

Title of proposal

Upskilling of academics' pedagogical professionalism: Trainers' and participants' experiences of university pedagogical courses

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First and second choice network

Network 22. Research in Higher Education

Network 10. Teacher Education Research

Network 1. Professional Learning and development

Some networks will ask for identifying sub-themes

University pedagogical training/courses; University teachers' professional development;

Experiences of trainers and participants of the university pedagogical courses

3 - 5 keywords

University teachers, higher education, professional development; pedagogical training

General description on research questions, objectives and theoretical framework

Traditionally good researchers were often regarded also as good teachers. This has changed, and many universities require from their staff completion of university pedagogical training (Ödalen et al., 2019) to foster their competences in teaching, strengthen their capacity to renew learning cultures (e.g., Hanbury et al., 2008) and develop collaborative forms of working/teaching practices (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). At the same time, pedagogical training is expected to respond to global, societal and working life needs (e.g., digitalisation, internationalisation, sustainability) (e.g., Mader et al., 2017; O'Dowd, 2018).

There are many drivers creating a setting for implementation of university pedagogical courses such as various policies, strategic recommendations and contextual factors that create a setting in which updating teachers' competencies takes place. Work and teaching cultures, resources and university governance systems are examples of the factors that frame university teachers' possibilities for employment and development as teacher and for career progression and incentives (Turk, 2015). Some earlier research has pointed to changes happening in HE towards appreciation of research at universities, and consequently undermining teaching activities at the same time and stressing career progression based on research merits (e.g., Jääskelä et al., 2017). Pedagogical leadership, understanding pedagogical processes on the management level, teachers' possibilities to allocate their time for development of teaching and proceed their teaching career have been identified as some of supportive conditions for development of teaching and appreciation of teaching on institutional level (Alpay & Verschoor, 2014; Jääskelä et al., 2017). Non-appreciation of teaching and precarious character of academic work have found to be linked to contradictory emotions, stress and workload (Ursin et al, 2020), which, in turn, have shown to decrease well-being and productivity (e.g., Hökkä et al., 2020). Some practices based on collaboration, such as

dialogue, and sharing ideas and expertise, have been identified as promising to increase the sense of meaningful learning and teaching (Riivari et al., 2020). However, deep collaboration ‘by design’ requires some favourable conditions including time resources and involvement (Jalkanen & Nikula, 2020). Supporting of teacher’s agency and expertise development, especially professional agency developed and manifested by groups of individuals together (collective agency) has been identified of importance for professional learning (Green & Pappa, 2021).

Current megatrends in higher education such as massification of higher education, digitalisation, internationalisation, sustainability and changing needs of working life are expected to bring about pedagogical and curricula adjustments, which creates new demands for university staff professional development (e.g., Turk, 2015; Mader et al., 2017). It is often not clear how to respond to these new demands, and therefore it has been recognised as important to examine various stakeholders’ perceptions concerning appropriate practices in higher education including curricular and pedagogical designs (Howlett et al., 2016). Especially, action research approaches have brought about good results in terms of responding to variety of tensions and challenges faced by higher education and academics (e.g., Mader et al., 2017).

The prementioned demands for pedagogical training challenge the implementation of university pedagogical courses, with forcing to update purposes, aims and approaches to the training. Thus, the focus of the study are trainers’ and pedagogical training participants’ experiences of implementation of this type of courses. The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What kind of meanings do the actors (trainers and participants) give to the university pedagogical courses (their aims, contents, practices) they have involved in?

2. How do the trainers and participants perceive the meaning of identified megatrends to the pedagogical competence of university teaching in the context of pedagogical training?

Methods/methodology

The study was conducted in a middle-sized research university in Finland. The university offers for their staff a variety of the university pedagogical courses (from 10 to 35ECTS) including a course related to teaching academic contents in English. Completing of Basic Studies in Education or University Pedagogy (25ECTS) is the bases for undertaking Adult Educators' Pedagogical Studies (35ECTS) and leads to gaining official teaching qualifications. The courses apply experiential learning approach (Malinen, 2000; Mezirow, 1991, 2000) and aim at supporting development of autonomous, reflective educators able to contribute to, work and be a part of interdisciplinary teacher community. The first course is obligatory for permanent research and teaching staff of the university.

The data consists of group interviews (n=9) with trainers (n=13) and participants (n=17) of the pedagogical courses. The data were analysed applying principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The inductive analysis focused on the trainers and participants' reflections of the courses' aims, contents, pedagogical approaches, practices and learning environment utilized in the courses. At the end of the interview, the interviewees were also asked about the correspondence of the course to key drivers identified by the authors in higher education pedagogical research and strategic documents. The trainers and participants were asked to comment on relevance and correspondence of the identified topics to the pedagogical training. The analysis involved repeated reading rounds of the data and coding of data, first, with the aim of finding out a variety of meanings related to handled themes asked in the interview. In the second phase of the analysis, the purpose was to identify repeated

meanings and patterns within the themes (e.g., related to the aims of the course) and examine their specific features and relations to each other. As a result of this analysis phase, some of these classified meanings represented positive stances and appeared as strengths of the training, whereas some appeared as challenges with creating even tensions to the present implementation of the courses.

Expected outcomes/results

The analysis of the interviews with trainers and participants revealed strengths related to supporting participants' growth as a teacher and a human being on individual level, well-functioning practices, spreading of new ideas and insights, creating sense of community, collaboration and good spirit as well as skills, commitment and enthusiasm of trainers. At the same time, experiences of trainers and courses' participants reflected existence of tensions that can work as an obstacle to taking the most out of the possibilities that participation in these courses may offer, for example in terms of positive changes as responding to societal and working life changes and quality of learning and teaching in the university context. These tensions were related to non-appreciation of teaching in departments, development of teaching and pedagogical competence, attempts to improve well-being of teaching staff and nature of academic work, university teacher agency and its development, utilized pedagogical approach and various participant groups' expectations and needs, internationalization and interculturality, incorporation of global and sustainability topics and broadening and integration of new learning environments.

In conclusion, the pedagogical training can be a spark for improving quality of learning and teaching, critical discussion on appreciation of teaching in academia, and an inspiration or important channel for globally and societally important responses. However, in order to use these opportunities and change to happen, there is a need for more planned and collective

actions and a support on the level of departments and university. Pedagogical competence and its development cannot be seen as a solely responsibility and a resource of the individual teacher.

The results add to understanding of challenges related to contradictory interests and unclear responsibilities and lead to a question of how university teachers and development of pedagogical competence can be supported the best way in the in this university setting.

Intent of publication

We intend to publish the findings in peer-reviewed higher education journal such as *Teaching in Higher Education* or *Higher Education Research & Development*.

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