

Pedagogical education for university teachers in Finland

La Formación pedagógica para los profesores universitarios en Finlandia

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Abstract

In Finland, teachers' pedagogical education is required at all levels from kindergarten to polytechnics except at the university level. In the 2010s, most Finnish universities are aiming at raising teachers' level of pedagogical competence. Pedagogical training has organised systematically since 1990s and at the moment most universities have preparedness to offer pedagogical education for all new university teachers, and also to the permanent teachers, who are willing to participate.

Key words: university pedagogy, professional development, university networks, competencies.

Resumen

En Finlandia la formación pedagógica es un requerimiento para todos los niveles de la profesionalidad docente, desde la Escuela Infantil hasta las Escuelas Politécnicas, exceptuada la universidad. En 2010 la mayor parte de las universidades finesas expresaron su intención de alcanzar mayores niveles de competencia pedagógica. La formación pedagógica se ha ido organizando de manera sistemática desde los años noventa y en la actualidad la mayoría de universidades se han preparado para ofrecer una formación pedagógica a todos los nuevos profesores universitarios, así como para los profesores permanentes, los cuales muestran interés en participar.

Palabras clave: pedagogía universitaria, desarrollo profesional, redes universitarias, competencias.

The development of Finnish pedagogical education for university teachers

In Finland, teachers at all levels of education from kindergarten to polytechnics are required to have pedagogical studies (60 ECTS). Only at the university teachers can teach without any pedagogical training. The roots lie in Humboldtian tradition, according to which learning takes place in the research community and is not separated from the research process. In 1840, J. V. Snellman introduced this idea into the Finnish university. According to Snellman, university cannot be based on the idea of delivering facts, as he saw teaching to be in school, but trying to find new knowledge. Thus, the term “teaching” was seen as not productive, but as a repeating function and thus “teaching” was labelled as not a suitable action at the university. Following that idea teaching how to teach at the university would thus be just a set of tricks how to deliver information and not a way to think how to support students’ knowledge building.

The earliest notions of pedagogical education for university teachers in Finland are from 1970s. As a part of great university reform and degree restructuring most Finnish universities reported of organising either pedagogical seminars or lecture series for university teachers (Komiteamietintö, 1979, pp. 73-81). During the 1980s, the eagerness to organize pedagogical teaching waned. The reasons for this are not clear, and there is no systematic research showing why this happened. One possible cause is that the pedagogical courses were organised in behaviouristic way that did not support the teachers’ pedagogical intentions. This view was supported by Nummenmaa in an oral presentation at a Peda-forum meeting (2007).

The 1990s was a time for expansion in Finnish university teacher education. The first unit for Educational Development was founded in the University of Oulu in 1991. The term “university pedagogy” (in Finnish: yliopistopedagogiikka) was introduced, and first university pedagogical courses were organised in most Finnish universities. In addition to shorter courses, almost all universities started to offer longer, from half to one year duration courses, valued approximately 10 current ECTS. In the beginning of 2000s, this activity was stabilized. During 2000s, university pedagogical courses became an established practice and the variety of offered courses and extent in ECTS’ expanded. In the beginning of 2010s, the biggest Finnish universities are offering the whole 60 ECTS package of teacher’s pedagogical education, the same that is required on other education levels in Finland.

Peda-forum – the national network for educational developers as an umbrella for activities

An important arena for development, discussions, training and formal and informal benchmarking has been the national network of expertise in university pedagogy and academic development “Peda-forum”. It was founded in 1994. It is a network for all university teachers and developers in the 14 universities of Finland. In the beginning the coordination was funded by the Ministry of Education. The network has contact persons in all universities. Annually the network organizes a 2-day seminar with

approximately 200-300 participants, who are mainly university teachers and educational developers.

Under the Peda-forum, a sub network is organised for university pedagogy teachers and developers. This network had its first meetings in 2006 and since that it has been very active, having one to four meetings each year. The network has dealt with such topics as the structure and contents of 10, 25 and 60 ECTS programmes; desirable competencies of these studies; organisation of pedagogical trainings at universities; recognition of prior learning (RPL) in university pedagogy; compulsory pedagogical studies and the development of Finnish university pedagogical journal (see below). The network has been very important for creating a good cooperation between the persons who in Finland organize, teach and also conduct research on university pedagogy. Thanks to the network, Finnish university pedagogical trainings are quite similar, so it is easy for teacher to move from one university to another and continue their pedagogical training.

From the very beginning of Peda-forum, a [Journal of University Pedagogy](http://lehti.yliopistopedagogiikka.fi/journal-of-university-pedagogy/) (in Finnish: Yliopistopedagogiikka, <http://lehti.yliopistopedagogiikka.fi/journal-of-university-pedagogy/>) has been published twice a year dealing with current pedagogical innovations and topical questions. In 2008, the journal started to publish also scientific, peer-reviewed articles in addition to descriptions of pedagogical innovations. There was clearly a need for this type of a scientific journal in Finland: the refereed articles section became quickly very popular and the editorial board was receiving lot of drafts (Murtonen, 2002). From the beginning of the year 2012, the journal has been published only online. Most articles in the journal are in Finnish to enhance the pedagogical vocabulary in Finnish and to offer researched knowledge in mother tongue to Finnish teachers. To promote international contacts, all refereed articles have also an abstract in English.

Peda-forum and its activities have created a vivid network and helped the educational developers to know each other in Finnish universities. This knowledge has also helped to start new education programmes. One result was TieVie network/project. In TieVie five universities organized training free of charge for all universities in Finland in the use of ICT in university education. During 7 years (2001-2007) approximately 1100 persons were trained in inter-university groups (8 and 15 ECTS courses). TieVie courses can be included as a part of university pedagogical education programmes. Even if the topic in the project was the use of ICT, this project served also as an informal benchmarking exercise on different ways to organize university pedagogy education in Finnish universities. The project was a good example of the power of the network. Network cooperation made it possible to share knowledge and to benefit from the know-how of top experts on a national level. None of the participating universities could have offered training of equal quality alone. The strengths of the network model were related to increased collaboration and cooperation among the participants, bringing expertise together, increased awareness and the widening of perspectives (Tenhula 2007, Peurasaari, Tenhula & Lappalainen 2008, Tenhula, Peurasaari, Lappalainen & Närhi 2008).

Peda-forum has also been a link to international cooperation in pedagogical education. International Consortium for Educational Development (ICED) is the

network for national educational/academic development networks. It organises a biannual conference where Finns have been active participants and contributors. ICED-conferences have been a forum where Nordic and Baltic colleagues have met organising regional lunch meetings. As a result of these informal meetings the first Nordic-Baltic seminar for educational developers was organised in Denmark 2011.

University of Turku as an example

University of Turku is one of the biggest universities in Finland. The development of pedagogical education for teachers at the University of Turku is a good example of how systematic pedagogical studies in Finland have been organised and expanded.

After the first trials in 1970-1980 described earlier, the first university pedagogical basic course was organised as staff training in 1996. The course lasted one year and it was valued as about 8 ECTS (at that time 4 “study weeks”). Each year approximately 20 teachers took part in the course. The Faculty of Medicine launched its own parallel course in 2003. In 2007, the University of Turku made a decision of starting to offer more extensive pedagogical education for its teachers, up to the whole 60 ECTS pedagogical studies. This task was assigned to the Faculty of Education. The 25 ECTS basic studies started in 2007 and the whole 60 ECTS package was offered in 2009. Today, every year starts two groups: one studying 10 ECTS during one year (51 students in 2013, in two groups, the other organised by the Faculty of Medicine) and another group continuing with 15 ECTS studies (22 students), lasting also one year. These two together form the 25 ECTS basic studies and it takes two years to fulfil the requirements. In addition, every second year we start with a group of students (N about 16) who study the remaining 35 ECTS education in 1,5-2 years, resulting the whole 60 ECTS pedagogical studies for university teachers.

The contents of the courses are as follows:

University pedagogy I 25 ECTS

Basics of the University pedagogy	10 ECTS
Teaching, learning and learning environments	6 ECTS
University as a structural and cultural environment	4 ECTS
Topical questions in teaching (optional courses)	5 ECTS

University pedagogy II 35 ECTS

Tutored teacher training	12 ECTS
Theory and practice of teaching	6 ECTS
Administration and development of higher education	4 ECTS
Discipline based themes	5 ECTS
Research based teaching	8 ECTS

The first course, “Basics of the University pedagogy”, can also be taken as an individual course. It is the aim of the University of Turku that all new teachers, and preferably also those already teaching at the university, would complete this course. The “Teaching, learning and learning environments” course focuses on the most recent development and research on the area of learning research. “The University as a structural and cultural environment” course deals with more sociological viewpoints. The last course in 25 ECTS studies, “Topical questions in teaching” can be put together from optional courses offered by the university’s staff development department.

In the 35 ECTS module, biggest courses are the “Tutored teacher training” and the “Research based teaching” course. Tutored teacher training is divided to training in one’s own job and training in a different job. This job is searched by the student and it can be e.g. another university or polytechnic, high school, training school or some other education institution. The training can also take place abroad, e.g. in the Erasmus teacher exchange programme. During the “Research based teaching” course the students make their own small scale research on their own topics. Some of the students also aim at publishing their research on a scientific journal.

Visions of the future in Finnish university pedagogy

The challenges of the future of Finnish university pedagogical training are focused around the next themes:

Compulsory university pedagogical studies?

Generally, pedagogical studies have thus far been voluntary. However, the situation is changing. There has been discussion about compulsory university pedagogical studies and some universities have begun to require these studies for their teachers. Recently, University of Jyväskylä, University of Oulu, Åbo Akademi University and Tampere University of Technology, have stated that new teachers must have pedagogical education (5 – 10 ECTS) or they have to take a course in two years of recruitment.

Other forms of professional development and assessment of merits

“Learning to teach” can also happen outside formal pedagogical training. The practices how to take into account teachers’ former teaching experience (*recognition of prior learning, RPL*) must also be developed as well as the practices how to evaluate teaching merits as a part of recruitment and tenure track. Key issue here would be how a teacher has systematically developed his or her own teaching.

Research based education

Finland is very active on research in higher education. The central idea in Finnish universities is that the university pedagogical education is based on research. Thus, most universities have researchers of university pedagogy that also teach on the courses. For example, University of Helsinki has a Centre for Research and Development of Higher Education (YTY) that occupies many researchers on the

domain. In smaller universities there has not been so much resources for research, so the challenge for future is how to ensure funding for research in addition to teaching.

Multiculturalism

The number of non-Finnish teachers, researchers and degree students in Finnish universities is very low. However, according to national strategy (Ministry of Education 2009) the aim is considerably risen the number. In order to improve the quality of education and counseling provided in a foreign language, the higher education institutions should focus on education activities for teachers and staff in language and cultural studies as well as the pedagogics of teaching in a foreign language.

Doctoral education

All academic expertise usually includes some form of teaching, supervising or guiding, so all students and especially graduate students would benefit from university pedagogical education. Universities have now started to search for models how to offer pedagogical studies for doctoral students. There has also been discussions about should some small course, e.g. 3 ECTS be obligatory for all graduate students, but none of the universities has yet required such.

University pedagogy as a part of other forms of educational development

In many Finnish universities, organization of university pedagogical courses is situated in the Faculty of Education while the main responsibility of educational/academic development is in university central administration. This means that special interest and coordination is required that university pedagogy would be integrated and linked to other forms of educational/academic development and support such as the development of study processes and student counselling, quality enhancement (eg. feedback on student experience and the utilization of the results), and the use of educational technology.

Cooperation or competition between universities?

The university reforms and the difficult financial situation have made the cooperation between universities looser in many sectors in Finland. At the moment the scope in most universities is inward. However, in pedagogical training the challenges in all universities are much the same. Also the network of university pedagogy teachers and developers has been very active in comparing and developing the structure and the contents of pedagogical programmes. The next step could be that the network would organize some courses for all universities. This would require special effort, common understanding of the benefits, and the development of the "business model". In a small country like Finland this would be a useful way to organize high quality teaching with small resources. Also, international cooperation would be very welcome.

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