

Chapter 5

Tension Patterns in Finnish Teacher Education – Recruitment, Reform and Relevance



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Abstract In this chapter, tension patterns and development opportunities within Finnish teacher education are examined. We have chosen to focus the analysis on the recruitment of student teachers, the relationship between theory and practice and mentorship for newly qualified teachers. Tension patterns and development opportunities appear in all three phases, linking the content and form of teacher education.

The analysis examines the overarching idea behind a recently introduced recruitment reform that was developed to let interviews play a larger role in the process. This was developed to address a situation in which an applicant applies to several universities or programmes, but is interviewed only once. The relationship between theory and practice in teacher education remains problematic, despite the practice schools' favourable organizational conditions. New teachers still face challenges when entering the profession; mentoring programmes have been introduced to reduce these tensions.

Like some other provinces in the Nordic countries, the self-governing Åland Islands have their own school system, which has both Finnish and Swedish traits, as well as similar kinds of tensions. Despite the presented tensions, research-based

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teacher education continues to be an appropriate foundation for the continuing development of Finnish teacher education.

5.1 Introduction

Since the nineteenth century, Finnish teacher education for secondary school (grades 7–12) has been taught at the master's level in traditional universities, while teacher education for primary school (grades 1–6) has also been integrated in universities for almost half a century. This integration was motivated by the need for a scientifically based professional qualification (Kansanen, 2014; Lavonen, 2018).

Over the years, teacher education at the master's level has proven its strengths through providing a stable professional foundation for teaching. In terms of public understanding, the university educated teacher has become a recognised position, and there seems to be consensus about the capacity of a higher education degree to secure adequate knowledge and skills. Therefore, during the last decades, no major demands have been made with regard to fundamentally changing teacher education and qualification criteria. Although the structure of teacher education represents recognised and sustainable qualities, it is not problem-free.

Puustinen et al. (2018) identify critical points in teacher education. They claim that the concept of the “teacher as a researcher” is unclear to student teachers, especially to secondary teachers. With a background in different subject cultures, the concept is perceived as jargon without substance. Although such criticism appears to be weak in relation to studies that draw other conclusions (e.g. Chung, 2009), comparative studies have revealed similar shortcomings. For example, a comparative study of coherence within educational programmes has revealed weaknesses in Finnish teacher education (Canrinus et al., 2017). The emphasis on research has meant lower priority has been given to teaching on campus because teacher educators as researchers compete in the same field as colleagues in other disciplines. Furthermore, newly qualified teachers' transition from educational to professional life has proven to be a threshold, with evidence of a growing number of dropouts from the teaching profession (Hansén et al., 2012; Heikkinen et al., 2012; Rantala et al., 2013). Finnish teacher education is thus not exempt from either structural or substantive problems, and since education is a societal mission, continuous efforts are required to respond to changes in the outside world.

Against this background, our purpose is to shed light on some tension patterns in Finnish teacher education that currently appear to be relevant in debate and research. Based on the research in which we are involved and many years of experience as teacher educators, we have chosen to highlight and review the following three tension patterns and ideas for improvement: (1) the recruitment of student teachers, (2) research orientation and practice and (3) newly qualified teachers' (NQT) encounters with professional work. Before examining the identified tension patterns, we

position Finnish teacher education in a Nordic context and highlight some characteristic features. Åland, with its self-designed education, represents an autonomous region of Finland. In a separate section, we will briefly touch upon issues attached to the recruitment of teachers on Åland, which lacks its own teacher education.

5.2 Finland and Reforms in Teacher Education

A look beyond the teacher education programmes in the Nordic countries exposes frequent extensive reforms carried out during the two last decades. As a contrast, in Finland, no comprehensive reform has been implemented since the 1970s. Its reform profile thus differs from the other Nordic countries (Hansén et al., 2012).

Finnish teacher education comprises four main categories (kindergarten, class, subject and special education teachers), in addition to different types of vocational teacher training. The training of kindergarten teachers permits them to work with children up to school age and in pre-primary education for six-year-old children. Class teachers for grades 1–6 are qualified to teach all subjects that are included in the curriculum; furthermore, they must immerse themselves in one or two of the elementary school subjects. The qualifications of subject teachers for lower and upper secondary schools emphasise in-depth studies in 1–3 of the school subjects. A special feature of the educational structure is that special pedagogy can be studied as a major course of study, leading to a master's degree. Special education teachers represent an important competence for the early identification of and support for learners with special needs. In this way, special teachers also contribute to creating equal opportunities for pupils. Special education's preventive function is built into the school system and is not limited to short-term measures (Ström, 2012).

Several researchers (Niemi, 2012; Simola, 2005; Tirri, 2014) have characterised Finnish education policy as having the intention to create an equal and uniform education system, which is also considered to have contributed to Finnish students' high level of performance in terms of international comparisons. Two specific features are usually highlighted in the characterisation of Finnish teachers. The first is the teachers' authority. According to Chung (2009), Finnish teachers create and maintain a certain distance with regard to students and parents. The second feature is condensed in the concept of autonomy. The previously centralised decision-making system was liberalised during the 1980s and 1990s, and the concept of a national curriculum was replaced by the idea of locally designed curricula based on national guidelines (Laukkanen, 1995). This development, in combination with master-based teacher education, emphasised teachers' role as autonomous and professional workers. Decentralisation was based on a culture of trust, according to which teachers possessed the necessary knowledge and moral competence, reflected in their daily work (Lillejord & Børte, 2017; Tirri, 2014).

5.3 Tension Patterns and Improvement Ideas

In the following section, the identified tension patterns, concretised in three questions, are scrutinised: *How can “the right” students be chosen? How can research orientation and practice be integrated? and How can newly qualified teachers be supported?*

5.3.1 How Can “the Right” Students Be Chosen?

Historically, different models have been applied in terms of recruitment to teacher education in the search for “ideal” student teachers. Several variants of selection instruments have been used, directed towards teaching skills and social and cognitive abilities. The continuing search for instruments shows that there are problems in reaching consensus about how to identify students with the ability to fulfil their academic studies and who, at least implicitly, have the potential to be successful teachers.

Since the 2000s, attention has been directed towards nationwide uniform criteria for admission. A so-called multidimensional adapted process model of teaching (MAP) has gradually emerged, and the following dimensions have been identified: a knowledge base for teaching and learning, cognitive thinking skills, social skills, relational skills, personal orientations and professional well-being (Metsäpelto et al., 2020).

There are two ways into teacher education; on the basis of a matriculation examination or through an entrance test. The latter is open to applicants without upper secondary school qualifications. After this first phase, each applicant participates in the second phase, which comprises a standardised multidimensional suitability test, carried out as so-called multiple mini interviews. The idea is that applicants are interviewed at five different stations, where distinct aspects of a teacher’s work are measured and evaluated. Being accepted as a student teacher rests on each applicant’s result in this suitability test.

A study by Metsäpelto et al. (2019) revealed that those applicants who obtained high marks in the matriculation exam and those who found their studies meaningful were successful. Success in the entrance examination was also associated with a desire to succeed and do better than others, in combination with a slight fear of failure. The results of the selection system, according to the authors, appear to be relevant and are considered to support the development goals for teacher education.

The basic reason for developing a system for the admission of student teachers is the fact that Finnish teacher education has continuously had many applicants. This pressure has enabled the teacher education units to recruit students with good results from upper secondary schools. The reason for young people’s interest in becoming teachers lies not only in the status of the master-based teacher education but also in

Table 5.1 Applicants who applied for Finnish class-teacher education and participated in a national selection cooperation network between teacher education institutions (Finnish National Agency for Education 2020)

Number of class-teacher applicants and those selected in different years	2017	2019	2020
Total number of applicants for teacher education	6519	5310	6231
Number of students who started studies on a teacher education programme	960	984	963
Proportion of students who started studies on a teacher education programme	14%	18%	15%

the social context and the status of teachers in Finnish society (Simola, 2005). Table 5.1 shows how Finnish class-teacher education has many applicants, despite a slight declining tendency, and how the proportion of student teachers selected remains constantly below 20%.

Behind the pursuit of standardisation lies the requirement for equivalence in the sample, and the criteria are also stated to correspond to some form of teacher ideal. Standardisation means that everyone is judged according to the same criteria and assessments to exclude arbitrary interpretations. Seemingly objectively measurable criteria do not necessarily self-evidently define perceptions of the ideal teacher. The question of which teacher ideals are allowed to guide the suitability test in search for the “right” student teachers is therefore crucial for schools and society. Continuous follow-up research on how the admission system works in practice is therefore necessary.

5.3.2 *How Can Research Orientation and Practice Be Integrated?*

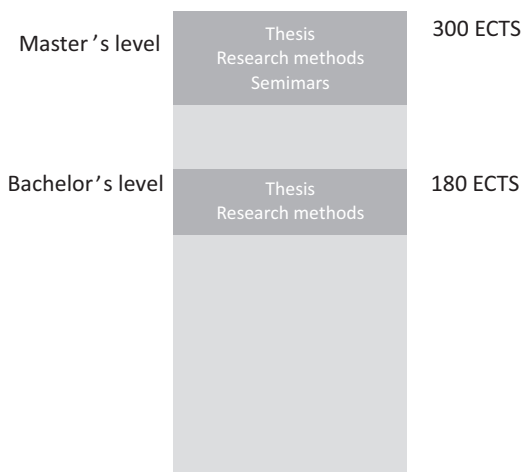
We have limited the search for an answer to this question to two intertwined areas: research orientation and the theory–practice relationship. These areas have been chosen against the background of Finnish teacher education’s explicit emphasis on a design anchored in a research-founded understanding of a teacher’s work. Additionally, the relationship between theory and practice refers primarily to the relationship between campus courses and internships in schools in Finland, mainly conducted in state-based practice schools.

Research orientation: The level of academic demands on teaching staff has gradually increased. In the past, it was considered sufficient for teachers to be up-to-date with the specialist literature in their fields, without conducting research themselves. Today, it is assumed that teacher educators have a doctorate and actively conduct research in the field of teaching. As in other disciplines, teacher education units require the staff’s engagement in research and development work, as well as research-based teaching (Kansanen, 1997). Teaching and supervision are assumed to be consistent with new research results and must be carried out by teachers engaged in research.

Student teachers are actively involved in research, which corresponds with the requirements for a professional qualification. A scientifically based understanding of teaching work has been considered beneficial for developing critical thinking and the ability to act autonomously (Kansanen et al., 2000; Lavonen, 2018). Teachers' ability to make educational decisions based on rational thinking, in addition to everyday intuitive decisions, is highlighted as a distinguishing feature of what research-based teacher education must offer (Kansanen et al., 2000). The intention is not that every teacher is qualified to be a fully fledged researcher. Instead, the qualification is aimed at equipping prospective teachers with the readiness to explore their own teaching systematically and reflectively, with the goal of continuously developing their own practice. Ultimately, the research orientation is about improving conditions for students' learning (Hansén & Sjöberg, 2006). Figure 5.1 presents a schematic picture of the positioning of the explicit research component of teacher education, with Åbo Akademi University's class-teacher education used as an example.

The explicit research-oriented component comprises one-fifth (60 out of 300 ECTS) of teacher education and is divided into two phases. During the first phase (bachelor's level), students write a scientific essay that can either be a literature study or an empirical work. In the second phase, students are expected to carry out empirical research (master's level). Both phases are associated with courses in research methodology and relevant seminars, where the emerging manuscripts are processed, and students are allowed to practise acting as respondents and opponents. This arrangement aims to develop the students' critical awareness and ability to analyse education phenomena through deconstructing concrete problems and finding solutions. In this way, they are given the opportunity to discover the potential that lies in systematically and thematically thinking together. The setup also provides opportunities to actively use and expand the repertoire of educational concepts and thus internalise professional language use.

Fig. 5.1 Schematic illustration of the explicit research component (60 ECTS) in Finnish teacher education



Research on how student teachers relate to explicit research activities can illuminate approaches that are applicable to their work as teachers. Eklund's (2014, 2018) studies show that a majority of interviewed student teachers rate the value of dissertation writing as positive. For example, the value lies not only in in-depth subject knowledge and the development of professionalism but also in the perception of the status of a master's degree. Additionally, the students emphasise the opportunities relating to further studies as well as the maturity and the personal development that the dissertation work entails. Students' negative judgments are related to perceptions about the connection to the profession and to missing links to school and classrooms. Too large a proportion of the studies was considered to be dominated by the thesis. When student teachers propose alternatives to the dissertation work, they request more internships, practical work and action-oriented courses. Other researchers have also addressed such criticisms. Puustinen et al. (2018) call for more internship-related research so that, for example, undergraduate students can study how theoretical thinking develops in practical situations (Säntti & Salminen, 2015).

Do theory and practice meet? Historically, teacher education in Finland has had a practical and ethical character, particularly for primary school teachers. The task has been to equip students with the basic knowledge and skills that are considered necessary for every citizen. At teacher seminaries, a strong, normative teacher ideal was developed based on Christian values that would be reflected in practice (Sjöberg & Hansén, 2003). The requirement of scientific knowledge has, in primary teacher education, not primarily been considered necessary for the understanding of teaching practice. The relationship between theory and practically oriented components of teacher education has therefore not been perceived as a major problem. The pedagogical qualification of teachers for higher stages has also been markedly practical, while subject studies at the university level have provided future subject teachers with a theory-based scientific understanding of their topics.

With the academisation of teacher education as a whole, the situation changed, along with an emerging complex relationship between theory and practice. Also, teaching practice should be permeated by theory-based understanding. The purpose of theory is to enable student teachers to describe their practice objectively, by applying scientific terms and a scientific way of thinking to their everyday routine. During internships, students are given the opportunity to apply research-based knowledge and, vice versa, their practice can form the starting point for theory development (Aspfors et al., 2011). Academisation contributes to maintaining tension between scientifically based theoretical understanding and teaching practice. The academic "weight" in education creates an asymmetrical relationship with practice, which is difficult to position in an environment that overemphasises research and academic excellence.

The relationship between theoretical and practical orientations in education is further complicated by the rationality and competence requirements that society imposes on future teachers (Luukkainen, 2000). If practice is too unilaterally focused on the classroom situation, the risk is that teacher education will not succeed in creating an understanding of the social dimension of education. Therefore,

to raise and consolidate the future status of teacher education, social relevance needs to be emphasised in the theory–practice relationship. Society must be able to rely on the fact that schools’ tasks are not limited to a reproductive function but also serve as an instrument for desirable changes in social practice. From this perspective, a close and mutually supportive relationship between theory and practice is vital for the quality of teacher education. Although the concept of practice schools is considered to provide appropriate organisational prerequisites for linking theory and practice, student teachers expose the same types of criticism in Finland as in other Nordic countries (Lillejord & Børte, 2017; Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2019).

5.3.3 How Can Newly Qualified Teachers Be Supported?

Although Finnish teacher education has an excellent international reputation, it does not appear to have the capacity to prepare for and respond to all the challenges that teachers face in a rapidly changing environment. However, it should be added that Finland shares this problem with most other countries as the transition from teacher education to professional life is often considered the most critical phase of a teacher’s career. The transition, also called induction, is considered a unique phase in the professional development of teachers. Induction includes the socialisation process with regard to the profession and the school community, as well as various types of formal programmes designed to support new teachers (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999). The transition from studies to professional life is demanding in most professions. In many occupations, workers are given opportunities for growth in their jobs during a transitional period. For new teachers, the situation is different. From the beginning of their employment, teachers bear full legal and educational responsibilities. For this reason, the teaching profession has been described as an “early high-plateau profession”, which illustrates the full responsibility that teachers are immediately assigned (Aspfors, 2012). The early working years have also been described as tumultuous and demanding (Lindqvist, 2019).

An increasing number of countries have paid close attention to the problem over the last decade, and various models to specifically support new teachers have been developed. According to a study by Kemmis et al. (2014), three archetypes of mentoring new teachers appear internationally as “supervision”, “support” and “collaborative self-development”. The first type is aimed at mentoring programmes in which the mentor directs or guides a new teacher through the so-called special standards and requirements during a probation year in order for him/her to become fully qualified as a teacher. The second concerns the support for professional development that a mentor individually provides to a newly qualified teacher. The third relates to mentoring in a group where new teachers, together with a mentor, discuss current relevant issues in order to promote success in the profession and professional development. The different archetypes of mentoring place the new teacher in various positions in relation to the mentor. Lately, studies are also questioning if the

use of formal mentoring, as the only strategy for the support of NQTs, is sufficient. These studies investigate how NQTs find and use informal support from their colleagues (Harju & Niemi, 2020; Kelchtermans, 2019; März & Kelchtermans, 2020). High-quality collegial support, including professional support as well as emotional and social support, is important for new teachers' job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation to teach (März & Kelchtermans, 2020; Thomas et al., 2019).

Although Finland still lacks a national mentoring system, the third form of peer-group mentoring (PGM) has been developed since 2007 in collaboration with researchers, teacher educators and teachers (Heikkinen et al., 2012). An important stage in the development of PGM was the Ministry of Education and Culture's 2010 commitment to the nationwide OSAAVA (which means knowledgeable) programme for the development of teaching staff's professional competence. One of the sub-projects in the programme, Osaava Verme (2010–2016), was intended to support teachers in the transition from education to working life. The project was financed nationally and consisted of a consortium that included all universities that provide teacher education (8) and all vocational teacher education colleges (5). The project included the training of mentors who, in turn, mentored groups of new teachers around the country. Currently, approximately 900 mentors have been trained under the project. In 2017–2019, Osaava Verme was followed by Verme2, which was further developed to offer mentoring support to groups other than new teachers, including student teachers, principals and teachers at the end of their careers (Heikkinen et al., 2020).

A characteristic of PGM in the above-mentioned programmes is its development in collaboration with research-based teacher education, with regard to the professional autonomy that graduates are expected to have after their 5 years of education. In a mentoring group, the teachers are regarded as equals, and participation is voluntary. Each mentoring group, which can consist of up to ten new teachers, is led by an experienced teacher or mentor and gathers six to eight times during a school year. Key features are dialogue, collegiality, well-being and ethics. The organisational setup focuses on different support processes. Didactic support can mean that aspects of planning and the implementation of teaching and student assessments are discussed. Semantic support, which is primarily linked to linguistic aspects, concerns the question of how teachers translate pedagogical concepts from education into a working professional language in communication regarding teachers' work. As the design is based on PGM, social support can be perceived as the essence of mentoring and relationship issues in the meetings with students, colleagues and guardians (Aspfors, 2012). Through the interaction and dialogue that characterise PGM, an individual participant in the group can also experience support, which contributes to increasing one's personal security and courage to act and make didactic decisions.

Experiences of the PGM model are very well documented, with approximately 193 research publications produced during the period 2009–2019 (Heikkinen et al., 2020). A recent literature review by Tynjälä et al. (2020) focused on 46 of these peer-reviewed articles and book chapters. The benefits and challenges of PGM are categorised into three levels: (1) individuals and groups, (2) community and organisation and (3) national issues. At the *individual and group level*, the findings reveal,

above all, many benefits of PGM in relation to teacher well-being and professional and identity development. The obvious advantage of PGM has been considered to be prioritised time for collaboration and thus opportunities to jointly process, discuss and reflect on new teachers' work experiences. The discussions have proven to be mentally supportive and practically solution-oriented. At the same time, the model is undemanding in the sense that it is not burdened by elements, such as performance requirements, judgment or control. The challenges identified are related to time management, participant commitment and, on some occasions, group dynamics. At the *organisational level*, the benefits are mostly indirect as the teachers may act as change agents in their schools. The lack of recognition of peer learning as a form of professional development is identified as a challenge. At the *national level*, the benefits are primarily related to the national network that has developed around the PGM model and the noteworthy body of research-based knowledge produced based on this. The biggest challenge is still the lack of legislation or national collective agreements around PGM. Consequently, PGM does not have any officially recognised status in the education system, and municipalities can continue to choose not to prioritise this form of professional support during financially difficult times. Thus, municipalities greatly vary regarding the questions of whether mentoring is offered and whether mentors are allocated time and payment for their work.

Through Osaava Verme, Finland has formulated guidelines for how mentoring and explicit PGM should be developed (Heikkinen et al., 2015), and a relatively large number of mentors have been trained. In contrast to the binding national agreements that Norway has achieved, municipalities in Finland continue making independent decisions on whether or not mentoring programmes will be introduced. If Finland wishes to live up to the principles of autonomy and equality, national frameworks for mentoring should also be developed in this country.

5.4 Teacher Recruitment on the Åland Island

Åland is an autonomous region of Finland with a population of approximately 30,000 people. The official language is Swedish, which is a protected minority language within Finland (Ålands Landskapsregering, 2021a, b). Its autonomy gives the regional government—Landskapsregeringen—extensive legislative competence, for example, with regard to education. The entire school system has a structure and organisation similar to the Finnish one, but Åland has its own curricula and policy regulations for all school levels. It has been said that the curricula for compulsory and upper secondary school so to say took the best from the Swedish and Finnish curricula. The new curricula from 2021 are written more in line with the Finnish ones, although some concepts and terms deviate from those used in Finnish education. The language of instruction in all schools is Swedish, with an exception for second language learning. While it is not mandatory to study Finnish, English is compulsory from the early grades (Ålands Landskapsregering, 2015). The region's

autonomy, together with its geographical position in the Baltic sea in between Sweden and Finland, flavours Åland's culture, politics and educational issues, but it also creates some demands and contradictions.

Furthermore, Åland offers tertiary-level education at Åland University of Applied Sciences – Högskolan på Åland—but no teacher education (Åland University of Applied Sciences, [n.d.](#)). This means that all educated teachers on the island are educated in either Finland or another country, such as Sweden. Thus, teachers working together in schools on the island are educated within culturally different education systems (Furuhagen et al., 2019). Following the autonomous Åland curricula, especially the one used for compulsory schooling, can be seen as a contradictory task since the teachers are educated in relation to other curricula within teacher educational programmes that differ culturally, as highlighted by Furuhagen and his colleagues.

In recent years, the proportion of teachers with a Swedish teacher education has increased and amounts today to about 60%. In particular, the vast majority of teachers who work within the compulsory school system receive their education in Sweden. At the upper secondary level, the proportion of teachers educated either in Finland or in Sweden is quite evenly distributed. A distinct tendency is that younger compulsory school teachers are educated in Sweden, which is not as observable in the case of upper secondary school teachers. According to statistics from 2020, the youngest upper secondary teachers (20–29 year olds) are educated in Finland, but those aged 30–39 are almost all educated in Sweden. Fifteen years ago, the statistics showed the opposite picture, even though the tendency, especially for compulsory schooling, was that younger student teachers received their education in Sweden. The fact that the majority of the teachers were previously educated in Finland was somewhat contradictory, as the curricula at that time were discursively and culturally closer to those in Sweden (Ålands Statistikbyrå, 2020). Today, a similar but opposite contradiction can be identified: Åland's curricula are similar to those of Finland, but more and more teachers are educated in Sweden.

As part of its legislative competence, Åland can decide on teachers' formal qualifications, but as it is constitutionally a part of Finland, all Finnish teacher education is accepted on the island. Furthermore, the Åland government regards Finnish teacher education as the standard in relation to which all other education is assessed. Teachers with an education that, in terms of grades and subjects covered, deviates from the Finnish one, need to undergo an adaptation period. Most teachers educated elsewhere are, however, in agreement with the European Union (EU), considered to be qualified without requiring an introduction to Åland's curricula (Ålands Landskapsregering, 2021a, b).

In summary, a question can be raised regarding whether the Åland government should try to make Finnish teacher education more attractive for prospective teachers or, otherwise, establish its own. Making such a decision could mean that, culturally, pedagogically and didactically, Åland's curricula are taught through a more unified teacher collegium. Until then, one strategy could be to have all new teachers undergo an in-service programme or introductory period in order to be prepared to jointly implement an education framed by a "third curriculum". However, no

discussion exists about how education methodically, pedagogically and didactically can be affected by such a contradiction. Despite the observable tension between Åland's autonomous education system, the lack of its own teacher education and the recruitment of teachers from (mainly) two countries, the education system so far seems to work well in terms of students' achievements.

5.5 Discussion

There is consensus that the approach chosen for teacher education functions appropriately, with no reason to fundamentally restructure the design. However, previous PISA successes have led to a deceptive impression that most matters regarding schools and teacher education work well in Finland. Although the country is considered to have a functioning and academically recognised high level of teacher education, our review has revealed tension patterns, including in areas that have been marketed externally as success factors.

One problem that has emerged concerns recruitment for teacher education. The issue is not the lack of suitable applicants but the accuracy of the selection process. The challenge is to identify appropriate criteria for recruiting student teachers who are motivated and judged as able to successfully complete their studies and work as professional teachers, through a selection instrument based on a theoretical foundation (Lavonen, 2018). The perception of the meaning of teacher quality changes over time and raises the question of what qualities should be given preference. Potential teacher qualities are more extensive than those included in a standardised aptitude test. Another permanent problem is the question of which personal qualities can or cannot be affected by teacher education (Fonseca, 2017). We have also examined two closely related patterns of tensions concerning the idea of making education more scientific through a research-based approach, which is also relevant to practical schoolwork.

The first pattern questions whether a large proportion of education programmes should be based on the premise that explicit research activities are optimal qualification tools. Studies that have examined teachers' and new teachers' perceptions of the importance of dissertations have shown different patterns. Although the possibility of deepening one's research within a chosen theme is perceived as positive, students and teachers are often critical of the concrete benefits in terms of teachers' work (Eklund et al., 2019). Therefore, the questions raised are how the choice of the research topic can be made more relevant to teachers' future practice and how research can be conducted so that student teachers are involved in action-based contact with schoolwork in practice. Action research has been shown to give student teachers opportunities, within their dissertation projects, to meet experienced teachers and observe their daily work in a way that strengthens the development of student teachers' pedagogic action skills (Jakhelln et al., 2016; Rönnerman & Forsman, 2011/2017).

The focal point of the second pattern concerns the question of how the relationship between theory and practice can provide mutual support in daily work. Through its practice school institutions, Finland has provided student teachers with organisational and pedagogical opportunities to implement their research ideas. Through practice in education, student teachers develop a professional identity that can be supported by content-oriented, theory-related courses. We have also pointed out research that claims that theory and practice do not meet, despite the favourable conditions offered by practice schools (Puustinen et al., 2018). Obviously, it is necessary to conduct more extensive and in-depth research that highlights critical points and obstacles to collaboration and offers constructive solutions.

A challenge facing new teachers is the discrepancy between the strong research emphasis in teacher education and the reality they encounter in their professional practice. Although Finland lacks a stipulated mentoring system, peer-group mentoring (PGM) serves as a model for supporting new teachers' entry into the profession, emphasising autonomy, that is, an independently acting teacher, and equality. In contrast to a mentor–teacher relationship, PGM is characterised by an equal relationship among participants and provides an opportunity for collective reflection on teachers' work. Although the model has proven to work well, its potential has not been fully fulfilled due to the following: (1) the lack of a national framework for how the mentoring programme should be implemented, (2) the lack of recognition of peer learning as a professional development method and (3) the unresolved compensation of employees for their time dedicated to PGM and the implementation of financing models to establish the activity on a regular basis (Tynjälä et al., 2020).

We have touched on some tension patterns in Finnish teacher education and also touched on the specific situation regarding education on Åland. As shown in this review, the critical points, although hardly described as dramatic, draw attention to vital areas that require continued improvement in the existing structure of education. Recruitment to teacher education, which has so far been a university matter, is being unified to increase equality to such an extent that it approaches a standardised admission procedure. In our review, we have highlighted both opportunities and risks that the new assumption may bring. The pace of reform follows a typical Finnish pattern, where changes are taking place slowly but thoughtfully. Few critics have questioned the relevance of teacher education that is research founded and linked to a master's degree, but a good education can always be made better.

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