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Teacher Education and the Idea of Investigative Working Style

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Abstract

The cross-curricular theme 'Growth as a person' in the Finnish National Core Curriculum is supposed to support children forming their personal identity and their comprehensive growth. This paper targets to the objectives that steer teaching in school. It does not discuss what topics and subject specific contents should be taught, but what kind of skills they need when faced with competing identity models. Students in teacher education should adopt an investigative working style and be trained to remodel their societal understanding which reshapes their teaching form time to time. This paper reviews a teacher education course in which the teacher students explored contemporary phenomena and tried to construct their own teacher identity within the investigative method.

In Finland the National Core Curriculum details the objectives of the teaching. Especially the cross-curricular theme 'Growth as a person' in the National Core Curriculum should take the advantage on the idea of children forming up their personal identity and to support the pupil's comprehensive growth.

This paper targets to the objectives that steer the teaching at school. It does not discuss what topics and subject specific contents should be thought to the children but merely what kind of skills they need when they are viewing the affordances of the modern world which is full of competing identity models for children.

The students in teacher education should adopt the investigative working style and be trained to remodel their societal understanding which reshapes their teaching form time to time. During a pedagogic course the students were encouraged to examine the present world. They focused in their own study themes emerging from the society and analyzed their own thinking. The students found meaningful topics and they assumed to benefit from the exploring working method in their future careers.

This paper reviews shortly a teacher education course, in which the teacher students made expeditions in the present-day phenomena and tried to construct their own teacher identity with the investigative method at the same time.

Introduction

Our children are nowadays available to huge number of identity models. In every day life the offering of the role models for children and youth is huge: for example television, films, pop music, music videos, soap operas, commerce, reality shows and sports offer a countless number of big names, heroes and idols, whose lifestyle seems to be worth to be striven. Though it seems that the status of the idols is short and disposable – new-comers

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overtake rapidly the eminence the old ones - the cultures of youth, media and commerce produce new models and new needs constantly.

The traditional idea of growing concentrated earlier 'what am I to be' in the societal sense. The environment and the societal status of the ancestry and the expectations of the family affected forthrightly to the presence and the future plans of the progeny. One's propensities and predispositions to choose a differing lifestyle was weak and the hopes and desires were hidden in dreams.

Now the children and youth seem to concentrate in the question of 'what would I like be today' - what is modern, what makes celebrity, who is my idol. The desires do not necessarily urge from the child's intrinsic quality but the mainstreaming trends and styles. The youngsters should be helped in growing. They should learn to know themselves and learn how to be critical over the meanings of the present phenomena. They should be able to respect their characteristics and not just choosing one identity model today and another on the other day.

Teacher identity and teacher profession in Finland

In Finland, the school system has received a lot of positive feedback in recent years because of good school achievements especially in the comprehensive school, which have become familiar through international comparative studies (OECD 2007, Välijärvi et al. 2007). The outcomes are considered to reflect very strongly, not only structural reforms of the educational system, but also a high quality of teacher education.

The compulsory education in Finland lasts nine years, from the age of 7 to the age of 16. Initial teacher education *in universities* prepares teachers for kindergarten, comprehensive school (class teachers), upper secondary school (subject teachers), special education, liberal adult education and student counselling. Students are admitted to university teacher education via entrance examination which usually consists of a written test and also interviews and aptitude tests.

In Finland preschool teachers get a Bachelor's degree in educational science. Teachers in the first six forms of basic education are usually generalists (class teachers), whereas those in the last three forms and at the upper secondary level are subject specialists (subject teachers). Class teachers get a Master's degree in educational science where as subject teachers have completed their Master's degrees in the subject they teach accompanied with the pedagogical studies.

Still teacher profession seems to need new kind of determinations and the education continuous development. On the other hand the pupils should be prepared for the knowledge-based society but the teachers are as well increasingly bound to teach classes that have pupils from different cultures, mother tongues, ability levels and levels of special needs. In Finland the Teacher education Development Programme (2001) specified the attributes and future development lines of the teacher profession. During the teacher education the essential objective is to combine the teacher's idea of man with the conception of knowledge and learning in the pedagogical studies. The human and

inclusive idea of man is the basis to understand different kinds of learners and thus exploit individual methods to help the pupils to construct knowing.

Nowadays being a teacher means encountering the changes, living with change and understanding the changes in the society. In the dynamic world the teachers should be constantly able to remodel their societal understanding, to reconstruct their knowing, reform the learning objectives and reshape their teaching and instruction. The old idea of providing and passing the information to the students is outdated though the teachers must also master the educational content and have a conception of how subjects, vocations or vocational skills are learned. Being a teacher means discovering and encountering change, living with change and influencing change in the society.

The research findings show that the pedagogical studies included in initial teacher education have already been developed quite well in this aspect. Community-building, social aspects of the teaching profession as well as the individuality and diversity are taken into account in the development of teacher education. Societal changes, such as those in the structure of population, will be reflecting in teacher education also in the future. (Piesanen, Kiviniemi & Valkonen, 2006). However teachers' needs for in-service training vary by fields and subjects. In comprehensive and upper secondary schools the teachers usually prefer curricular and subject-specific training but increasingly teachers place more emphasis on training related to supporting student's efforts and also preparation for working life (Piesanen, Kiviniemi & Valkonen, 2007).

In the changing and dynamic world the teachers should be constantly able to remodel their societal understanding, to reconstruct their knowing, to reform the learning objectives and to reshape their teaching and instruction. Thus teachers' professional competence is seen in their competence to make the desired learning opportunities available.

Identity and Education

In Finland the basic education is planned to form a coherent learning pathway that supports children's growth, development and well-being. The Finnish education system starts with nine-year basic education (comprehensive school), preceded by one year of voluntary pre-primary education. The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2004) specifies the objectives and core contents of subjects and subject groups in basic education. Apart from the subjects the curriculum delivers the objectives for cross-curricular themes to be taught in basic education. The 'Growth as a person' cross-cultural theme encompasses all instruction. The goal of the theme is to support the pupil's comprehensive growth and the development of his or her life management skills. The objective is to create a growth environment that supports individuality and healthy self-esteem on the other hand and on the other, development of a sense of community based equality and tolerance. The main objective is that the pupils will understand their growth as a whole (physical, psychological and social growth) and their uniqueness as an individual.

The word "identity" means 'the same' or 'in the same way'. The modern motivation psychology connects the term identity closely together with the object for identification,

or with the care and protection as well as with the separation and growing up. Identity formation starts in the earliest years when the child grows aware that they are separate and unique individuals. This self-awareness develops through physical, cognitive and social changes and ends to the identity that will serve the human as the basis of adult life. Because the identity of children and adolescents is so mouldable, the influence of others is immense. The healthy human will be a person who can play different roles in harmony with the changing environment.

In the old days individuals were brought up in local environments and the socialisation of children took place in the families. Upbringing has a smaller impact on people's lives as it used to be and the consumer identity in today's society is amplifying its share. The increased models have increased the anxiety of the growing children.

The Course on the contemporary phenomena

The aim of the teacher education course 'Growth as a person - the modern phenomena of the society' was build to explore the formation of a child's personal identity in the modern society. The students were asked to explore the chosen current phenomenon and the rivalling role models of the young people by their own intention. After the theoretical and participatory research they should expand the results and the meaning of the theme as a part of her own professional identity and the teaching. The final task was to share the findings and idea with the peers with a presentation or activating the others with actual doing.

The students' background information and attitudes were charted with the help of the Four field chart to reveal the subconscious and automatic phrasing of the speaker. The Four field chart was designed to help the students to open up and structure his or her thinking and to analyze the knowledge, conceptions, views, opinions, impressions and assumptions of the theme. The chart has the next cells to be filled: 1) Knowledge: What do I know of the theme? 2) Opinions, experiences: What kind of experiences and opinions do I have of this matter? 3) Presumptions: On which things and circumstances in a child's living does this matter influence? 4) Associations (benefits, challenges etc.): What other matters do connect with this?

The first activating tasks were planned to arouse thinking, to invoke feelings and to raise questions. The students were given articles to read. They were asked at first to write down their present ideas and conceptions of the chosen theme (the name and the key words of the article). After that they were asked to read the given article and then objectively specify and write down one's own thinking on the chart. In the next meeting they were asked to summarise the article and then illustrate their own viewpoints. After that they were to formulate and state a few provocative or activating questions to the others and lead the discussion.

The task to select ones own topic started by collecting texts in a wide sense. In their scrapbooks they added newspaper articles, pieces of news and ideas from the net, media, art, films. They made illustrations, added brochures, cut pieces of flyers and advertisements and documented their field observations. When meeting the group

continued the discussions on found topics (texts, pictures, observations) in order to determine the themes for each student.

The additional study assignments consisted of reading (articles, literature) specified one's own research subject; studying the theme in real life situations and presenting the outcomes and connecting the findings with their own future teacher work.

The topics of the studies could be divided in the following five categories:

- 1) Imagination (What and why do the children play; Fairytales and the lessons in them, Music-workshop – a story with sounds / different learners)
- 2) Media (Childhood in the media-world, Image processing, Irc-galleries - the rules and activity; TV programmes for children, Strip cartoons)
- 3) Exploration of the world (What is forbidden from children? Children experiencing the places, My colours – research on the favourite colours, Children and photographing – exploring the world)
- 4) Childhood and family (Mental problems in youth, Children's peer discussions on divorce in the net, Fatherhood in the modern world)
- 5) New interests (Japanese youth cultures, Parkour and the child's natural way of action, Idols of today, Beauty idols of girls, Role playing).

Investigative working style

After two performed courses under this topic it is obvious that we should retain the students' possibilities to contribute to the course contents and help them to find their own study themes out of the present media and through real-world observations. One's own interest and the possibility to influence is the best guarantee for learning motivation and positive learning outcomes.

The students should be encouraged to choose their own study themes by examining the present world. They obviously need instruments to analyze their thinking.

It strongly seems that the students need help to analyze their up front thinking and previous knowledge. The using of the four-field-chart operates satisfactory for we need awakening to discover our own preferences and lines of thought. It seems as well interesting to make the difference visible between one's own experience versus the written and read-and repeated information of the matter. The small-scale observations, experimentation or other research activities with the children (or grown-up people) make the difference substantive.

It is furthermore the students need a high quality set of articles and other reading for their use. There is a faint risk that the course discussions and themes tend to turn merely on the negative aspects and sides of the phenomena of the contemporary society - so guidance is also needed to reveal the positive dimensions of the present events.

The students found meaningful topics of the present society which influence the formation of a child's personal identity in the modern society. For the future teacher quality and for the teacher education it is satisfying also that they assumed to benefit themselves from the exploring working method in their future careers.

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