The importance of the teaching profession in 21ˢᵗ century Finland

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This article addresses the educational and pedagogical responsibilities of teachers in contemporary societies. The interest is focused on the major changes that are needed in schools and learning environments if teachers are to successfully perform their key functions. The pedagogical, didactical and educational relationships between teachers and pupils are illustrated. Teachers' key competencies are discussed in relation to these relationships. Vital strategies to ensure the continuing prestige of the teaching profession (qualified initial teacher education, in-service education, work-related psychosocial improvements, avoidance of accountability-orientation, and external appreciation) are presented. Examples of Finnish solutions related to these topics are presented, and discussed with reference to teacher education and the position of the teaching profession in Finland.

KEYWORDS: teaching profession, teachers' key competencies.

This article examines teachers and teacher education in Finland, where all primary and secondary school teacher education has been at university level since the 1970s. All teachers (except kindergarten teachers who can complete with a Bachelor's degree) must hold a Master's (MA) degree to obtain a teaching qualification. Based on the Bologna process, students must complete 120 credits for a Bachelor's (BA) degree (3 years' studies) and an additional 180 credits for a Master's degree (2 years). As part of their Master's studies, students conduct guided empirical research and write a thesis on their findings.

The legislation on teacher qualifications first defines the requirements for teaching posts at different levels and sectors of the education system in Finland.

Secondly, the teacher education act (issued in 1995 and revised in 2005) regulates how BA and MA degrees must be completed to become a teacher. There is no external agency that awards teaching certificates or licences following graduation and this is the key issue for the teacher's prestige. Teacher appraisal systems, which are common in many other countries (see Nusche, 2013), are not applied in Finland.

The aim of this article is to (a) look at the professional challenges teachers face in contemporary societies and the key competencies for coping with these heterogeneous expectations, and (b) consider key strategies to support the teaching profession as a core factor in mediating the individual talents of youth with the needs of society as a whole.

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Education in different demographies

The work of teachers offers great interest and satisfaction from interaction with children and adolescents whose adult lives are ahead of them and for which they are acquiring knowledge and new skills. Teachers prepare young people as future members of society to take care of themselves and their own prospective families while contributing to the intellectual, social and economic growth of the state. Teachers too are aware of their key role in this process, as are various other segments of society who offer their opinions about what schools and teachers should and should not do and their explanations. (Onnismaa, 2010, pp. 36–47.) Openness between schools and their communities has also improved in many respects, which has led to successful partnership in education.

The growing challenges faced by schools and teachers are too numerous to name; however, a summary is presented in Figure 1.

Due to a rapidly changing world, it is increasingly difficult to predict what will be expected from today's youth as future citizens, which should be remembered when stating the aims of education. In this dynamic world, families try to cope with increasing pressures from the outside, pressures which complicate children's experience, which accompanies them to school. Multiculturalism has its various positive and challenging influences on teaching and learning. Pupils have changed over the last few decades: they need differentiated support for diversifying needs and challenge teachers' key competencies. Finally, teachers work in new kinds of school communities where "traditional" work cultures are perhaps no longer thriving.

The core of a teacher's work lies in their pupils' cognitive domain, although teachers are also responsible for other important domains such as the social, emotional, physical, and psychological. Table 1 enumerates the changing expectations of teachers in this area, while it may be too categorical in presenting some aspects as new (in the right column), since they have always been at the core of education.
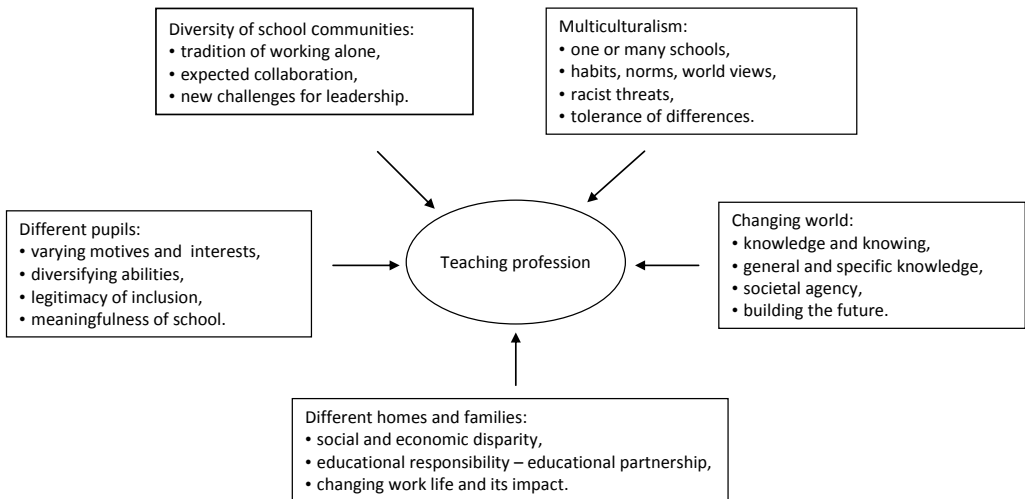

Figure 1. Growing challenges for the teaching profession.
Modified from Välijärvi (2000).

Teachers should be competent in scaffolding pupils' active learning processes, making them more conscious of their own metacognitive abilities, i.e., to exercise pupils' "learning to learn skills" (Vainikainen, 2014). This requires change to the traditional approaches to curriculum and its content, learning methods, and assessments, taking an even more intense look at the anticipated future needs of society instead of only relying on transmission of culturally important topics.

Table 1 illustrates teachers' core work, i.e., teaching-studying-learning processes. Teachers should always be able to promote pupils' learning by means of their update knowledge and tools. All other demands and expectations – including socio-emotional support, cooperation with various

Table 1

Changing expectations of schools (modified from NAHE, 2014)

Educational aspects	Concepts in the 20th Century	Concepts in the 21th Century
Objectives	• Focus on rearrangement of knowledge • General objectives from knowledge	• Focus on the creation of knowledge • Specific objectives for education
Activities	• Ability to know • Borrowing ideas • Content-based activities	• Ability to do • Creating ideas • Needs-based activities
Knowledge	• Past knowledge	• Future knowledge
Content selection	• Acquisition of information	• Acquisition of knowledge
Curriculum	• Collective and generalised curriculum	• Individualised and selective curriculum vs collaboration
Student comfort	• What students can understand easily	• What students must know to meet modern world demands
Learning methodology	• Traditional methods and techniques of teaching • Talking, listening • Teacher-directed learning	• Combination of modern and new methods and teaching • Understanding and doing • Self-directed learning
Student performance	• Teacher dependant	• Self-reliance
Assessment	• Assessment based on knowledge • Assessment	• Assessment based on learning • Assessment for/as learning (development)

educational stakeholders, development projects, and fund raising – should be weighed against the core, so that sufficient calm, space, and resources are allotted to guarantee success in this key area.

Maintaining and developing key relationships

Despite changes in teachers' tasks, one factor has remained stable: education must promote and nurture children's versatile growth and development where teachers' responsibility as supporting adults is noteworthy. This idea forms the core for the ethics of the teaching profession (Atjonen, 2004b; Atjonen, 2004c). Education aims to help children become autonomous, inner-directed human beings, such that eventually the educators themselves becomes unnecessary to pupils' lives. This process takes time; growth is slow and multi-levelled, characterised by an asymmetric pedagogical relationship between the

educator and the pupil. (Kansanen, 2004; Siljander, 2014; Värri, 2007.)

Education means to take educational responsibility. This reminds us of the teacher's important job, being in the service of children and protecting their beneficence. Teaching pupils is an activity that is intentional, planned and conscious, organised and institutional, and professional. Teaching requires a teacher, learner, and content, which can be combined to form a triangle (Figure 2).

According to Figure 2, teaching involves the management of content and several relationships. A pedagogical relationship exists between learner and teacher, meaning that the teacher tries to understand the needs of the pupil and initiates a "mental connection" to encourage trust and confidence. A learner's reaction to a teacher's approach creates a reciprocal relationship, the durability of which depends on both parties. Teachers are important adults (meaning that they are
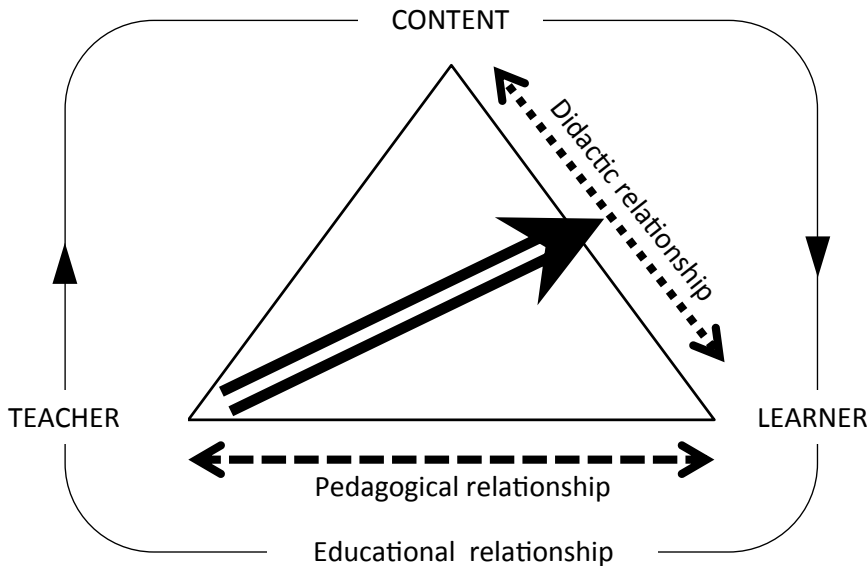

Figure 2. Content-learner-teacher relationships.

Modified from Jyrhämä and Syrjäläinen (2009, p. 424); see also Kansanen et al. (2000); Syrjäläinen, Jyrhämä and Haverinen (2004).

experienced and may act as role models in clarifying what is good or bad behaviour, for example) to pupils for establishment and maintenance of the pedagogical relationship. This is not an arbitrary relationship; it is based in particular on learning, which definitely requires professional education and expertise. Regarding the pedagogical relationship, teachers need education (both initial and in-service) covering developmental psychology to meet the needs of pupils of different ages and support diverse pupils (e.g., gender, learning abilities, and ethnic background).

Another continuum exists between learner and content. There is always some "material" which is studied in mathematics, music, or biology, for example. In trying to understand this "material", pupils need their teacher's help; teachers try to do their best to figure out how to make content easily understood by pupils. This is called the

teacher's "pedagogical content knowledge" (Wilson, 2008). A teacher's special expertise is in creating and maintaining this didactic relationship, which is the teacher's relationship with another relationship existing between learner and content. Parents, counsellors, hobby coaches, friends, and pop idols cannot do the same. Regarding the didactic relationship, teachers need initial and in-service education concerning curriculum development and construction of the key concepts for school subjects, teaching-learning methods (including information and communication technologies, ICT), open and rich learning environments, and strength-based pupil assessment, i.e., aspects which were described in Table 1.

Teachers cannot avoid educational relationships with pupils. This comprehensive responsibility embraces the triangle and its two relationships. Educational partnership involves educational responsibility shared by
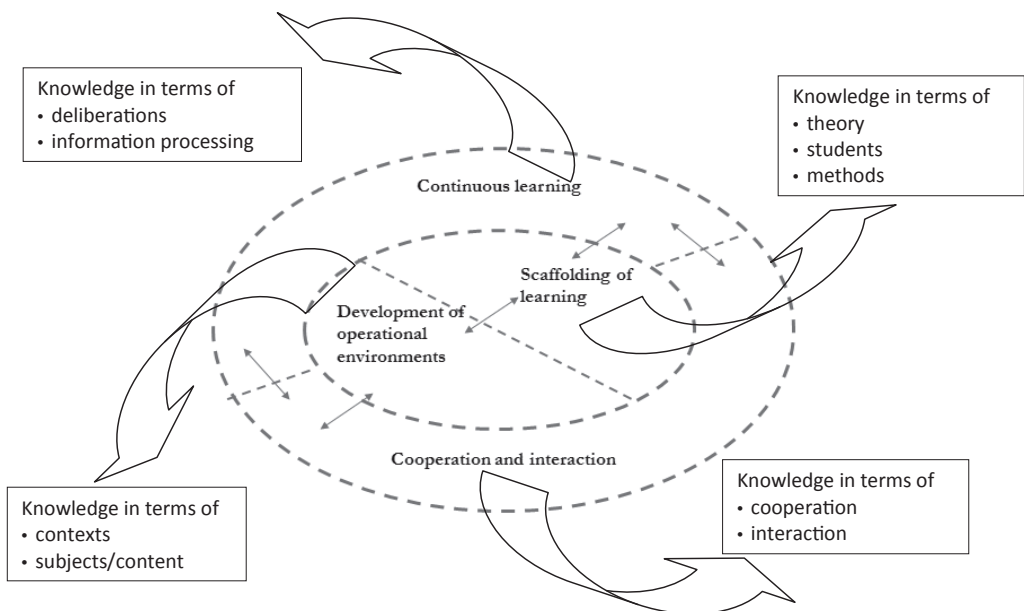

Figure 3. Teachers' core competencies and their implications (Atjonen, 2009).

schools and homes. As philosophers might say, a human being can only become human through education; therefore, teachers must be role models and trustworthy adults. They may be the only persons in their pupils' lives who really cares for them, if, for example, their parents cannot fulfil their educational responsibility (for one reason or another). Regarding educational relationships, teachers need education in the philosophy of education (e.g., the concept of a human being, worldview, value, legitimacy and responsibility) and in consolidating trustworthy asymmetric relationships and maintaining open, reciprocal interaction.

From core competencies to future know-how

In Figure 3, some core competencies are summarised for teachers, from various articles in the literature concerning teaching and guidance (see: e.g. Day, 2004; Dede, 2007; Onnismaa, 2010; Reeves, 2010; Virtanen, 2013) and what their future practical applications may be.

Teachers' two main tasks are to scaffold learning and to develop learning environments to support that learning (see e.g., Kovalainen, 2013). These two competencies must be nourished through teachers' own continuous learning, which can be promoted by cooperation and interaction with colleagues at the school level or by means of in-service education.

In order to scaffold learning, teachers need knowledge in terms of theory, pupils, and learning. They need to know how learning happens, how different learners learn differently, and how teaching-studying-learning processes can be theoretically conceptualized and methodically supported. For the development of operational circumstances for learning, teachers must know the contexts and their subjects' special characteristics in order to decide on pedagogically

proper methods. They should be aware of recent research on various impacts of learning environments (physical, emotional, social, and technological) on learning in order to meet pupils' heterogeneous learning needs.

In order to promote continuous learning, a teacher's ability to carefully deliberate and process information is important. The current constructivist understanding of learning emphasises information retrieval skills, active efforts to accommodate and assimilate new information to existing knowledge structures, and metacognitive skills. To be as helpful to pupils as possible, a teacher's own learning skills should be sophisticated. For cooperation responsibilities, teachers of course need interactive skills and abilities. They need to know how to listen, discuss and argue, to create networks, deal with conflicts, show empathy, cope with negative feelings, and to build confidence and trust. This also makes ethical aspects of the teaching profession very apparent; teachers must consider how to promote justice, care, and truth in their everyday work with various segments of human relationships in their school settings.

These competencies are well-suited to the main objectives of research-based teacher education (TE), which will be discussed later in this article. In the next chapter, I will focus on some main principles for TE which strengthen teachers' skills to meet the challenges described in Table 1 and Figures 1–3.

Key choices for TE

There are two main approaches to providing teachers' professional development in relation to their education. Some countries have chosen relatively short pre-service education to give teachers the basic skills for coping with school realities, with the remainder of knowledge and skills acquired during in-service education. Other countries believe that
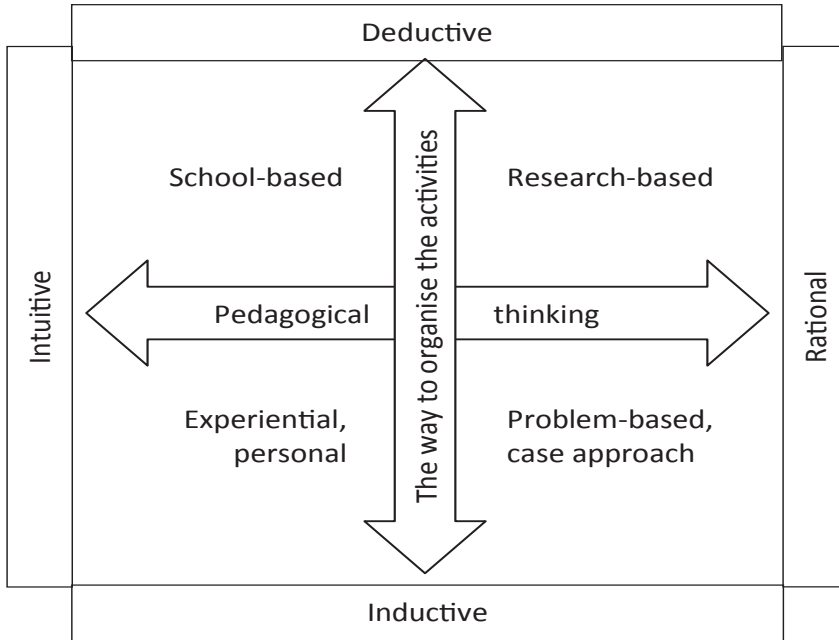
Figure 4. Relationship between the structure of TE programmes and methods of justifying them (Kansanen, 2007, p. 142).

it is important to receive the best pre-service education possible, in order to ensure a development-oriented pedagogical career that will meet the challenges from both society and education stakeholders for pupils and their teachers. About 35 years ago, Finland decided that it is best to lay a solid foundation in initial TE. Therefore, a higher academic degree and research-based approach was chosen, which dramatically changed education of class teachers for primary in particular.

Two levels of educational tasks can be distinguished in relation to the two approaches mentioned above. The first or basic level enables prospective teachers to acquire practical skills to plan, implement, assess, and develop instruction in a manner best-fitted to pupils' needs. They also develop interpersonal skills to improve their relationships with colleagues, education stakeholders,

and partners. The second or advanced level establishes a distance from this praxis by means of reading, reflection, and discussion. This level enhances teachers' intellectual capacity to view routines and "the usual way of doing things" differently. Teachers must be able to acquire and assess information critically and to look at long-term goals over everyday practice. They should be able to advocate for their pupils' education and personal needs in the face of various "-isms" (e.g., radical constructivism in learning, pure technologism in ICT pedagogy, or narrow neoliberalism in values) and purely instrumental external influences (e.g., demands for promoting pupils' entrepreneurial skills in business life). The second level is the core for research-based TE, which will be discussed later in this article.

Kansanen (2007) describes four kinds of emphases in TE (Figure 4) in general. The first

continuum distinguishes a structural background (inductive–deductive) and the second concerns ways of justifying pedagogical decisions (intuitive–rational). Figure 4 illustrates only the main lines of interest and does not analyse various nationals systems analytically or exclusively (e.g., teacher education can be both research and school-focused) but is used as a heuristic tool in my discussion.

Perhaps no TE programme can be entirely defined by just one of the approaches described in Figure 4; however, every programme prioritises some methods over others. Some TE programs emphasise the deductive and intuitive aspects of learning and rely on the practical knowledge which prospective teachers obtain from the intensive partnership between the TE institution and field schools. Some TE programs prefer rational pedagogical thinking and inductive reasoning and want student teachers to become familiar with real life problems and cases, by means of a problem-based approach. In some countries, a combination of the inductive and intuitive approach is used: student teachers are expected to clarify their personal and experiential relationship with the teaching profession and, therefore, certain methods of implementing TE are used (e.g. reflective workshops, many periods of teaching practice in as many different school settings as possible).

In the early 1970s, Finland chose a research-based approach to TE. The TE departments of eight universities adjusted their profiles or combination of approaches. For example, some units apply problem-based learning or nourish the personal-experiential aspects of education; however, the main method is research-based or inquiry-oriented. This method emphasizes the deductive approach to building teacher competencies and sees rational decision-making as preferable (Atjonen, 2004a; Atjonen, Korkeakoski and Mehtäläinen,

2011; Kansanen, 2007; Krokfors et al., 2011; Niemi, 2012)

A research-based approach to teaching-studying-learning processes has a lot in common with the main idea of pedagogical thinking (Kansanen et al., 2000; Syrjäläinen et al., 2004). Pedagogical thinking may refer to all thoughts which teachers express when they talk about their work (Veijola, 2013) in relation to stakeholders, educational policy, or quality of in-service education, for example. More didactically oriented definitions describe pedagogical thinking as that which is focused on teaching-studying-learning processes or its parts where existing knowledge is restructured. Pedagogical thinking raise consciousness about factors which influence teaching-learning events, the consciousness of objectives set for these events, and the ability to justify one's own pedagogical choices (Jyrhämä and Syrjäläinen, 2009; Krokfors et al., 2011.)

Pedagogical thinking is especially concerned with teachers' decision-making: how teachers justify their decisions and what reasons they give for their decisions and activities? Arguments are quite often mixed, i.e., both intuitive and rational elements are combined. Not only rational aspects but also personal belief systems are very important in decision-making: attitudes, emotions, feelings, and opinions may be either conscious or unconscious but they inevitably influence decisions. Both normative and descriptive thought is needed, combined in teachers' thinking and decision-making; however, what is worth noting is that in normative thinking, autonomous decisions are lost. For truly qualified work as a teacher, autonomy is of crucial importance (Knight, 2008; Lapinoja, 2006; Siljander, 2007). If teachers uncritically put the wishes and expectations of external agencies and stakeholders into practice, they will neglect their pupils' needs and not protect the peace and slow pace needed for human growth.

Finnish interpretations of research-based TE

Structure of TE studies

As mentioned in the introduction, all pre--service TE in Finland in the general education sector (vocational education excluded) was assigned to universities in the early 1970s. The next step was taken in 1979, when the first intake of class teacher students enrolled for Master's' (MA) degrees with their Major in education. Subject teachers (e.g., teachers of mathematics or languages in secondary education) had always been educated at universities but their pedagogical studies were reorganized to become better integrated with their Majors (e.g., in faculties of humanities, social sciences, or natural sciences).

The education of both special teachers and guidance counsellors had been organised as temporary university courses and programmes since after the early 1970s but were later established as MA programmes in the late 1970s and 80s. The first temporary programmes for kindergarten teachers also started at universities in the early 1970s and a BA degree was introduced in 2005. MA degree programmes for early childhood education were established in some universities in the early 1990s.

All prospective teachers in Finland must sit admission tests, which thoroughly assess aptitude for the teaching profession. As a result of this selection, student teachers complete their studies successfully (compared to the dropout or delay observable for many other groups of university students) and also remain in their profession. They tend to have realistic motives regarding becoming teachers and problems with "unsuitable personalities" for work with pupils are rare.

The latest structural reform was implemented in 2005, when TE, as a part of university education, moved to the two-tier system in accordance with the Bologna process. This did not fundamentally change anything in TE because all who passed the admission test automatically receive direct admission to the MA degree programme (120 credits' studies); however, technically, they must first complete a three-year BA degree programme (180 credits). Naturally, some curricular changes and amendments were introduced when this two-tier system was prepared, including a few common national agreements between departments (concerning, for example, study modules on research methods, theses, and teaching practice) and local development work based on each university's autonomy and strengths. The basic modules for class teacher education are as follows (exact credits/ects may vary in different universities):

A. Multidisciplinary studies in school subjects (obligatory minor)	60 credits (minimum)
B. Major in Education (basic, intermediate and advanced studies)	150 credits
• pedagogical studies (including 20 credits of teaching practice	60 credits (minimum)
• research methods and two (candidate, master) theses	50 credits
• other studies in education	40 credits
C. Academic studies in a different discipline (1–2 minors)	60 credits
D. Language and communication studies and optional studies	30 credits
Total	300 credits

Based on Finnish university decree, universities' TE departments are autonomous in planning courses included in the above main topics A–D. Departments have slightly different profiles based on their research strategies, teacher educators' expertise, and some national special responsibilities (e.g. University of Eastern Finland is responsible for TE in Orthodox religion). Representatives from different TE departments meet annually, together with representatives of the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs to discuss programme development and practices.

Pedagogical studies are obligatory for qualification as a teacher, both in primary and secondary education, as well as in vocational and adult education. According to Finnish legislation, pedagogical studies must be in education with an emphasis on didactics and worth at least 60 credits. These courses also include guided teaching practice (normally about 20 credits), both in the teacher training school and other partnership schools.

A specialty of Finnish TE is that every university has its own teacher training school (TTS) where all groups of prospective teachers obtain some (but not all) teaching practice. This provides a safe and rich learning environment in which to experiment with different pedagogical ideas using various materials and learning technologies. The programme mentors – working simultaneously as classroom teachers of TTS – are well-educated and fully aware of the TE's main objectives and development needs and are therefore able to serve as good role models. The pupils of TTS represent the entire spectrum of the local socioeconomic structure, which provides prospective teachers with opportunities to get acquainted with the different types of social, emotional, behavioural, and learning challenges that pupils bring to schools.

Since 1989, several national and international evaluations and numerous scientific investigations have been carried out to examine the strengths and weaknesses of Finnish TE. These evaluations are summarized in Table 2.

The majority of the broad aims of TE are achieved, based on the results in the left column of Table 2. Problems occur mainly at the basic level or in the vocational "content-oriented" tradition illustrated in Figure 5. Young students in TE cannot yet see the strengths of scientific orientation in relation to practical challenges clearly. They may expect direct normative advice, which may be also given by educational practitioners. Later in their careers, students appreciate their high-level education and understand the value of having broader critical abilities as opposed to focussing only on content courses on restricted issues.

Towards research orientation

Finland has successfully combined two traditions of TE, as is illustrated in Figure 5.

There are important vocational elements in Finnish TE which belong to the first (basic) level, meaning that students are provided with the skills and abilities necessary for the

Table 2

Summary of several evaluations of Finnish TE[*]

Positive outcomes	Improvement needs
• high quality students (only 10–15 % of applicants are accepted), • classroom teachers' good knowledge of pedagogy and educational responsibilities, • teachers' commitment to their work and reasonable salaries, • MA degree's value in different educational expert positions, • eligibility for postgraduate (doctoral) studies • no real problem with drop outs from TE-programmes (motivated students).	• networking abilities (cooperation with parents, other educational partners in, e.g., youth work), • multicultural and multi-professional competencies, • abilities in encounter pupils with special needs, • excessively intensive focus on subject matter in subject TE, • teachers' poor societal knowledge • pedagogical use of ICT.

[*] See: Helin (2014); Ministry of Education (2007); Niemi and Lavonen (2012); Veijola (2013).

"everyday pedagogy" of teaching and learning in the most common school settings. This practical vocational tradition of TE is well-known in all countries and, historically, was strong in Finland since before the 1970s (Atjonen, 2013).

At the second (advanced) level, a great deal of scientific knowledge is studied in order to understand educational, pedagogical, and didactic relationships more thoroughly and critically (see Figure 1). This academic tradition on the right in Figure 5 could also be called "inquiry-orientation." As a combination of these two traditions (vocational and academic), the aim is to educate teachers who base their work on knowledge (not just information). The ultimate ideal for Finnish teacher can be defined as an inquiry- and development-oriented interactive expert on teaching and education.

It is not the aim of Finnish TE to make all Finnish teachers researchers, but rather to empower teachers as practitioner researchers. As Kansanen puts it, "research-based action consists of thinking, along with all-round research methods and knowing what kind of backing, argument, and justification may be used" (2007, p. 141). This may mean that teachers, together or independently with the university's senior researcher, conduct research on their professional practice and write an article. A more realistic and desirable expectation is that teachers use research competencies regarding their own work, i.e., they work as practitioner researchers; for example, they:

- are able to read research reports on teaching and learning challenges that they have faced in their work;
- are able to systematically gather empirical observations concerning teaching-learning processes if they find something "wrong" (this does not mean that they have to write an article or report but rather that they use the results to improve their practice);
- do not only rely on opinion when something needs to be changed;
- do not react uncritically to any projects or initiatives ("isms") launched at school or in broader learning environments;
- are capable of and interested in trying to conceptualise or problematize practice; and
- are willing to discuss various alternatives and viewpoints on pedagogical and educational topics.
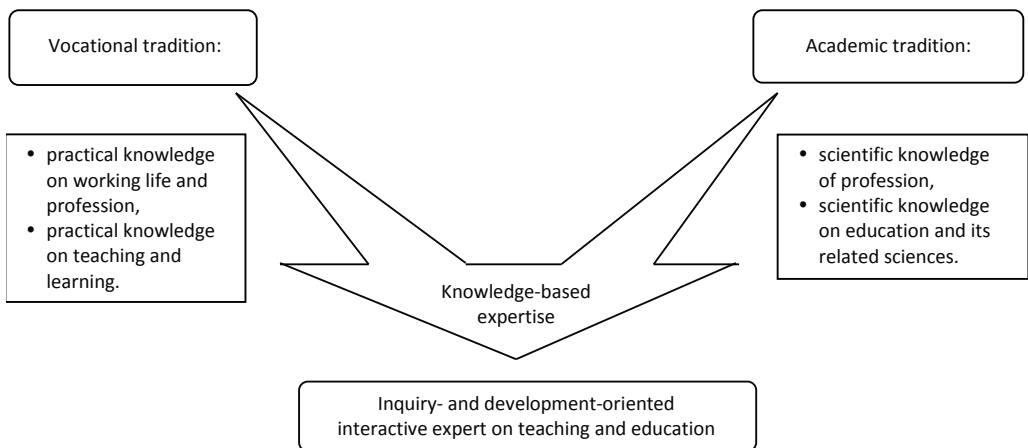

Figure 5. Two traditions of TE and the ideal description of teachers' qualities.

In the international literature, "inquiry-oriented teaching" refers mainly to the quality of teaching methods. In the Finnish data on primary and secondary school teachers, Jyrhämä and Maaranen (2012, pp. 101–108) found the definition of "inquiry-oriented teaching" to be much broader. It includes teachers' personal development and evaluative attitude towards their own professional actions, the principles of a constructivist view of teaching, the use of multiple methods in teaching, multi-professional cooperation at schools, and societally critical orientation to education. These researchers say that "it is a stance, close to being a reflective teacher" (see also Day, 2004).

Two solid applications for the "research-based" approach

There are two main methods for putting a research-based approach into practice in Finnish TE. In the first method, "all TE courses are connected with research", such that either teacher educators have conducted research on the topic or use the latest research findings in their courses. Students are expected to base their essays or other study assignments on research literature, not just on text books, study guides, general handbooks, and practical reports. This is required not only in an education Major or in pedagogical studies but also with multidisciplinary studies (basic courses on different school subjects).

The second way in which research is clearly present in the courses for all those studying to become a primary school teacher (class teacher), special school teacher, and guidance counsellor is the requirement that they have to "write two scientific theses during their studies": a candidate thesis at BA level and a Master's thesis at MA level. Obligatory research seminars and several courses on quantitative and qualitative research methodology are closely connected to students' own empirical research work. The expectation of conduct a true research project (supervised by the faculty's senior researchers) as a Master's thesis is something which truly distinguishes Finnish TE from other countries. Prospective subject teachers have always submitted Master's theses in their Major (e.g., physics) but they may choose a pedagogically oriented research task, for example, one with a focus on teaching and learning physics. Kindergarten teachers write only a candidate thesis for their BA degree.

An MA thesis need not be a traditional report with empirical data gathered by questionnaires or thematic interviews, although the majority are. MA theses are often integrated into a senior's research project to solve certain research problems. Finally, an article may be published in which a student is co-author and learns a lot about collaborative research work. Some student teachers implement a field experiment or a small-scale action research in which they systematically gather empirical data for the research task. They may prepare research-based teaching and learning materials for experimental purposes, which are then published as a part of their thesis. In this way, an idea of the "teacher as a practitioner researcher" is solidly put into practice.

It is worth noting that an MA degree renders all students fully eligible for postgraduate studies in education. In the ideal case, an article written on the basis of an MA thesis is the first article in the doctoral dissertation. There are hundreds with doctorates in Finland who started and successfully finished their doctoral studies following an MA degree in TE. This provides a highly valuable resource for the Finnish educational system in its development work behind PISA or other indicators for quality in Finnish education. Those with doctorates are not just recruited to universities as researchers; they also work at various levels of the education system as well-educated experts.

The prestige of teachers in a postmodern world

Being appreciated as a teacher in Finland

Many countries are faced with the ambitious task of protecting teachers' prestige. This is necessary due to the low status of teachers, schools' discipline problems, low salaries, teaching standards, and low autonomy, due to various controlling mechanisms (Belt, 2013; Cohen, 2013; Hargreaves, Cunningham, Hansen, McIntyre and Oliver, 2007; Lapinoja, 2006; Wermke, 2013). Finland has so far been lucky to have a lot of talented and motivated applicants for TE programmes and teacher salaries are reasonable because of the higher academic degrees held by Finnish teachers (Kyrö, 2013). Finland is well-known for the trust established between teachers and education authorities. Teachers' freedom to implement their pedagogical vision is not unlimited, however; national guidelines for curriculum and school-based curriculum provide the main teaching framework but teachers' pedagogical freedom is still highly notable (Simola, Rinne, Varjo and Kauko, 2013; Toom and Husu, 2012).

As a Scandinavian welfare society, Finland has always appreciated education policy for equity (Niemi, 2012, pp. 21–27: educational opportunities for all are important, regardless of pupils' socioeconomic status, gender, and residence. Historically, Finland has been quite homogenous as far as ethnic minorities and languages are concerned. Education has always been broadly accepted by its citizens. Naturally, there have been debates about the meaning and quality of comprehensive school from time to time. However, during the last decade, PISA success has promoted "national self-confidence" in the importance of education, including teachers' worth (see also OECD, 2014). In Finland, education is a public service, being free of charge in general, vocational, and higher education. Only a few private schools exist, for example, in primary education. These facts are effective in quality assurance.

Cooperation with guardians and other key educational stakeholders is based on reciprocal trust and teachers have received "background support" even in difficult situations. The teachers' union in Finland is strong and has done its share to highlight the value of teachers in society. Finnish teachers must also meet growing contradictory demands from families and the business community, and hard value collapses have been witnessed when individual personal needs are emphasised by families but teachers must remind "outsiders" of broader collaborative viewpoints (Kumpulainen, 2013).

In these situations, teachers' quality education and abilities to provide valid arguments and gather research-based evidence are definitely needed. Niemi (2012, p. 35) expresses this well by saying that:

> 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. Teachers have a right and an obligation to articulate intellectual needs and challenges in the society they serve.

Solutions for better work satisfaction

Because of the unattractive image of teaching or serious recruitment problems in many western countries, effective solutions are needed to improve the situation at a global level. What lessons could be learned from Finland? Based on Finnish experiences, not much can truly be achieved by image campaigns, better salaries, control-oriented evaluations, or increased school or class sizes, all of which belong to the popular vocabulary of New Public Management (NPM) throughout the OECD countries. While the first two actions (better image and increased salary) are not wholly ineffective, the impact of campaigns is superficial and in periods of global

economic downturn, considerable improvement in salaries is not realistic.

What possible solutions are reasonable and sustainable? Among the first, a "high level of initial teacher education" should be emphasised. If teachers receive good TE, they are more confident in their own ability to cope with the challenges of teaching and appreciate their own education more clearly. Then also stakeholders (as guardians or local education authorities) should demonstrate trust and respect for their education partners at schools. A high level of education includes systematic development of pedagogical thinking, as has been discussed elsewhere in this article.

Second, it is extremely important that effective, regular, and versatile "in-service education" is available for all teachers, not just principals, senior advisors, and coordinators. The solution here involves both short courses (for special situations when quick introductions are needed) and longer programmes, the combination of which has greater impact. In addition, more school-based, case-oriented initiatives are needed, rather than mass lectures and centralised programmes. Locally oriented research or development (i.e., the teacher-as-practitioner researcher approach) should be encouraged.

Based on the empirical evidence from observation of Finnish in-service TE (Helin, 2014; Kangasniemi, Hämäläinen and Kyrö, 2013; OECD, 2014; Piesanen, Kiviniemi and Valkonen, 2007), some concerns are warranted; teachers want short courses and "ordinary teachers" have fewer opportunities to participate in in-service education than they did in the past. These challenges have become worse due to the difficult economic situation faced by local governments: there is a lack of long-term prospects for local educational authorities, and relevant courses are not always available.

Providing "work-related psychosocial improvements" is the third way to motivate teachers to remain in the teaching profession and maintain commitment to their pupils' well-being. In many countries, (although not in Finland at the moment), there are not enough applicants for TE. Many teachers leave the profession (although not in Finland) because of disappointment with working conditions and lack of opportunities for career development (Cohen, 2013; Blomberg, 2008; Mäkelä, 2014). It is always important to facilitate teachers' positive self-esteem and support their expertise via strength-based feedback as they are in a profession in which they must continuously give of themselves and are burdened by hundreds of interaction episodes every day (Toom and Husu, 2012).

Teachers complain about excessive ongoing projects with which they must be involved when available tranquillity and time for basic work with pupils is decreasing (Onnismaa, 2010). Ethical strain is also obvious due to the wide variety of educational demands (Enlund, Luokkanen and Feldt, 2013). Large, heterogeneous school communities with various professional groups (teachers, psychologists, guidance counsellors, learning consultants of special education, health care professionals) create challenging social environments. Special care is needed for both novice and ageing teachers by means of mentoring (Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä, 2012; Stanulis, Little and Wibbens, 2012) and supervision (Alila, 2015), for example.

The fourth topic worth discussing is "avoidance of accountability-oriented evaluative practices". Increased competitive actions and values (e.g., teaching standards, teacher appraisals, school league tables) seem to have very little power to improve the quality or internal motivation in education where "business" is not focused on tangible products (such as mobile phones or foodstuff) but operates via human growth (Atjonen, 2014; Simola et al., 2013). Rude accountability may just perpetuate mediocrity, rigidity, and unhappiness. There should be serious

discussion about the consequences of NPM in their policies to close smaller schools, increase class sizes beyond reasonable bounds, and reduce teaching assistance.

Centralised curriculums are not indicative of trust in teachers' professional skills. Teachers' opportunities to participate in work on school-based and locally amended curricula strengthen their experience of participation and agency (Craig and Ross, 2008). Too much decentralization is not good for the equal opportunities of pupils in different areas and schools (Nyyssölä and Jakku-Sihvonen, 2009) but local curriculum design based on national guidelines is useful for teachers' professional development. Schools deserve good pedagogical leaders in the spirit of shared leadership and a proper balance between administrative and pedagogical objectives (Salo, 2014). Modern leadership is a social construct, created through dialogue and not through domination, authority or by exercising power over actors.

What is urgently needed, but not in the power of TE professionals to control, is an "improvement in public opinion", which could be more supportive and less demanding. Obviously, external pressures on all public sector agencies are increasing and this pressure may also improve services. The slogan "the customer is always right" must be, according to accountability and market logic, appreciated and respected; however, from the evaluation theory perspective, customer feedback is not the best or even an adequate tool for quality assurance. True results, outcomes, and impact need much deeper analysis.

It is all too simple for citizens, parents, the media, politicians, and administrators to raise their demands and highlight mistakes and deficiencies made in schools or by teachers. They have all once been pupils and therefore they feel they "know" how everything should be improved. Bearing in mind my earlier sceptical commentary on the potential positive implications for external criticism, it might not be unjustified to request more constructive, supportive, and strength-based advocates for education and those working in the field. Teachers and schools are instrumental in defining our future and creating coherence and stability in society.

Concluding remarks

Education and teaching are value-driven activities; the national education system as a whole is based on the cultural and historical roots of each society. Despite increased international cooperation and knowledge exchange, some characteristics and principles are not easy to export. In general, it is difficult to learn from other contexts beyond one's country, although it may seem kind to make external and sincere recommendations. It is the hope that my article provides some clear background knowledge on which international TE professionals can reflect to guide their own intentions more precisely to suit opportunities available in their context. Best practices may be useless but future practices (Leithwood, 2008) or effective principles (Patton, 2011) anchored in one's own circumstances and future expectations may be fruitful.

Contemporary schools and teachers must be proactive in promoting societal ideals, rather than simply reacting to external demands, which may be very narrow from the viewpoint of lifelong learning and human growth. They must also address broader global challenges (such as climate change, population growth, or human rights) in the long run. On the other hand, teachers must accept and help others to accept that improvements through education will happen step-by-step; their outcomes cannot be measured on a yearly basis. With patience, the education level of all citizens will be gradually improved and prerequisites

for ethically and economically sustainable societal decision-making will be strengthened. Empowered people may be critical and become a threat to those in power; however, empowering people is necessary to ensure equal opportunities and rights for all, avoiding serious social disturbances triggered by the experiences of those who are marginalised and denied a voice.

Teachers are not the only professionals who want to improve their status and achieve respect as experts. There are intense ongoing international debates regarding teaching as a real profession compared to that of physicians, lawyers, or soldiers, if, for example, autonomy, prestige, and salaries are taken into account. There may be the risk that an increased level of education in all professions leads to a lack of people responsible for "grassroots-level" jobs, at which point "education inflation" will accelerate. On the other hand, it is difficult to reject the classic idea that education is an investment in the future and it can never be the wrong decision. Who could seriously say that the high level education that teachers attain – which is not just the bare minimum – is wasted time or is not worth the expense because "they are just working with kids?"

In today's increasingly complicated societies, teachers need partners committed to their educational work. Multi-professional skills and practices help teachers stay in effective touch with today's heterogeneous youth, a youth in which a growing number of individuals are in danger of becoming socially excluded in increasingly competitive societies. This is a real challenge for all welfare states, Finland included. Since external and internal expectations are legion and contradictory, psychosocial strain is increasing among teachers, and there is a clear call for action to empower professionals. Pre-service and in-service education should be integrated to form a continuum where there are options to work on different tasks in various sectors of education during different phases of a career and where sufficient confidence exists such that professional developmental needs are taken seriously and supported.

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