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Title: From individuality towards co-operative culture : New direction for professional development in Finnish teacher education

Year: 2021

Version: Accepted version (Final draft)

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Please cite the original version:

Rautiainen, M., & Kostiainen, E. (2021). From individuality towards co-operative culture : New direction for professional development in Finnish teacher education. In B. Klopsch, & A. Anne Sliwka (Eds.), *Kooperative Professionalität : Internationale Ansätze der ko-konstruktiven Unterrichtsentwicklung* (pp. 63-73). Beltz Juventa.

From individuality towards co-operative culture: New direction for professional development in Finnish teacher education

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Introduction

The professional identity of the Finnish teacher has traditionally been built around individuality and autonomy. Accordingly, the role of teacher education has been to ensure that all teachers are capable of being autonomous professionals in classrooms. This goal has been reinforced by teachers' extremely wide autonomy and pedagogical freedom. In Finland, teachers' contracts are structured according to their lessons, and only two hours each week are assigned for collaborative work among teachers, which is very little considering the increasing expectations for teachers' cooperation in school. In practice, these two hours can be used in different ways in schools, such as for community building defined by the head teacher or for practical, teacher-driven activities (see more, Rautiainen & Kostiainen, 2018).

The culture of teachers' individuality has been largely criticised over the last 20 years. Alongside traditional schools, various experiments, both in schools and in teacher education, have sought to create a new culture based on cooperation and collaboration. There are several reasons for this. First, the paradigmatic shift in learning that began in the 1990s led to the proliferation of learner-centred and collaborative approaches in Finland, including new theoretical perspectives in research. Second, educational policies, such as increasing the autonomy in the educational system and developing curricula, have emphasised the development of a community-based and collaborative approach. Third, multi-professional cooperation has been supported by legislation. Teachers alone are unable to solve the issues they face in everyday life in school (see more, Yee, Sliwka & Rautiainen, 2018).

The role of teacher education in the Finnish educational system is special. Its scope is to educate students on the prevailing school conditions and, at the same time, to create utopias for a new future. In Finland, the development of teacher education takes place as part of autonomous universities. Therefore, the universities themselves are responsible for developing academic teacher training programmes. The Ministry of Education and Culture finances universities and guides them via educational policies, creating a framework by

legislation and different projects; however, universities themselves make decisions concerning the programmes and content of curricula. In this article, we present how teacher education has been developed at the Department of Teacher Education, University of Jyväskylä, towards a teaching culture based on cooperation.

Think big, act bold

Over the past 15 years, the operational culture of teacher education at the University of Jyväskylä has been developed in terms of long-term planning, promoting a communal and experimental culture and vision work (see Picture 1). Because of this work, the following procedures have progressed in the operational culture of the Department of Teacher Education (Hökkä et al., 2019; Silander et al., 2014; Tarnanen & Kostianen, 2020):

- leadership and teaching are based on teamwork,
- the curriculum has been changed to a phenomenon-based curriculum,
- experimental culture has been reinforced,
- structures are reorganised to support communal and cooperative cultures,
- the role of students as members of the community has been strengthened and
- research-based teacher education has been strengthened.



Picture 1. The Department of Teacher Education's vision of teacher education at the University of Jyväskylä.

The development work focused especially on the concepts of society, communality, phenomenon-based curriculum (and learning), exploratory learning and interaction. Picture 1 depicts this culture as utopia. The orientation towards the future is central in all development activities, strongly reflecting the idea of teacher education from the idea of utopian education, including both utopian thinking and attempts to make utopia possible through different experiments.

Common school – Common mission

As we described above, the teaching profession in Finland has a strong tradition of individuality. This is particularly strong among subject teachers, where the professional identity is built around the sub-cultures of each subject (Ylijoki, 1998). This trend was strengthened in the 1970s, when the national core curriculum for basic education took a turn towards individualisation, with a strong focus on achieving learning goals in each subject. Although subject-teacher cultures were already differentiated in grammar schools in the 19th century, since the 1970s, this subject orientation has also been strong in basic education. In

the late 1990s, subject-teacher education was practically studied within all subject groups. Encounters with students from different subject groups were random, and volunteer meetings, not practices and structures, were organised by the educational institution (Rautiainen, 2008).

At the beginning of the 21st century, the reform of subject-teacher education in the University of Jyväskylä started by creating so-called mixed student groups. Mixed groups comprise students from different subject groups – in other words, mixed groups could be called a teachers’ room inside pedagogical studies. Reform aimed to highlight the common expertise of subject teachers alongside subject-oriented studies. Nowadays, mixed groups are an integral part of the structure of subject-teacher education (see Figure 1).

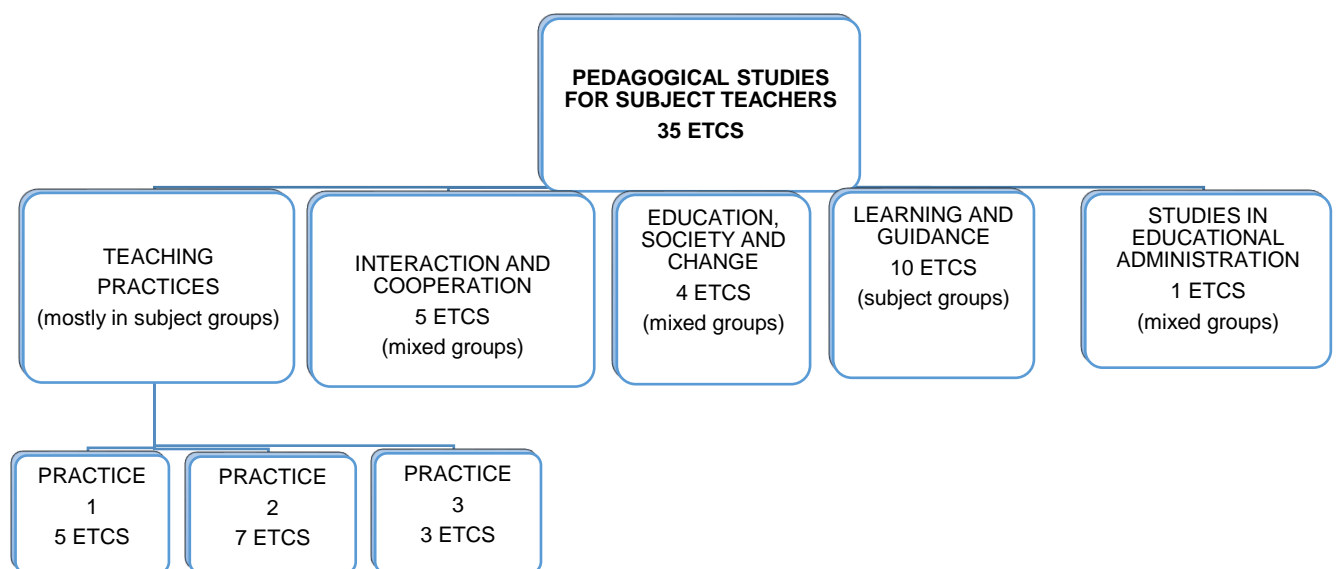


Figure 1. Pedagogical studies for the subject–student teacher in the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Jyväskylä in 2020.

Two phenomenon-based course modules, *Interaction and Cooperation* and *Education, Society and Change*, are studied in mixed groups, as they most strongly resonate with the professional skills, attitudes, knowledge and values connecting teachers. Interaction and cooperation are central concepts when building a community and a democratic way of life (Kostiainen, Klemola & Maylor, 2017). School and education, on the one hand, are social institutions that depend on the surrounding society; on the other hand, school and education can and must play a proactive role when developing society.

The course module *Interaction and Cooperation* explores the basics of interaction, especially from the group work perspective, including inclusive education. The course module *Education, Society and Change* continues students’ work in mixed groups. During this course

module, students must implement a project based on the idea developed and planning done in their mixed student group. The objective of the project is to gain an empowering experience that encourages continued collaboration in their future work as a teacher. In their project, students must also promote democracy, equality or participation in the educational context selected by the mixed student group. Most of the groups select a school context. Teacher educators introduce three key concepts – democracy, equality and participation – as they represent the important aims of Finnish educational policy and the curricula of teacher education programmes. These key concepts are introduced to students via lectures and in the literature that students read before their projects start in mixed groups. These are the frames given to students by the team of teacher educators. The project itself is solely student-driven. Next, we introduce one of the projects implemented in 2019.

Students in one group selected equality as their key concept and decided to implement ‘equality markets’ in the spirit of Augusto Boal’s *Invisible Theatre* (2002) in primary school. The group found two teachers who were interested in this idea, and they conducted two experiments in two different schools. The idea of equality markets is based on the idea that pupils will attend different workshops where they study the concept of equality from different perspectives. After each workshop, the teacher will give prizes to pupils based on their success in the workshop. In other words, there was heavy competition between the groups of pupils, and the prizes were awarded not according to their success based on principles such as justice and equality but according to arbitrary decisions made by teachers. At the end of the equality markets, the results were displayed, which led to behaviours of anger by the pupils, who found it difficult to tolerate the injustice they felt over the arbitrary awarding of prizes. As a learning experience, the experiment was successful. After the student group revealed the idea behind their experiment, the conversation that took place with the pupils was meaningful both for them and for the student teachers.

In their reflective essays, the student teachers described how the project, and the mixed group working together as an entity, encouraged and gave certainty and meaning to the cooperation in the teachers’ work. In the early 2000s, students were curious and interested in cooperation with other subject teachers, but they did not value it as much as they valued the studies of the pedagogy of their own subjects. Over the past 20 years, this situation has changed. Studies in mixed groups are just as valued as studies of the pedagogy of students’ own subjects. Year after year, the students describe the studies in mixed groups as an eye-opening experience for the possibilities of cooperation between different subject teachers.

Experimenting towards deeper cooperation

Projects in student teacher mixed groups are part of the experimental culture that the Department of Teacher Education, University of Jyväskylä, has been implementing for over a decade to promote a cooperative and collaborative culture. However, at the beginning of their pedagogical studies, students are often not eager to experiment with a new approach; instead, they are more likely to be conservative when describing their thoughts and attitudes. Thus, studies and the ethos behind the studies have to be forced upon students so that they take on this new experience together. This is also the basic idea behind the phenomenon-based curriculum in teacher education, which is the approach of observing an event, or phenomenon, from a multi-faceted viewpoint together with students and thus instigating students to critically think outside their comfort zones (Curriculum Plans, 2014-2017; Kostiainen & Rautiainen, 2020). Next, we will describe how this idea has been implemented in history studies.

History, which is a 4 ECTS course, is one of the subjects studied in the class teacher programme's multi-curricular studies. The main objective for studying history is to understand the nature of history, especially from the perspectives of interpretations and identity. Students also study inquiry-based learning in history. In practice, students first study relevant literature to better understand these approaches. Next, they discuss the literature in small groups supervised by the teacher educator. Here, students should understand why inquiry-based learning in history is being taught in teacher education and schools. Students also implement a project in school based on inquiry-based learning. An important aim of this project is to find new approaches for teaching history using, for example, games, escape rooms and/or mysteries (Rautiainen, 2020). For example, the mystery of Minna Canth was one of these projects implemented in 2019. Minna Canth (1844–1897) was a Finnish author and feminist. An exhibition celebrating her 175th birth anniversary was held at the Jyväskylä University Museum in 2019; our students created a mystery game for the exhibition. The mystery was based on the question: What was the most important question Minna was trying to answer throughout her life? The answer was inside a locked box that could only be unlocked by a four-digit code that pupils had to uncover. 'Minna Canth' helped pupils by giving them tips via four audio recordings, where she spoke about her life; the recordings ended with the question that the pupils had to find in the exhibition – this was not done directly, like solving a typical math problem, but by reasoning. A benefit of this game was that it was also open to all visitors at the Jyväskylä University Museum.

The entire project, from the coursework, to reading the literature, to the project assessment, was a collaborative effort. The students reported that they thought the course, especially the project, was very challenging and important when thinking about their professional development during their first two years of studies. When cooperatively developing experimental culture and atmosphere, the most important elements emphasise both strong student-centred orientation and challenging the student intellectually. The main idea of 'ethos' in teacher education is to create and implement approaches and skills so that students can construct an intellectual teacher community, one that studies core questions such as why school exists. This new way of professional development should be implemented during initial teacher education and not in the future.

Student teachers and teachers learning together

Finland currently has many ongoing development projects at the national level, which aim to promote stronger collegial culture both in teacher education and in schools. According to the Teaching and Learning International Survey, teachers in Finland work in a culture of trust and have high levels of autonomy and individuality, but their involvement is low. Finland is among four other EU countries where teachers self-reported very low participation in continuous professional development (OECD, 2013). It can be presumed that the traditional in-service training for teachers, which usually involves expert lectures or short refresher courses of some current theme, fails to strengthen the collaborative teacher identity and the development of novel pedagogical practice and thinking. In many cases, the in-service training also enables teachers to take on a more passive role as a mere recipient of information and not as an active creator of common understanding. This in turn reduces teachers' attempts to act as a learning community (Haymore-Sandholtz, 2002; Tarnanen, 2018; Tarnanen et al., 2019).

The national Finnish Teacher Education Forum is a developmental programme for teachers' pre- and in-service education. It supports the implementation of the national reform programme (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). In the spring of 2017, the Ministry of Education and Culture (2018) awarded nearly 15 million euro in grants to 11 coordinating universities for projects to develop teacher education. One of the aims of the Forum is to promote collaboration in teacher education and in schools. The University of Jyväskylä is leading one of the projects to develop teacher education called Promoting Creative Expertise – Bridging Pre-service and In-service Teacher Education (PCE) (Tarnanen, 2018; Tarnanen

et al., 2020). It is a joint project between four Finnish universities. The project aims to support the development of professional teacher learning and to enhance the agency of and new collaborative culture between student teachers, teacher educators and school teachers within the cooperating schools. A secondary aim of the project is to involve the principals, school students and education providers in the development work. Further, the focus is on cross-cutting themes in teaching and learning, especially multiliteracy and language awareness, professional learning, a research-oriented approach to working and cross-curricular cooperation (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018; Tarnanen et al., 2019). The project is based on the idea of systems thinking, peer learning and a research-based approach (Senge et al., 2012; Zmuda, Kuklis & Kline, 2004).

Within the PCE project, various learning modules promoting collaborative professional learning have been implemented in the cooperating schools. In the project, the student teachers, teachers and teacher educators together plan, implement and evaluate a module based on their shared learning and development needs. Currently, there is a great need for improving pedagogical practices in interdisciplinary learning modules. The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education requires that all schools should plan and provide at least one interdisciplinary learning module for every student per school year (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016). Hence, for example, in one joint PCE project, 250 students (from Grade 5 to Grade 8), 25 teachers, 23 student teachers and 4 teacher educators implemented a multidisciplinary learning module promoting inquiry-based learning and multiliteracy skills. The school students worked in mixed-age groups for one week, and the group of teachers (student teacher, teacher and teacher educator) guided the students. The project was research-based, and the findings support the idea that the pedagogy of interdisciplinary learning should be developed in collaboration in both pre- and in-service education to enhance the expertise and professional learning of teachers (Tarnanen et al., 2019).

Student teachers and teachers have the opportunity for an equally collegial relationship both in the pre- and in-service phases of their careers. Therefore, in joint projects, it is essential that the learning community includes student teachers, teachers and teacher educators who are learning with and from each other. This provides an opportunity to consider the school community's contextual characteristics that are limited in traditional professional development approaches for teachers and that remain limited in traditional teaching practices for student teachers. Stronger collegial relationships also enable engagement in discussions,

reflections and observations, which have proven to be necessary for longstanding changes to professional development and practice (Tarnanen, 2018; Tarnanen et al., 2019).

Discussion

In Finland, teacher education is research-based. This means that the practical aspects and theoretical basis of teachers' work are complementary to each other, not contradictory. Moreover, research orientation means, above all, testing and extending one's knowledge and understanding through empirical observation and critical reflection. Therefore, both teacher educators and student teachers act as researchers of teachers' work and search for new information, deeper understanding and a shared vision of the school. From the beginning of courses on teacher education studies, it is important to promote and share the understanding that the roles in collegial relationships – among student teachers, teacher educators and school teachers – are equal, not hierarchical.

As we describe in this article, in addition to traditional teaching practices in teacher training schools, various projects are organised in schools, where student teachers can practice different types of skills and foster the abilities suited to their profession. This is extremely important because, as Loughran (2006, 42) aptly remarks, 'teacher education is where all students of teaching should learn to challenge their deeply held views of teaching and learning; so often implicit in practice but so rarely articulated, confronted and examined'. In this sense, student teachers develop explorative questions for themselves and have a special focus that they observe, explore and reflect on during the various projects in schools.

The aim of the pedagogy, various training and project experiences in schools is to foster meaningful learning in teacher education. In this sense, meaningful teacher education is not isolated from the surrounding environment; rather, it aims to provide contextualised and authentic practices that resonate with the actual challenges teachers face in their work. Because these contextual features are likely to vary with regularity, teacher education needs to remain up to date with the developments in education and society (Kostiainen & Pöysä-Tarhonen, 2019).

Finally, various practices of how our student teachers work in schools with the teachers and students are possible because the phenomenon-based curricula in our teacher education programme emphasise process goals and the in-depth understanding of the relationships between educational phenomena rather than emphasising the specific pedagogical or subject-specific contents to be learnt. Furthermore, teacher education needs to be cognizant of the

boundaries traditionally set between theory and practice, to acknowledge that these boundaries are not fixed or unalterable and to reflect on the purposes behind them (Kostiainen & Pöysä-Tarhonen, 2019; Loughran, 2006).

We emphasise that teacher education should prepare students to be the experts of pedagogic practice who are willing and capable of developing their own professional skills in collaborative and continuing processes throughout their working career. To this end, different kinds of collaborative activities and projects give insight into understanding schools as a system and considering school practices from different perspectives.

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