

## **THE FINNISH MODEL OF TEACHER EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>**

Reijo Laukkanen

*Ex-Counsellor of Education Board. University of Tampere (Finland)*

Finnish education system has got much publicity because of being on top in international PISA reviews. Therefore in Finland there have been huge amount of visiting groups trying to understand what the Finns have done otherwise e than others. During the years when I worked in the Finnish National Board of Education in Helsinki I personally met hundreds of researches, journalists, ministers, members of parliament, other politicians and civil servants from all over the world. One important issue was to tell that in Finland developing quality education has needed not one but several different efficient changes before it became to be a system as it looks like today. Always my list of those important elements included: First equity is basic value which means equal opportunities and fairness. Other important values are support and trust. We support rather than control. We trust our teachers and our teachers trust us. It has been important to get university researchers to work with state central education administration. It has been beneficial to increase openness and transparency. It has been essential to set high expectations to all students. It is necessary to know how to use financial resources efficiently to get the best possible return from them. You must support students who seem to fall behind others. Setting long term strategic objectives has been important. Competent teaching force, of-course, is the key.

Highly qualified teaching force is an important quality guarantee for any education system. Quality teachers persuade students' interest to studying and knowing. They give food for thought and imagination and know how to enhance learning. They open doors to the world. Investing in teachers is perhaps the best way to improve education quality.

Teachers need comprehension of the issues and, subjects taught. However that is not enough that they need because being a good professional teacher requires also expertise in teaching, studying and learning. Teacher should improve students' abilities to understand and use theories for practical solutions. Being able to do that teacher should also have some understanding of educational research findings. That is what teacher educators in Finland say.

Today teachers' work is more and more demanding because of continuous changes in society, because of behavioral problems in classes and because of for example that there are more and more parents who challenge teacher's choices. It is good to notice that all parents have some kind of understanding of who is a good teacher. Opinions differ but many adults, like me, remember teachers who were strong personalities, and a little bit strange. They made a big influence also in my mind. Some of them also were able to raise my interest in what they taught. I want to tell this because the personality is a very strong instrument for any teacher. My opinion is that all teachers can make their own charisma if they build their behavior on their true believes and personality. It is really important that we have teacher individuals

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(hopefully in all schools) who can inspire students to find new openings and new practices and research findings.

However, it is problematic that teaching at schools is more and more hard. We have seen much news about teachers leaving their teaching jobs in many countries, though not in Finland. Same applies with the school heads. It is more and more difficult to recruit them and keep them in the posts. Therefore for instance the European Commission has made special recommendations to the governments to handle this problem.

In Finland researchers of teacher education are quite unanimous of the presents demands for teachers. Jouni Välijärvi (2006, 21 -22) describes the present situation in Finland as follows:

First: Teachers' work is continuous intellectual, social and emotional cooperation with students, colleagues and parents. It is increasingly also cooperation with the rest of the society. Development of information systems has given possibilities to create new learning environments. Teachers can nowadays be seen more and more as knowledge workers. One of the special features in teachers work is ethical consciousness of how to build connection to the new learning environments so that it best support balanced development of students. The ethical approach means that the best of each student is the highest criteria as teacher makes his/her decisions in teaching. It is interesting to tell that also Teacher's Union emphasizes that teacher's work must be based on a strong value base where essential is human dignity, verity and fairness (Niemi 2006, 84).

Second: At the same time also requirements to teachers grow. And these requirements are contradictory. Schools are asked to create new readiness to use new learning environments as leaning sources but at the same time to concentrate to practicing in traditional skills and knowledge. Also demands to take broader responsibility of social or character education grow. All these developments make more and more stress to teachers.

Third: In teachers' work professionalism is emphasized. Professionalism means that teacher has ability to work independently and autonomously trusting on his/her own competence. Professionalism means to be free from outside steering, but also to be able to recognize the changing demands of the society and be ready to cooperate with different actors.

Forth: In knowledge society and knowledge economy, the basis is knowledge, that changes with more and more increasing pace. Therefore lifelong learning qualities and skills are utmost important for the teaching profession. Teacher education makes basis for that. Teachers need skills for their own choices, independent thinking, creative planning of teaching and experimenting with different pedagogical choices.

The great public trusts that teaching profession bases on high moral and ethical principles. It is interesting to tell that as an initiative of the Teacher Union an ethical council for the teaching profession was established in 2000. It is an independent organization that published the first ethical principles in 2000.

However, I don't want to give an over romantic view from Finland. Theory and practice doesn't totally meet. Teacher's work is often seen to be lonely work behind the closed classroom doors. But this is the same issue in most of the world, I suppose. However, much of that attitude has changed with the younger teacher age groups. I suppose, that might be the result of their modern education.

## **EDUCATION SYSTEM OF FINLAND**

Preprimary education is not compulsory for children but however almost 100 % of children participate in that education. Teaching is not divided into subjects. Teachers are educated in universities. There they reach Bachelor of Arts level examination.

Basic education is compulsory for all. Ability grouping was used before in mathematics and foreign languages but it was abolished in 1985. Teaching heterogeneous groups is one of the big challenges that teachers have at the lower secondary education. The government decides on general objectives and distribution of lesson hours. The Finnish National Board of Education decides on the National Core Curriculum. All teachers study at universities to get Masters' Degree.

In general upper secondary education national ruling follows the same lines as in basic education. A specialty is that curriculum is constructed to last 3 years but the students may complete it in 2 to 4 years. After completed all courses students participate in national matriculation examination. Teachers are educated in universities.

Initial vocational education bases on completed basic education. It is institution based. Adults can get their vocational qualification by competence based tests. Teacher education program consists of 60 credits, it is, one year of full study, and includes basic studies in educational sciences, vocational pedagogy studies, teaching practice and other studies. Eligibility to studies requires: relevant university or polytechnics degree and, a minimum of three years' work experience in field corresponding to the degree. Teachers are educated in Polytechnics.

In order to understand the flexibility of the Finnish educational system it is advisable to follow the arrows in the chart of the system. At the upper secondary education level one can study at the same time in both education sectors, general and vocational. Most schools are publicly run. In general education private sector is marginal. Teachers are hired by municipalities. Teacher's posts are published in newspapers and individual teachers apply to posts where they want to work.

Education is free of tuition fees at all levels of education. Learning materials, school meal, school transportation etc. are totally free in pre-primary and primary education. In Upper-secondary institutions students pay their books and learning materials.

## **TEACHING FORCE**

Since 1974, teacher education for all teachers in basic education has been arranged at universities. Before that, primary school teachers were educated at teacher-training colleges.<sup>2</sup> In 1979, primary school teacher education was also upgraded to the level of a Master's degree. The purpose of this modification was to unify the core aspects of primary and secondary school education and to develop an academically high standard of education for prospective teachers. Teacher education for the secondary school level was also reformed expanding

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<sup>2</sup> Teacher education before that, see Kansanen 2003.

the scope of pedagogical studies. (Niemi & Jakku-Sihvonen 2006). Competition for teacher education specially for primary education is really hard because only around 10 - 15% of applicants are accepted. Thus, it is fair to say that teaching work is popular. We also have seen that a career as a teacher in Finland is the most popular choice amongst those leaving upper secondary education. This was confirmed in a poll carried out by Helsingin Sanomat, the biggest newspaper in Finland (Liiten 2004).

Why is the teaching profession so popular? Teachers' salaries in Finland are only at the average level in international comparisons, so this cannot be the explanation (Table 2). My own guess is that the high popularity is the result of four things. 1) All Finnish teachers in basic education and general upper secondary schools complete an academic Master's degree either in education or in one or two teaching subjects. Academic education is respected. If teachers' education was still based at colleges, it might not be so popular. 2) Finnish teachers enjoy significant autonomy in organizing their work. Due to decentralization, Finnish schools do have plenty of autonomy in terms of the organization of instruction, personnel management, planning and structures and, deciding on the use of resources. 3) In Finland, education has been respected through its history. Thus, teachers have also enjoyed considerable respect. 4) Teachers are satisfied with their position. A review published in June 2012 revealed that teachers are the most satisfied professional group in Finland (HS 2012).

## **HOW TO GET IN TEACHER EDUCATION?**

As we talk about teacher education that is given to general education teachers the basic requirement is that applicants have passed Upper Secondary Schools and the National Matriculation Examination.

The entrance examination to teacher education has 2 steps.

1) Participation in national entrance examination that bases on given pedagogical material - book that the applicant have to read. All who want to apply to have teacher education can participate in this test in a given day.

2) After the test the best performers are invited to an one day interview to the university where the candidates have sent their application. This is organized and planned individually by each university so there are different variants. In the University of Helsinki this spring the process has been the following:

Around 20 minutes before the individual interview the candidate gets a pedagogical text that is general or related to a school subject. The interview lasts 15 minutes and bases on the text mentioned and on the information given in the application form.

The interview team consists of members from both the faculty of education and the faculty of the subject area if the case is of subject teachers. They look at 3 issues: motivation, interaction skills and how realistic are the

candidate's plans. More generally said the interview tries to examine suitability to teacher's career.

The importance of this intake process can be seen for instance by the University of Tampere's primary school teacher selection. The upper secondary school report marks and the Matriculation examination marks give only 20 % of the possible entrance points. Thus 80 % can be gained by performing well in the entrance examination and the interview. This is to say that suitability to teaching work is really strong criteria in Finland as students are taken to teacher education. The best of the best are those who have the possibility to have teacher's education in Finland.

Finland has regulations on Bachelor's and Master's degrees that apply to all examinations. Master's degree includes:

- 1) good overall knowledge of the major subject or a corresponding entity and conversance with the fundamentals of the minor subject or good knowledge of the advanced studies included in the degree program;
- 2) knowledge and skills needed to apply scientific knowledge and scientific methods or knowledge and skills needed for independent and demanding artistic work;
- 3) knowledge and skills needed to independently operate as an expert and developer of the field;
- 4) knowledge and skills needed for scientific or artistic postgraduate education, and
- 5) good language and communication skills. (Degree 2004/794, 12 §, 626, Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi 2006, 19-20)

## **PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS**

We can see that primary education teacher studies follow the general rule that we saw in the former slide. In the University of Jyväskylä the primary school teacher education program for a master's degree consists of the following studies (Asunta, 2006, p 140):

1)	Language and communication studies	25	
2)	Basic studies in education	25	
3)	Intermediate studies in education	35	
4)	Advanced studies in education	80	
5)	Multidisciplinary school subject studies	60	
6)	Minor subject studies	60	
7)	elective courses		15
TOTAL		300 CREDITS	
No 2 +3 Including 12 ECTS credits from teaching practice			
No 4 Including 16 ECTS credits from teaching practice			
One credit is around 25 – 30 hours of work			

Education is divided into two parts: bachelor's education and master's education. During the both periods students have to make written theses. However that division to two parts has no practical meaning, because a teacher without a master's degree cannot get any permanent teaching work in Finnish schools.

Education consists of theory of education, pedagogical studies and some subject didactics. Education is looked from several perspectives: education sociology, education psychology, curriculum theories and practices, student assessment, pedagogical approaches and special needs education.

## **SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS**

There are two ways of becoming a secondary school teacher. The majority of students complete a Master's degree in their subject and after that they apply for teacher education. However some apply already during their subject studies for teacher education. Those who use that latter way they usually start teacher education after their second year of education. (Kansanen 2007). The Finnish Teachers' Union's opinion is that applying for teacher education early is more recommendable because it supports the teacher identity development. (OAJ 2008, 5)

Those who study in secondary teacher education line have to complete pedagogical studies which take the minimum of 60 credits. It means one year full time studies in the faculty of education. Studies are integrated to the master's program or they are separate. These studies also include teaching practice minimum of 15 credits.

## **TEACHING PRACTICE**

Finnish teacher education integrates theory and practice. The aim of the supervised teaching practice is to give to students professional skills: how to reflect their own doing, how to handle in social situations, how to put into practice the research and evaluation theories that they have got. This process forwards step by step giving the student teacher gradually more and more responsibility of the process.

Practicing is organized in so called "normal schools", which belong to the organization of universities. Teachers of these teacher training schools guide and supervise teacher students. Practicing is organized after normal school also in municipal schools that have made agreement and accepted certain principles of responsibilities with the local university.

Studying in teacher training schools starts with observation of lessons. Those observations are discussed with their teachers. Students observe also their colleagues teacher students. Students learn to plan their lessons and after realized lesson they get critics from their supervisors.

## **MAIN IDEA IS IN RESEARCH-BASED APPROACH**

Finnish teachers are well acquainted not only with various teaching approaches and methods but also with educational research. That is one of the benefits of that teacher education is carried out in university departments of teacher education within faculties of education. Pertti Kansanen explains this by arguing that “[t]he basic aim of every teacher education program is to educate competent teachers and develop the necessary professional qualities to ensure lifelong teaching careers for teachers” (Kansanen 2003, 89). This means that teachers must have a good basis for lifelong learning within their profession. Therefore, teacher education is research-based in Finland. “The aim of research-based teacher education is to impart the ability to make educational decisions based on rational argumentation in addition to everyday or intuitional argumentation” (ibid, 90).

Finnish teacher education is to educate teachers for their lifelong teaching career. “Behind this idea is the belief that initial teacher education is of paramount importance and any defects arising during it are extremely difficult to correct afterwards. In-service teacher education is naturally inevitable, but the basis for professional competence is laid during the initial teacher education.” (Kansanen 2007,132). This is to say, that if we want our teachers succeed well as long as they teach, teacher educators in Finland see it inevitable to arrange properly reasoned high level teacher education for all who participate in their programs. Universities are independent to decide on the contents of their teacher education curricula, but because of the Bologna process planning that changed the system, all universities share a common understanding of the teacher education structure, but also see quite similarly the philosophical basis and the contents of teacher education (Niemi & Jakku-Sihvonen 2007).

Lifelong learning is nowadays perhaps the most central international signal that directs beliefs of countries as they make general plans to develop the whole education systems. The OECD recognises four main features that make lifelong learning so important (OECD 2004): 1) It represents systemic view covering the whole education system, the whole lifecycle and all forms of formal and informal learning. 2) Learners are in the center, which means shift from supply side to demand site in order to meet learners’ needs. 3) Motivation to learn is important to be able to learn through self paced and self directed learning. 4) It suits well to multiple objectives of education policy (eg. personal goals, knowledge development). It also sees that priority of those objectives may change during an individual’s lifetime.

Lifelong learning includes all learning: formal learning (in educational institutions), nonformal learning (organized for example in workplaces) and informal learning (learning from work or from everyday settings). As Tynjälä and Heikkinen describe those concepts they emphasize learning through work process, by tackling new challenges, cooperating with colleagues, through formal education and training etc. “Thus, learning and professional development of teachers should be seen as a continuing process combining formal, nonformal and informal learning throughout the career.” (Tynjälä and Heikkinen 2011, 27).

In research-based teacher education teaching is the core but teacher must be familiar with instruction process: it is the teaching – studying – learning process. (Kansanen 2007)

Research-based approach means that teacher education programs should be built systematically. Building program systematically means that the program has some basic believes to guide its organizing and that there are principles to selection of the program content. Finnish universities have much common understanding of the research-based approach idea but they differ in contents and breath of their programs. (Ibid)

Research-based approach is a principle that combines all the studies in research in some way. Aim is to educate reflective teachers who understand research-based evidence and see how it connects to their own work. Continuing research method courses are included in the program already from the beginning of studies. (Ibid)

Idea is that teachers have general understanding of research methods and are able to use some of them actively. The goal of the teacher education program is not to give professional researcher competences. However they reach knowledge to think and act according the research evidence. (Ibid)

Also the teaching practice is connected to research. All practice periods are combined with theoretical studies that relate to the topic of the practice period. (Ibid)

Let's take here an example from the University of Helsinki. For subject teacher education they had 4 moduls (Meri 2005):

Modul 1 includes psychology of development and learning, special needs education, and theoretical, psychological, and didactic basis of teaching and learning a subject.

Modul 2 includes seminar on teaching methods and planning and supervised teaching practice in Teacher Training School;

Modul 3 includes Social, historical and philosophical basis of education. Furthermore there is a seminar on curriculum work and evaluation of learning and teaching. There is also teaching practice.

Modul 4 includes "Teacher as a researcher" seminar and teaching practice

## **IN-SERVICE TRAINING**

The purpose of continuing professional education is to maintain and update teachers' pedagogical skills. Responsibility for teachers' in-service training mainly rests with employers. They have an obligation to provide teachers with a minimum of three days of training every year. That is arranged according to the agreement between the teachers union and the central authority of the municipalities. This training is provided free of charge for teachers, who also receive full pay for their training days. This is what is the obligation to all teachers (Ministry of Education 2008; Asunta 2006).

The in-service courses are organized by the schools themselves, by the municipal authority, by universities' in-service training centers or by regional or national state organizations. For instance the City of Espoo organizes around 200 in-service programs in a year for different teacher categories. These include e.g. information technology, pedagogy, environmental issues and proficiency in the contents of various school subjects (Espoo 2012).

Most of in-service education organized outside the municipality demands extra funding. The problem is that there are many municipalities that have not enough funds to pay travel costs, pay for substitute teachers and participation fees and, thus their teachers cannot enter to those rich courses. However, there is also government funded free-of-charge in-service education to promote implementation of education policy reforms, for instance curriculum changes. Some that kind of training the state organizes also for the teacher educators.

In general teachers are eager to development themselves in summer university courses or having other further studies in universities. However, in Finland, as anywhere, there can be seen the phenomenon that some teachers are very eager to attend much to various in-service courses and, also some teachers are not so ready to participate in them.

## **TEACHER'S PROFESSIONALISM**

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) say that teacher's professional capital include three elements: human capital, social capital and decision making capital. That is an interesting definition. Now I don't talk what they say about the different elements but look at them what others say about them.

Human capital is often seen as the synonym of examinations, knowledge and skills. But it is also something else. According to Beatriz Pont and Patric Werquin (2001) important is ability to lead people, ability to work in groups, and skill to strive to commonly set goals. Important is also motivation and willingness to stick to work, ability to learn more and solve problems, ability to communicate efficiently and readiness to make analyses.

OECD (2001) sees that social capital consists of networks and common norms, values and agreements, which enhance inner cooperation in a group and cooperation between groups. Differing from human capital social capital is not seen as a quality of an individual but the social relations. Trust is the source and the product of social capital.

Hargreaves and Fullan say that making decisions in a complex situations is what professionalism is all about. I can agree with them.

In Finland we have writers talking about making educational decisions. One of them, Matti Meri (2005), says that it is about to choosing between alternatives. The decision can be unconscious and intuitive or conscious and rational. Important decision making chain is: planning – interaction – evaluation –process. Reflection includes: reflection-in-action (formative evaluation), reflection-on-action (summative evaluation) and reflection-for-action (prognostic evaluation).

Matti Meri (2005) says that the core competences of a teacher are self-confidence, creativity, meta-cognitive skills, skills to direct interaction and ability to create teaching-studying-learning environments.

Hannele Niemi (2012) collects together what is demanded from highly academic and ethical teacher professionals: "1) Teachers have to take an active role in raising serious questions about what they teach, how they teach, and the larger goals for which they are striving. 2) Teachers need to view themselves as public intellectuals who combine conception and implementation, thinking and practice in the struggle for

a culture of democratic values and justice. 3) Teachers have a right and an obligation to articulate educational needs and challenges in the society they serve. 4) They also have to be active in public debates and decisions affecting the development of schools and education. 5) As professionals, teachers cannot only be implementers of decisions, but must also be partners in the development. 6) Teachers are expected to be able to take an active role in evaluating and improving schools and their learning environments. 7) They are also expected to refresh their professional skills, to cooperate with parents and other stakeholders, and to be active citizens.”

I really can agree with her.

### **THE FINNISH MODEL?**

The OECD says that Finnish teacher education has at least four distinguishing qualities (Schleicher 2012):

- 1) Research based
- 2) Strong focus on developing pedagogical content knowledge
- 3) Good training for all Finnish teachers in diagnosing students with learning difficulties and adapting teaching to different learning needs.
- 4) A very strong clinical component.

This is the Finnish teacher education model in the nutshell.