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Visions for the future

I. Introduction

Speaking about the future is always a risk-taking challenge. Future is an unknown area, sometimes full of surprises. It is risky to speak about visions especially for someone who trusts empirical facts and information. It seems even dodgier to speak about visions for the future. So caution is needed when one speaks about visions of the future.

What is a vision? Something you are yearning for? Encouraging the transformation of the existing situation? A status you would like to see EFTRE in future?

The risk of expressing visions is obvious but it includes also a challenge and a mission. My presentation includes visions but also wishes for EFTRE how to develop further.

1. The history of EFTRE

My first point is to look back to the history of EFTRE, at least to the last 15 years and on the themes of the conferences. Liam Gearon quoted George Orwell: "Who controls the past, controls the future." I would modify this for our context into: "Who knows EFTRE's past, can shape EFTRE's future."

EFTRE Conferences 1992-2007 (EFTRE started in 1980 in Finland)

1992 York: "Teaching World Religions"

1995 Hamburg: "School as a workshop of humanity"

1998 Copenhagen: "Into the third Millennium. Religion,
Culture and RE in Europe... "

2001 Edinburgh: "Handling Truth claims in the RE classroom"

2004 Järvenpää "RE: educating the whole person"

2007 Budapest: "The contribution of RE to active citizenship.
Developing a European perspective."

The impressive list of themes shows that EFTRE have a concern about the broader context of religious education, about the main issues and areas that shape religious education: The content, objectives, the students, the school, the wider discourses in education and the values RE stands for.

The main focus of EFTRE is on professionalism of RE teachers, their training, their status in the education system, and their competences. Interestingly the RE teacher has never been expressed in the theme of a conference, at least not during the last 15 years.

The themes of EFTRE conferences mainly referred to the profile of the subject RE with its different history and different layers in the countries of Europe or to the wider context.

Now in 2007 for the first time “developing a European perspective” is expressed as part of the title of the conference. This is an important step for EFTRE. And also the link of religious education to citizenship, the main focus of our conference, expresses a more political character or message of EFTRE.

2. EFTRE contributes to a Europeanisation of Religious Education

The term Europeanisation sees Europe more as a dynamic process than as a given entity. “Europe does not exist, there is only Europeanisation” (Beck & Grande). Developments of Europeanisation can be described from two perspectives: from a *vertical* perspective namely the influence of European political institutions on national and regional constituencies and from a *horizontal* perspective that includes increasing exchange and encounter of different groups and people. This shapes Europe. In general the trend of Europeanisation is also obvious in the field of education, influencing more and more national discussions and developments. “Europeanisation as a dynamic process of its own, transcends the ideological conflicts of national policy.” (Beck, Grande 2005, S. 76) Using a term of Bert Roebben one can also say that we shape a Europe-in-dialogue. Chris Doude van Troostwijk used the expression: “I do believe in Europe, because it does not exist.”

EFTRE forms a network of a specific target group, RE teachers, teacher trainers and institutes with concern about RE. EFTRE can actively take part in the process of building Europe.

3. Europe, education, religion, teaching RE

Against this background future activities of EFTRE should take account of challenges and developments in these four areas:

3.1 Europe

EFTRE’s activities should be connected to the European political agenda. The project of Europe is too important to leave it to bureaucrats or politicians alone. A European perspective is not something that substitutes the national or the

local perspective. However it is true that the development of the European Union has changed the interplay between the national, European and international sphere, the founding of the EU has not replaced the nation. An "either-or" perspective, "Europe or nation" does not fit with the existing situation. The Maastricht Treaty (1992) established a legal European citizenship to all citizens of the EU member states. From the very beginning this was seen as a "multiple citizenship": European citizenship and national citizenship are complementary. In a similar way, we can refer to a "multiple identity" by considering local, regional, national and European identities as compatible without excluding the one from the other. Recent empirical results indicate that the majority of Europeans declare having both a national *and* a European identity, demonstrating that they consider them compatible (survey of Eurobarometer, see: http://www.gesis.org/en/data_service/eurobarometer/standard_eb_trend/trend/europ_identity.htm).

A closer connection to the European political agenda includes thinking about the place of religious education in the wider frame of education policy, in the education system and it includes also becoming aware of the main players, developments and discussions of education policy in Europe.

Let me introduce some examples of political developments and statements of the two main players the European Union and the Council of Europe that might be linked to EFTREs concerns:

- The **European Commission** (2005) has published a set of key competencies (including knowledge, skills and attitudes) for lifelong learning (COM(2005)548 final) "Key competences are those which all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment." (13) The list contains of:

1. Communication in the mother tongue
2. Communication in the foreign languages
3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
4. Digital competence
5. Learning to learn
- 6. Interpersonal, intercultural and social competences and civic competence**
7. Entrepreneurship (*refers to an individual's ability to turn ideas into action: It includes creativity, innovation and risk taking*), and
8. Cultural expression."

Especially key competences 5 (Learning to learn) and 6 (Interpersonal, intercultural and social competences and civic competence) are close to concerns of religious education and EFTRE.

- The EU has currently started initiatives for high-quality initial teacher education and a coherent process of continuous professional development. Also a public consultation about "Schools for the 21st century" was

initiated in July this year. The questionnaire of this consultation includes: "How can school communities help to prepare young people to be responsible citizens, in line with fundamental values such as peace and tolerance for diversity?" Do we as RE teachers have an answer to that question?

- The newly started integrated life-long learning programme of the EU includes opportunities also for RE teacher associations etc. We should take account of these programs and activities and of other developments that provide opportunities to take part in consultation processes and to bring in a voice of RE and RE teachers in Europe.
- The **Council of Europe** is the oldest political organisation in Europe with now 47 member states. Its policy is based on three pillars: *plural democracy, human rights and the right of law*. The Council has opened up its approach to intercultural education to the religious dimension, and has organised a consultation process to work out a white book of intercultural dialogue. Since 2000 also many activities concerning Education for Democratic Citizenship have taken place, often not recognized properly by the educational community. One of the contemporary publications of the Council is also of interest to the RE community: Religious diversity and intercultural education: a reference book for schools (Keast 2007).

EFTRE should think about getting the status of a participating NGO at the Council of Europe.

Advocacy for Religious Education can be done in collaboration with other organisations. This has been the driving force to create **CoGREE**, the Coordinating Group for Religious Education in Europe some years ago.

The steering group of CoGREE has taken some decisive steps at its meeting in January 2007.

CoGREE has changed its name to Coordinating Group for **Religion in Education** in Europe. The reason for this comes out of collaboration with Council of Europe and of a wider scope of issues CoGREE member organisations deal with.

CoGREE has established a part-time paid office in Voorburg/NL with a secretary.

CoGREE has agreed on statutes that name the following aims:

- Exchange of information among the member organisations
- Clarification of common interests
- Agreement on common activities
- Representation of common interests beyond CoGREE.

CoGREE has also agreed on a common statement about Education, Religion and Europe as a starting point for further activities.

The text includes:

Religious education as an ordinary school subject in most countries of Europe offers a substantive contribution to education for democratic citizenship. Education for tolerance and peace is incomplete without religious education.

CoGREE is not an independent organisation. The strength of CoGREE comes from its member organisations. CoGREE needs EFTRE's commitment. When the member organisations are weak and loosely structured, also CoGREE will be weak. But...The network contributes to built up a voice for RE in Europe. The vision is, to bring more and more together the stakeholders of RE in Europe.

3.2 Education

Religious education as a school subject should not be seen as an end in itself but as a means to educate children. Therefore the discussion about developments in education, curricula development and also education policy should be seen as the wider frame for religious education.

At this point I want to introduce two perspectives that may help also shaping visions for religious education and EFTRE.

Paulo Freire: The well known educator from Brazil has developed a dialogue oriented approach to education for illiterate people, those who cannot read or write, a program, a method for "alphabetization", using one of his crucial terms. His Pedagogy of the Oppressed is a sharp critique on the "banking" concept of education with pure transmission of knowledge. Education for critical consciousness has been his main focus to encourage a reading of the world especially of those that are oppressed and underprivileged. Freire speaks of "teacher-learner and learner-teacher" to characterise a dialogue oriented method in education. Later he explored this as follows: "The teacher learns through teaching, the learner teaches through learning." In his latest books and articles Freire has published the books "Pedagogy of the Heart" and a "Pedagogy of Autonomy" that has been translated in the American version into "Pedagogy of Freedom" (Freire 1998). In these books Freire deals a lot with the situation of the teacher and their competences. Some of the features he argues for are:

- Knowing how to listen
- Openness to dialogue
- Caring for the students.

Tobin Hart, professor of psychology, University of West Georgia: (Hart 2007) Toward an Integrative Spiritual Pedagogy, one example out of many that tries to integrate a spiritual dimension into education. Hart argues for a **pedagogy of depth** and presents a map of different layers that can guide learning and

teaching. He sees the transmission of information not as a goal of education but as a starting point for moving into the depth of this information rather than to move on to other information. "When we dive in a little deeper, subject and Self open and both have the potential to be transformed." (1149)

"In this map, *information* is given its rightful place as currency for the educational exchange. Information can then open up into *knowledge*, where direct experience often brings together the bits of information into patterned wholes involving mastery and skill. *Knowledge* then opens the possibility of cultivating *intelligence*, which can cut, shape, and create information and involves a dialectic of the intuitive and the analytic. This is followed by the layer of *understanding* that takes us beyond the power of intelligence to see through the eye of the heart. Understanding, then, contrasts and balances objectivism and offers a way of knowing that serves character and community. Education then has the possibility for cultivating *wisdom*, which sees from a greater height and blends insight into what is true with an ethic of what is right. Finally the depths lead to the possibility of creative *transformation* changing both the known and the knower and generating *new information* to be explored." (1151)

Hart is using a map to characterise a possible series of developmental changes that occur in a single thought, feeling or during a lesson. Each layer represents an expansion of knowing which in turn reveals more of the subject.

- **The Currency of Information.** Education gathers around information but amidst a deluge of information what is the appropriate function of information for the educational endeavour and how should teachers and students hold and handle it?
- **Mastering the Puzzle of Knowledge.** Having knowledge means holding together the puzzle of information. It implies the basic ability to use information.
- **The Power of Intelligence.** Intelligence shapes and creates knowledge; intelligence uses knowledge, judgement overtakes mere opinion. The activity of intelligence is multifaceted and operates as dialectic of the intuitive and the analytic.
- **The Heart of Understanding.** While conventional education is dominated by objectivism, understanding requires a fundamental shift in the process of knowing. Referring to Martin Buber who said that 'all real living is meeting' Hart states that understanding comes when we empathise with the other or understanding is learning to see through the eye of the heart.

- **The Eye of Wisdom.** Wisdom is an activity rather than a static entity to be accumulated. Wisdom has been described as involving capacities for empathy, self-knowledge, listening, comfort with ambiguity, a tendency to de-automatise thought routines, and movement beyond conceptual limits. (1157)
- **The Paradox of Transformation.** To transform means to go beyond current form. Transformation is both an outcome and a process; it is the push and the pulse that dives self-organisation and self-transcendence.

As a conclusion, Hart states that spiritual education involves a curriculum of inner significances as well as one of outer information.

“When the heart of the discipline and our own hearts and minds are plumbed, information then serves its rightful place as a currency for learning, knowledge brings an economy of interaction, understanding opens the heart, wisdom balances heart and head leading us to insight and right action, and transformation culminates this deepening spiral as it enjoins us with the force of creation and communion.” (1161)

3.3 Religion

There are interesting developments in the discourse about religion. (Davie et al. 2003) The history of religion is filled with surprising developments. Those who favour the thesis of secularisation may be astonished that religion did not disappear in Western Europe as expected in terms of general theories of modernisation. Those who favour differentiation as a guiding concept of religion may be surprised about how institutionalized religion is obvious in the European public sphere. The religious scientist Hans Joas suggests not overestimating developments in secularisation and differentiation (Joas 2007). Concerning the future development of religion he mentions the dissolution of religious milieus and the globalisation of Christianity as two important facts (the third trend he deals with is “implicit religion”). The dissolution of religious milieus affects religious education when pupils come to school no longer with any religious knowledge and experiences. Christianity and also other religions are foreign, unknown to them. It is obvious that teaching and learning has to take account of this fact. Also taking into account developments of religions in other parts of the world can open our Eurocentric perspective.

Research is increasingly organised about the religion of the pupils and students and also about the religion of RE teachers that should be taken into account (Bakker et al. 2007; Larsson et al. 2004).

3.4 Teaching religious education

In a project of the Comenius Institut together with Kings College and the RE Centre in Loccum we have organised a dialogue among colleagues from different countries about good practice in religious education in primary schools (Schreiner/Kraft/Wright 2007). The focus of the project was to bring together

successful and innovative classroom practice of learning about, learning from and learning through religions (learning in religion). The range of presented methods is remarkable from using a learning circuit for RE, pupil-to pupil dialogue, narratives, and the method of Godly Play as a child centred method for introducing biblical texts. Also methods of theologising with children or teaching religion through art are presented. It was no surprise that the understanding about what Good Practice is differs from context to context.

Some trends can be identified in teaching religious education:

- Teaching RE is less transmission of knowledge but encouragement for transformation.
- The life world of the pupils and their families is recognized in RE lessons.
- Teaching RE needs respect for the spiritual situation of the pupils and it needs RE teachers that appreciate dialogue.

In summing up this part I am convinced that further dialogue and discussion about current developments in education, religion and teaching RE might help to develop a vision for the collaboration of EFTRE.

4. Standards for religious education and dialogue between research and practice

In the final part of my paper I will underline my “visions” or wishes by presenting the discussion about standards in RE and about the need for closer dialogue between research and practice in RE.

4.1 Standards for religious education

There is a dynamic debate about standards and competences in education. This is not new because education always deals with standards, with expectations of a specific outcome of teaching and learning. Due to the Programme for International Student Assessment – PISA and other international comparative studies standards are increasingly demanded and discussed in a European and international context. This debate includes also religious education: What should students know at a specific age about and from religion? How to develop religious competence and religious literacy? Against this background the question about common standards on a European level is raised. In a recent article Judith Everington (Everington 2007) expresses her concerns and a fear about a Europeanisation of RE in terms of European standards. On the basis of research with English trainee teachers she states: “Freedom is necessary if teachers are to develop professional skills and tailor their teaching to the backgrounds and needs of their pupils. Direction is needed to ensure that teachers have sound educational principles to work from and are enabled to put their personal knowledge and experience at the service of the child.” And she continues addressing the policy level: “Politically motivated policies should be informed by a research based understanding of what teachers need and want and of the im-

portance of achieving a balance between standardisation and professional freedom." (2007, 111)

I can completely underline that freedom is necessary for teachers to professional skills and to tailor their teaching according to their specific context. However the question about common standards of quality of RE is not solved with that perspective.

Friedrich Schweitzer, German scholar with an international perspective in RE who is also involved in various comparative research projects has provided an offer for common standards for RE on a European level and beyond (2004):

- Religion can and must be taught in line with the criteria of general education (*educational quality*)
- RE is of relevance to the public and must be taught in line with this relevance (*contribution to general education*)
- RE must include some type of interdenominational and interreligious learning which are in line with the increasingly pluralist situation in many countries (*dialogical quality, contribution to peace and tolerance*)
- RE must be based on the children's right to religion and religious education (*child-centred approach based on children's rights*)
- RE teachers must be professionals in the sense that they have reached a level of self-reflexivity based on academic work which allows for a critical appropriation of their religious backgrounds and biographies (*professional teaching*) (2004, 196).

This seems worth to be taken into consideration by EFTRE and RE teachers. It is no more than an offer to identify expectations towards RE which are acceptable beyond one's own national background. Building a voice of religious education in Europe is a task ahead of us.

4.2 Research and Practice

In his book "Teaching Religious Education" (2006; see also 2007) with the subtitle: *Researchers in the Classroom*, Julian Stern argues for a closer relationship between contemporary RE and contemporary research. He presents various forms of dialogue oriented RE in different parts of Europe. It seems to me that dialogue work is gaining increasing prominence in RE across Europe.

One example about dialogue in the RE classroom: In her research about dialogue of pupils Julia Ipgrave from England differentiates between three levels of dialogue: *primary dialogue* (acceptance of plurality), *secondary dialogue* (openness to difference) and *tertiary dialogue* (pupil interaction). Her project developed from phase 1 in one school, through phase 2 between schools in a single city to phase 3, which is the e-bridges project making use of email dialogue.

This can be a model also for increasing exchange among RE teachers moving from a local context to an international one. Can EFTRE encourage and facilitate this exchange?

For Julian Stern all issues about research into the impact of religious education and citizenship education come down to two crucial questions:

- 1) What does RE aim to do for pupils and society (and how do we know?)
- 2) What effect does it have (and how do we know)?

So far we do know little about how these questions can be answered. What we need is research into the impact of RE. It is a challenge for EFTRE to get connected to research initiatives that already exist and maybe to stimulate further research. It is obvious that the research process needs a close interplay and dialogue between practitioners in the classroom and academic researchers.

Examples:

REDCo = Religion in Education. A contribution to Dialogue or a factor of Conflict in transforming societies of European Countries. A research project of 10 universities from 8 different European countries, coordinated by the University of Hamburg.

(see: <http://www.redco.uni-hamburg.de/web/3480/3481/index.html>)

ENRECA = The European Network for Religious Education in Europe through Contextual Approaches, a network of scholars, and PhD students working in projects of contextual RE.

(see: <http://ci-muenster.de/themen/europa/enreca.php>)

TRES = Theology and Religious Studies in European Societies, a university network to highlight and promote the teaching of religion and **theology** in the multicultural European context.

(see: <http://www.student.teol.uu.se/tres/>)

5. Bringing competencies together (summary)

- EFTRE's activities should be more connected to the political agenda in Europe (EU and CoE and others); e.g by recognizing many initiatives concerning education and citizenship on an academic level and on a strategic level
- EFTRE should take part in creating a voice of/for RE in Europe (CoGREE)
- EFTRE can contribute to a Europeanisation of Religious Education by more exchange among RE teachers in Europe
- EFTRE can benefit through exchange with comparative research projects like REDCo, TRES, ENRECA and others

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