learning.
- *Evolving knowledge*. No time is available to turn knowledge into programmes and implement them in order to deliver up to date

qualified professionals. During the programme the knowledge transferred gets outdated so sophisticated ways must be found to involve students in the evolution of knowledge and in the continuous process of sharing and co-creating knowledge/competences. Curricula need to become snow balls that grow because students and teacher push them together.



The developments I see when looking back at the history of the RDC and of myself in it is not unique. It coincides with developments from behaviourism, to cognitivism, to constructivism and social constructivism, connectionism en connectivism we have seen in social sciences in the western world. Still, I have the idea that we have been among those who tried to push the snowball of knowledge further. My constant challenge has been to try to see the next stage as soon as possible in order not to lose touch with developments or rather to stay ahead of times. This has brought me a sense of continuous discovery, revelations, and adventures.

In Retrospect

I am sure many of those who attended conferences and listened to presentations never experienced anything alike. This awareness makes me humble (I am just one among the many pushing the snowball) and happy, since I derive a sense of adventure from doing so.



Professional learning was a journey. It had its ups and downs, but overseeing the long run of it, I see it shows growth. Professional learning was an active process. It took energy and initiative to make things happen. It was to a large extent a social interactive process. I worked and learned with others who inspired me and were partners on the way. Frankly, I have also seen many who seemed to have other purposes. I also found out that in the end they didn't gain as much from it as others did, nor did they derive much pleasure of it. Sharing the challenges the journey confronted me with made the process worthwhile. The Prolea project is a stage in my professional development but new horizons seem to get into reach. I may be approaching the end of my employed life, but I will try never to end my professional learning.



