

## Teacher Education in Finland - updating the 1996 SIGMA report

---

Since teacher education in Finland was described and analysed within the SIGMA pilot project in 1994-1995 and published 1996 (Hansén, Teacher education in Finland: description and analysis, in Sander, Buchberger, Greaves & Kallós, 1996), no major structural changes have been carried out. The process of academisation of teacher education is today more or less completed, in the sense that most categories of teacher education are either totally integrated into universities, or that at least the pedagogical components qualifying teachers are offered by universities. Primary school teacher education, secondary school teacher education, and pre-school teacher education have all been integrated into universities. The corresponding integration of vocational teacher education is under way. This process implies a process of unification of teacher education as a whole. In the legislation from 1995 it was decreed that pedagogical qualification for one form of educational institution automatically gives the pedagogical qualification for different school levels (Bergem, Björkqvist, Hansén, Carlgren, & Hauge, 1997).

The departments of teacher education in Finland are complete university departments. They offer both basic degree programmes (B. Ed. and M. Ed.) and doctoral programmes (D. Ed.). There also exists a licentiate degree between the master's degree and the doctoral degree. This degree can be given different orientations (Kasvatusala kohti tulevaisuutta, 1994; Bergem, Björkqvist, Hansén, Carlgren, & Hauge, 1997).

According to the request to up-date the SIGMA-report, I will here focus on the two aspects that appear to be of importance. The first aspect concerns changes in teacher education since the national report was published (1996) and the second one the recent endeavours being made in order to evaluate teacher education.

### 1. Changes in Finnish teacher education

Within the existing structures various measures have been taken in order to further improve the quality of teacher education. Some of the initiatives come from the departments of teacher education themselves, while other changes are derived from the responses made by the departments on generally identified problems and expressed critique. There are many criticised areas, but in this context my intention is not to offer an exhaustive picture of either the ongoing development or the problems and the critique. In the discussion about the methods of evaluation in section 2 (see below) I will touch upon some aspects of the problems, because they form the starting-point for an ongoing preparation for evaluation. Present and future trends, problems, and challenges of Finnish teacher education have been discussed in some detail in a relatively recent study (ed. Tella, 1996). Various

aspects of Finnish teacher education are also analysed in the *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* (3-4/1997).

The discussion will be limited to comprise two areas which reflect the ongoing changes and discussion about efforts of the internal reconceptualization of teacher education.

The first area deals with the practically oriented preparation, and the apparent relationship to the theoretically oriented preparation of student teachers. Although there is a false dichotomy between the two phases of preparation, they are anyway at least physically partly separated. The theoretically oriented preparation takes place at the departments of teacher education within the Universities. The practically oriented preparation is mainly located in separate training schools, and to some extent also in so called field schools, i.e. regular schools, with their own teaching and guiding staff. The universities aim at contributing to a research-based way of knowing and reasoning, while the teaching staff guide student teachers to act in classrooms inside particular school cultures (Adams & Tulasiewicz, 1995).

Efforts to overcome the incompatibility between the two phases of preparation is an extensive problem in Finnish teacher education. The authorities have noticed the problem, and the Ministry of Education has provided funding during the years 1997-1998 for sixteen projects aiming at developing teaching practice. The projects are distributed among the twelve departments of teacher education at the Finnish universities (Letter from the Ministry of Education 25/3/1998). The intention is to elaborate the practical preparation as an essential part of professional development and its integration with the theoretical preparation. The task is demanding because a number of interrelated factors impinge on the professional development at large, such as student teachers' personal biographies, the influence from each specific classroom situation including supervisors' encouraging or discouraging roles, the influence of institutional factors, such as institutional biographies, as well as the role of critical reflection on action (Kettle & Sellars, 1996).

The need for restructuring parts of the practically oriented preparation is also pragmatically related to the structural change of the comprehensive school and the labour division between class teachers and subject teachers. The administrative demarcation between the lower (grades 1-6) and the upper stages (grades 7-9) will be eliminated. This change means in practice that class teachers can work in the upper stages and the subject teachers in the lower stages under certain conditions of the comprehensive school (Education & research 2000, 1996). The practically oriented preparation has to be adjusted to the new situation.

Finnish teacher education has been charged for not paying enough attention on how to deal in practice with socially related problems. The authorities have thus called for the intensification of developing action models in order to reduce school harassment and to enhance school satisfaction and pupils' self-esteem (Education & research 2000, 1996).

The overall aim of the two phases of preparation is to help student teachers to recognize them as interdependent, and to acknowledge the contribution from the representatives of the universities and the schools involved as a form of partnership. Regular opportunities of reflection required the university courses, together with continuous critical reflection on action, to help student teachers elaborate their practical theories more explicitly (cf. Kettle & Sellars, 1996).

The traditional content of practice, almost exclusively directed to teaching practice, has also been questioned. Studies show (see Gonnée van Amelswoort & Scheerens, 1996) that nearly half of teachers' working time consists of non-teaching activities such as school-based curriculum work, collective planning, cooperation with parents, out-door activities etc. The practical preparation in its dominating form is not considered to provide the ideal way for student teachers' to face the

reality of the school work. An appropriately organized practice offers a broad contact with the totality of the elements constituting school work. This means, not only lesson planning and teaching, but also possibilities of exploring new teaching strategies, participating in the dynamics of collaboration with colleagues within various projects and with different actors and actor groups, like parents, local authorities and tutoring students with special needs and social problems. Student teachers also need to get opportunities for resolving social conflicts. If this aspect of practice is absent, the possibilities to confirm or modify various components of student teachers' practical theory by putting these into practice will be limited. It might be of value to schedule opportunities so that student teachers gain maximum benefit (Kettle & Sellars, 1997).

The other area I want to touch upon relates to the claim stating that the Finnish teacher education is not only scientifically based but also research oriented (Kansanen, 1997). What does this claim stand for? Because the main part of teacher education is connected to a higher university degree, i.e. Master's degree, student teachers get engaged into research while writing their thesis. Today an essential part of the thesis consists of empirical studies on various aspects of the educational field. The development during the very last years has to some extent favoured models that engage teachers in the research process, particularly action research. During pre-service education, this kind of research is a natural way to combine the later phases of practice teaching with work on the master's thesis. At a meta-level, the study of teachers engaged in research and analyses of such activities have become an important field for theoretical research within the educational field (Ojanen, 1996; Bergem, Björkqvist, Hansén, Carlgren, & Hauge, 1997).

Besides the role of providing opportunities for a systematic way of achieving knowledge, the thesis writing also forms a central part of student teachers' process of learning to reflect, and thus prepares them for action guided by a gradually elaborated practical theory.

Since teacher education in Finland is firmly set within an academic framework, it is quite natural that the research interests of that academic community should include, to a large extent, the processes and problems associated with teacher education and teachers. A short look at some identifiable fields of research relating to teachers and teacher education reveals some areas where a more distinct profile has emerged during the last years (cf. Bergem, Björkqvist, Hansén, Carlgren, & Hauge, 1997):

- Research into teachers' thinking, besides being an internationally viable field of research, serves as a base of knowledge for teacher education itself. The concept of a "reflective teacher" includes a focus on pre-service as well as on in-service education. Concerning this field of research, researchers have been accused of neglecting the influence of the context on teacher's thinking.
- Another field of educational research directly relating to teacher education has concerned the concept of professionalism. The current focus of interest is related to two processes: the academisation of teacher education and the decentralisation of educational decision-making. This culture of new professionalism, which particularly values cooperation, interaction and communication as well as active personal learning as a professional tool, differs manifestly from a culture in which professionalism is defined in terms of teachers' individual actions directed mainly to classroom problems and tasks.
- The third field deals with interaction in the classroom and can be seen as a call for more systematic research efforts. The research on teacher behaviour is one of diminishing importance, at least temporarily. This can be seen as a consequence of a paradigmatic shift towards constructivist views of learning, that place the learner in the spotlight. Research on teacher

behaviour tends to focus on the teacher-learner interaction. There exists today a need for research which focuses on classroom interactions from a broad contextual perspective.

- A fourth field of research relates to the periodic renewal of national curricula which plays an important role in any country. This has been the case in Finland, and such research often includes a discussion of the role of the teacher in the implementation of the curriculum (Atjonen, 1993; Syrjäläinen, 1994). The newest Finnish curricula date from 1994. They reflect the clear transition to decentralised educational decision-making, being much less prescriptive than the previous ones. Formally, they give teachers considerable freedom in action, but the lack of even non-statutory guidance leads to the paradox that some teachers turn to traditional ways of teaching rather than make use of the acquired freedom. Teacher education needs to give priority to research related to this area in order to deepen the understanding about the conditions directing teachers' school-based curriculum work, and the translation of the curriculum objectives into practice.

## 2. Evaluation of Finnish teacher education

The latest evaluation of Finnish teacher education was carried out in 1992-94. In the national reports of the fifteen member states (Hansén, in Sander, Buchberger, Greaves & Kallós, 1996) I have already discussed the outcome of the evaluation. In this context I therefore only touch upon some of the discussed issues as a basis for the discussion about current plans to re-evaluate Finnish teacher education.

The evaluation 1992-94 was ambitious and consisted of four phases: self-evaluation of the departments of teacher education, site visits by the appointed evaluation team to the departments, international evaluation and a national evaluation seminar. The results were published in two reports (Kasvatusala kohti tulevaisuutta, 1994 and Buchberger et al., 1994). The first report emphasizes the importance of preserving and further elaborating a university based teacher education. The report accentuates the need of developing the curriculum, elaborating criteria for the recruitment of student teachers, and further developing the evaluation of teacher education. The international review team focused in its report on a number of problems: for instance, on the need for improving the integration of different elements constituting the content and structure of teacher education, on different problems concerning the relationship between subject studies and educational studies for subject matter student teachers, and on what is considered as a proportionally low share of subjects like psychology and political science in teacher education programmes.

Teacher education has also been paid attention to in the evaluation of the disciplines of the humanities and science. Among other issues, claims have been made to move part of teaching and posts from the departments of teacher education to departments of different disciplines. Another intention mentioned is that of elaborating a more flexible connection between theoretical studies and teacher practice, and to develop in-service training.

Also the Committee of Culture within the Finnish Parliament has expressed the needs of developing teacher education. The Committee has for instance called for the development of more reflective and critical practitioners, and for the improvement of teachers' readiness to cooperate with other teachers outside the classroom, with parents and other actors and actor groups outside the school.

Evaluation is seen as a topic of general importance at Finnish universities at the moment. The Government has stated in its developmental plan that all universities are to be evaluated between the years 1995-2000. The Finnish higher education evaluation council has in 1998 appointed a committee to plan a re-evaluation of Finnish teacher education during the years 1998-99 (Pro

Memoria 10/6/1998). The aim is to evaluate how the results of the previous evaluation (1992-94) have affected the development of teacher education. Subjects mathematics and science will also be included in the evaluation. The focus of the re-evaluation will be put on the programme which includes areas such as teaching, learning, studies, examinations, the recruitment of student teachers, the qualification of teacher educators, and educational structures. The overall aim of the evaluation is directed to the improvement of university evaluation in general. The attention will furthermore be directed towards the position of teacher education within the structure of the university's budgeting by results, and to the inner structures of the university which affect the development of teacher education as a part of the university.

The evaluation will be conducted by a steering group and organized into different phases consisting for instance of 1) document analysis, like previous evaluations, research about teacher education, the legislation, teacher education programmes etc.; 2) departments' internal evaluation; 3) external evaluation carried out through site visits, and finally 4) reporting.

The challenge for this kind of ambitious and large-scale evaluation approach is the question of how to carry out the evaluation in only approximately one year. On the other hand the idea of this kind of evaluation is to get the results in a reasonable time. Another demand is the problem of how to encourage the departments to cooperate, to harmonize and to make different kinds of data comparable. The most demanding challenge, though, is the problem of how to make sense of the results. An evaluation is only a diagnosis which itself does not contribute to the solution of problems within different institutional settings.

### **3. Concluding remarks**

In my up-date to the SIGMA-report, certain aspects of the present state of affairs of Finnish teacher education have been described and analysed. I have concentrated on two issues: changes and evaluation. The current changes discussed are not of a structural character. They are basically content oriented and aimed at further improving the quality of Finnish teacher education and, thus, contributing to teachers' further professional development. As earlier mentioned, a number of important areas have been left out, for instance, the actual debate about the enhancement of in-service education within the conception of life-long learning and various specificities. One is the expanding quest for the small country's need to offer a broad programme of language studies. Today there is a discussion going on about how to qualify teachers for immersion programmes where the target language is the language of instruction.

With the stabilisation of teacher education as an integrated part of the university, the scope of research gradually has become more global. The awareness of international research on teachers and teacher education has spread to large sections of the Finnish academic community, particularly as a result of the great number of master's theses produced each year. The intention here has not been to cover the topic fully but rather to give a subjective illustration of current trends in the development of Finnish teacher education. Beside the presented research areas remains a fair amount of research directed towards different educational areas, for instance, towards the solution of specific problems that might emerge in the developmental process at the local level.

## References:

- Atjonen, P. (1993) Kunnan opetussuunnitelma koulun hallinnollisen ja pedagogisen kehittämisen kohteena ja välineenä. Oulu: Kajaanin opettajankoulutuslaitos, Oulun yliopisto.
- Adams, A. & Tulasiewicz, W. (1995) The crisis in teacher education. A European concern. London: The Falmer Press.
- Bergem, T., Björkqvist, O. Hansén, S.-E., Carlgren, I. & Hauge, T.E. (1997) Research on teachers and teacher education in Scandinavia: a retrospective review. In: *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 41 (3-4), pp. 433-458.
- Education & research 2000. Development plan for education an university research for the period 1995-2000 (1996), Helsinki: Ministry of Education.
- Gonnie van Amelswoort, H.W.C. & Scheerens, J. (1996) International comparative indicators on teachers. Paper presented at the ECER-conference Seville, September 1996.
- Hansén, S.-E. (1997) Lärarutbildning och lärararbete i postmodern tid. *Kasvatus* 1/1997, pp. 13-23.
- Kansanen, P. (1997) Lärarutbildning i Sverige och Finland. *Utbildning och demokrati*, vol. 6, nr 1, pp. 65-83.
- Letter from the Ministry of Education 25.3.1998. Yliopistojen opettajankoulutuksen kehittämishankkeita vuosina 1997 ja 1998.
- Ojanen, S. (ed.) (1996) *Tutkiva opettaja 2*. Lahti: Helsingin yliopiston Lahden tutkimus- ja koulutuskeskus. Oppimateriaaleja 55.
- Pro Memoria 10.6.1998. Yliopistoissa annettavan opettajankoulutuksen arvioinnin projektisuunnitelma. Finnish higher education evaluation council.
- Sander, Th., Buchberger, F., Greaves, A. E. & Kallós, D. (eds.) (1996) *Teacher Education in Europe: evaluation and perspectives*. Osnabrück: Universität Osnabrück. In French: *La formation des enseignants en Europe: Evaluation et Perspectives*. Rapports nationaux préparés pour une Conférence Européenne à l'Université, Osnabrück, Allemagne, les 23-24. Juin 1995.
- Syrjäläinen, E. (1994) Koulukohtainen opetussuunnitelmatyö ja koulukulttuurin muutos. Helsinki: Helsingin yliopiston opettajankoulutuslaitos. *Tutkimuksia* 134.
- Tella, S. (ed.) (1996) *Teacher education in Finland. Present and future trends and challenges*. Helsinki: Department of Teacher Education, Vantaa Institute for Continuing Education, University of Helsinki. *Studia Paedagogica* 11