



# Teacher education as a key element for a successful school system

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# Finnish comprehensive school reform in late 1960's and 1970's

- School reform as a part of the more general political programme to develop Scandinavian welfare state in a historical and cultural context
- 9 years comprehensive school for all children (6 years primary level and 3 years lower secondary level)
- In the beginning there was a “soft” tracking system in some core subjects but this was removed in a few years
- Special attention to learning disabilities
- Conscious attempt to combine equality and quality

# New requirements for teachers

- The comprehensive school reform was quite radical and put new requirements for teachers
  - How to cope with diversity in integrated classroom?
  - How to support children with diverse difficulties (social, emotional, motivational, cognitive)?
  - How to modernize the content and methods of traditional education?

# Two solutions

- **Short term solution:** massive in-service training for the teachers of former separate school systems
- **Long term solution:** new pre-service teacher education model for all teachers of general education (primary and secondary levels)

# Teacher education system

- New faculties of education were founded in the middle of 1970's which consisted of old departments of education, teacher training colleges and training schools (professorships in educational science, educational psychology, general didactics and subject didactics in main school subjects)
- Class teacher (primary level) education was in the beginning a few years a lower university degree but become very soon a full master degree
- Subject teacher (secondary level) education was organized collaboratively between different subject departments and faculty of education (full master degree in the main subject areas and one year pedagogical studies and practical training in the faculty of education)

# All teacher education in universities

- Hierarchical difference between primary and secondary teacher disappeared and opened opportunities for more equal mutual collaboration
- Teacher educators and teacher students gradually became members of scientific communities
- Some experiences of multi-professional expert group work
- People working in teacher education started to participate in interdisciplinary research on teaching and learning
- Other departments started to take school education into account in developing university studies in mathematics, languages and other school subjects

# Full master degree for all teachers

- Primary school teachers' professional and social status increased in comparison with other academic professions
- Teacher's professional self-esteem increased and can be compared with other academic experts like psychologist, lawyers, medical doctors
- Teaching as a profession is very popular and attractive among young people (e.g. this year in Turku we select 160 new students from 2700 applicants into the primary school teacher programme)
- Teachers have been given a rather autonomous professional role similar to many other academic experts

# Research based education that goes beyond the immediate requirements of the profession

- Teachers are not depending on some fashion ideas of learning and teaching but have larger background to think critically about the theories and pedagogical models
- There are more and more teachers who conduct small scale experiments within the confines of their teaching practice
- There are more and more doctoral students and professional researchers having a background in teaching
- Teachers have good facilities for reading research based literature within their discipline
- Teacher degrees (primary and secondary) have good reputation in companies and public administration

# Empirical evidence

- International comparison studies support the conclusion that Finnish teachers are more autonomous than teachers in many other countries (Väljjarvi, 2006)
- A current study (Siitonen, 2007) describe the professional status and work experiences of all people who graduated from the master level programmes of different faculties of the University of Turku in 1999 and 2000
  - After 5-6 years work experience primary school teachers describe the content and demands of their work and the general features of their expertise very similarly than medical doctors
  - They particularly value the general skills they learned during pre-service training:
    - self-regulation, thinking and problem-solving skills and abilities to search and manage knowledge

# Empirical evidence about the impact on students' learning?

- There is no convincing empirical data about the relationship between the teacher characteristics described above and students' learning in Finnish schools
- However, international evaluation studies show that the relative achievement of Finnish students started to improve when the number of teachers with “new training” approached 50 % of all teachers

# Conclusions

- There are many reasons to believe that the expert culture of teachers and research-based teacher education model have been key elements for the success of Finnish school system in the particular context of Finnish society and culture
- How to create and maintain high level expert culture among teachers
  - Pre-service training, in-service training, working conditions, networking
  - Problem of external assessments and accountability vs. trust
- However, I don't believe that it would be possible or meaningful to simple copy this model into other countries or cultures
- Some of the ideas and experiences can be helpful when planning reforms in Hungarian education but the meaning of these factors is highly depending on the cultural context and general structures of the society