

Teacher Education and Career Development –

Finnish and Hungarian Experiences, Challenges and Good Practices

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I would very much like to thank you for this opportunity to talk about teacher education with you. I believe that it is a valuable exercise to share the Finnish and Hungarian experience and exchange views on trends in teacher education. I greatly appreciate the fact that we shall be able together to consider the challenges that lie ahead, learn from one another, and discover opportunities for cooperation.

In my talk, I will first look at some basic aspects of teacher education in Finland. After that, I will deal with the appeal that teacher education inspires and selection procedures. I will also consider the matter of teachership in the future, possible threats and continuing education for teachers. In my talk I will be focusing on the training of teachers in general education.

1. Some aspects of teacher education in Finland

The system of social welfare in Finland relies on knowledge and skills. If we are to guarantee and improve the skill levels of people, we need equal opportunities in education. We think it is important that all children and young people have a right to good teaching and to guidance, irrespective of where they are or the educational institution they are attending. Access to further studies and the prospect of employment cannot be jeopardised on account of poor quality teaching. That is why we go on the assumption that teaching staff need to be properly qualified and competent.

Finnish teachers are trained at university. They are required to obtain a higher university degree. That has been the case since the 1970s. Ten universities in Finland run teacher training courses. One of them is Swedish-speaking. Finland has two official languages: Finnish and Swedish. Two of the universities that offer teacher education are universities of the arts.

There is excellent regional availability of courses in teacher education, as the universities that run them are spread evenly around the country. This also has a favourable impact on the availability of teachers in different parts of the country.

We ensure that there is an adequate supply of teachers by systematically monitoring the situation at schools and predicting the need for teachers on a regular basis. The situation regarding our teachers is good. I am happy to say that 95% of teachers, for example, of languages, arts subjects, mathematics and natural sciences, are properly qualified for the job. And it is the same excellent situation in year-classes 1 to 6 in basic education.

Our system of teacher education is based on research. We think that the work of a teacher is demanding and specialised, and requires not only a higher university degree but also a research base. The job of a

teacher is not about the adoption of ready-made models. You do not become a teacher by learning a few tricks of the trade. Teacher training involves an approach where the teachers are encouraged to discover things for themselves and use the research data they obtain to develop their work in teaching and education as well as their work community. The main purpose of research studies in teacher education is to help teachers see their work as a field that is constantly changing - one that has to be monitored and developed openly and critically.

My opinion is that school should not replay the society; instead it should create the new builders of the tomorrow. The principal task of teacher education is to produce individuals, teachers who are new pedagogical thinking, who are able to question, who are able to innovate and who are able to reform the school.

Dear participants,

2. Teacher education - a popular option

Next I will deal with the selections for teacher education and the factors that contribute to the appeal of teaching as a profession.

The selection procedures for teacher education at Finnish universities focus on academic ability, suitability and motivation. In Finland, we are in the happy position where teacher education holds exceptional appeal, compared to the situation internationally. It is a very popular option for young people as far as educational courses are concerned. Take the example of training for class teachers. By class teachers I mean those who teach all subjects in classes 1-6 in basic education. Every year there are around 900 places on training courses for class teachers. There are more than 7,000 applicants. Universities can therefore select the most suitable and motivated applicants among some excellent candidates. Student recruitment is also easy for courses in special needs teacher training and guidance counsellor training. Again, there are plenty of applicants.

There are also adequate numbers applying for training courses for subject teachers, although more applicants are needed for mathematics and natural sciences. By subject teachers I mean those who teach the various subjects in classes 7 to 9 in basic education, upper secondary school, and adult education and training.

I have often been asked what makes teacher education and teaching a popular alternative for young people when they are planning their future studies. There are definitely a lot of reasons why. We Finns hold education in high regard, because we know that it is a key factor in a small nation's survival and success. The appreciation of education is also reflected in a respect for teaching.

The respect for teaching, in my opinion, also has a historical background. When you read old Finnish literature, a common figure is the sympathetically depicted teacher, who is an active spiritual and cultural person in the community. The teacher in Finnish folklore is playfully referred to as the 'people's candle'.

The fact that teacher training is provided at university level and the higher university degree required of teachers also naturally contribute to the respect for teaching as a profession.

An important reason for the interest in applying for teacher training I think is that our teachers work independently. In the Finnish educational system since the 1980s, the powers of decision have been very

much divided between the local authorities and schools. Studies suggest that teachers are in an excellent position to have their say in the work they do. Our teachers have pedagogical freedom. The criteria for the Finnish curriculum determine the levels of knowledge and skills to be aspired to, but do not specify the pedagogical methodologies. School inspections were abolished at the start of the 1990s. The work of teachers is not squeezed to fit into nationwide standards. Our teachers' salaries are average according to OECD statistics, so considerations of pay hardly have any major impact on the sector's appeal.

In conclusion, selection focuses on suitability and motivation when it comes to teacher education, and the status of teaching, and the respect for it, has had a positive influence on people's desire to stay in teaching. We have just completed a study on the status of teacher movement. We particularly wanted to discover what factors affect teacher movement between teaching and other occupations. The results showed that the majority of teachers value and enjoy their work. The profession is seen as being important though very demanding. There is teacher movement, of course, but much of it is to new jobs within the teaching and educational sector

Dear honourable seminar attendants,

3. Teachership in the future

Next I would like to consider teachership in the future and the challenges to development that it might lead to. I see the professional skills of teachers in the future as consisting of four elements. They are good knowledge content of the subject or discipline taught, expertise in learning, guidance and teaching, social and ethical skills, and knowledge of practical school work.

The elements I mention are not to be seen in isolation from one another: they are interconnected in many ways. Enabling these elements to interconnect, however, is and will be a challenge in the development of teacher education. It will require the establishment of a continuum between basic and continuing education and training for teachers. I think an important objective in the future is basic teacher training, the induction of new teachers and continuing education and training for teachers to form a consistent whole, in terms of its content, and this would serve the needs of the professional growth of teachers at different stages of their career.

What is included in these four elements I have referred to?

I think that teachers of the future will be versatile knowledge workers who will need to have a broad perspective of education, training, learner development and learning. They will need sound content knowledge, the relevant pedagogical and didactic skills, and knowledge of the curriculum.

We know that new technologies are revolutionising and diversifying learning environments at a rapid pace. Current and future pupils in basic education are and will be children for whom information and communications equipment is an inseparable part of their living environment.

The digitalization is changing learning environments in schools. It doesn't be any kind of shortcut to happiness; neither doesn't it solve the problems, which are complicated connected, to learning and social behaviour. The digitalization will change relations to our culture and to our standards of life.

If we don't succeed to change this fact to the new way of thinking about the pedagogical practices, the school might lose its idea and finally legitimisation in the eyes of the pupils and their parents.

The basic and continuing education and training of teachers must take this more into account in the development of course content and practical activities.

I also want to see as a key goal the development of the linguistically and culturally aware school. Our schools are becoming international in character and multicultural, so teachers will be expected to have much greater linguistic and cultural awareness than before. Every teacher is also a language teacher when teaching his or her subject or discipline. This needs to be remembered in courses in the basic and continuing education and training of teachers.

I think that it is vitally important that, as teacher education develops, we remember that the work of a teacher is not merely restricted to imparting knowledge and skills. A crucial part of the work of teachers is the conveyance of social, educational and cultural values. Democracy, human dignity, tolerance, and active citizenship are goals that schools must promote both now and in the future. That is why these issues also have an important place in the content and practice of courses in teacher education. The ethical and social dimension of the profession of teacher assumes a key role as economic and social change as well as media environments have an ever more dramatic impact on what goes on in the classroom.

School and teachers are also required to have good interactive skills. In my opinion, a school with interactive skills is the basis of a successful partnership between home and school. Teachership in the future will mean a facility for dialogue and an ability to participate and have a say in the debate on school.

Dear audience,

4. Are there any foreseeable threats?

I have been frequently asked what foreseeable threats there are for teacher education and teaching in Finland. What could have a harmful effect on the current situation? One threat I think is that teacher education and the profession of teacher might lose their appeal and respect. In Finland we are used to a situation where there are sufficient, not to say plenty of, applicants for teacher training courses and jobs in teaching. Perhaps we take the present situation a bit too much for granted. Also the traditional schools are losing their value in the eyes of the clients, pupils and their parents.

And what if things were otherwise? If there should be a sharp decline in applications for teacher education, and if teachers now in work were to start to look around for other jobs, we would have huge problems. That is why we need to appreciate properly the role of teacher education and the profession of teacher. This involves many different things. Appreciation means ensuring that teacher education is of good quality, adequately resourced and able to develop. Appreciation means ensuring that teachers have good working conditions, salaries and opportunities for development through continuing education and training.

Continuing education and training will be what it takes if we want to see teachers coping in what is a demanding job, developments in teaching, and a desire on the part of teachers to stay in teaching. Coping and staying in the job can be encouraged not only through continuing education and training but also peer support, mentoring and supervision as well as development of the entire school community. Continuing education and training must be systematic and based on a training and development plan that takes account of the different stages of the teacher's career. The role of the management of any educational institution and the training of that management are key factors in school development.

Continuing education and training in Finland is the responsibility of those who employ our teachers - the local authorities. Unfortunately, it has to be said that teachers are in an unequal position as far as opportunities for continuing education and training are concerned. These opportunities would improve if each year the state channelled resources into the organisation of free continuing education and training for teachers.

Ladies and gentlemen,

School is an important factor and influence in the growth and development of children and young people. The time perspective of school is long. Those children that start school this autumn will still be major players or policy-makers at work or in society at the end of the 2060s. When we are training teachers, I believe that it is important that we keep in mind that we are educating those who will make the future.

We must see the school, which supports children growth and progress diversely, as a tool to prevent inequality of children in the society.

As the scientific fact from Finland, we have the model of the, so called, flexible school day. The structure of the school day includes hobbies and morning and evening clubs that are integrated into the school day. The target on this is to give all children the possibility to participate in learning with in diversity social, athletic and cultural activities. Target is to serve for all children possibility to be involved in the learning within diversely social, sports and cultural activities.

The fast and rapidly growing entry ICT-equipment, e-books and e-materials into the world on schools and learning offer brilliant possibilities to individualize learning and to improve special education.

With the development of the modern society, the school and learning environment will also become more based on modern technology.

The speed of change in working environments will still grow.

In my opinion it is very important, that the task of the school will be under the rush and in the middle of change to offer a safe and peaceful environment , where children grow up to be balanced and responsible citizens.

I believe that our session today will open up new horizons for teaching and education.

Thank you for your interest, and I will be happy to answer any questions.