Teacher education in supporting inclusive life-long learning in Finland

Paper presented at the International Conference on Inclusive Education for Diversity in Abu Dhabi March 2016

Author: Dr Eila Burns, Teacher Education College, JAMK University of Applied Sciences

My presentation focuses on discussing the role of teacher education in supporting inclusion and diversity in a life-long learning context i.e. post-compulsory education. At the beginning of the presentation, my aim is to put Finnish teacher education in a broader context by introducing some facts about Finnish teachers as professionals. Then I will introduce some elements that underpin the development of teacher education. Those elements include the framework model of quality inclusive education at vocational education and training (VET), and a profile of an inclusive teacher. At the end of the presentation, I will discuss the theoretical framework for inclusive teacher education and offer an example of the teacher education model in Finland.

High-level teacher education in Finland

Finland is well known for its high-level of teacher education, which not only includes classroom teacher training but also post-compulsory teacher education. This has been substantiated, for example, by two recent surveys, Teachers at Glance 2013 and Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2013.

Statistics published in Teachers at Glance reveal that, indeed, in Finnish vocational education and training (VET) organisations have highly qualified teachers. According to the statistics, 80 % of all principals and lecturers were fully qualified, and, an astounding figure of 95 % of special educational needs (SEN) teachers in VET education were likewise fully qualified (Kumpulainen, 2013,Teachers in Finland). Another international survey, TALIS 2013, carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicated that over 90% of teachers in primary, upper secondary and vocational schools in Finland like their job. One reason for this high figure is that teachers are valued in the Finnish society. This materialised as 57% of primary school

teachers and 69% of those in secondary education (includes upper and VET education) stating that they believe that society values their job as a teacher.

The high-level of teacher education has been acknowledged as being one of the reasons for Finnish students' success, for example, in PISA, but also in receiving excellent results in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies. PIACC was developed by the OECD to assess the proficiency of adults from age 16 onwards in literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments. These skills are "key information-processing competencies" that are relevant to adults in many social contexts and work situations, and necessary for fully integrating and participating in the labour market, education and training, and social and civic life. The PIACC data was collected in 2011/2012, in which around 166 000 adults aged 16-65 were surveyed in 24 countries and expanded by including additional nine countries in 2014-15. (*Skills Matter: Further Results from the Survey of Adult Skills* (2016). Perhaps not surprisingly, the PIACC results indicated that Finland was among the top three best-ranked countries in all the measured competencies (OECD, 2013).

In the paper *The Value of Smarter Teachers: International Evidence on Teacher Cognitive Skills and Student Performanc*e by .Eric Hanushek, Marc Piopiunik and Simon Wiederhold (2014), a link between PIACC assessment and teacher education was addressed. The authors used the data from the PIAAC survey to measure cognitive skills of teachers. This data allowed them to quantify differences in teacher skills in numeracy and literacy across countries. By combining the information on teacher quality with student achievement, they discovered that differences in teacher cognitive skills are a significant determinant of international differences in student performance. The authors state that "When we look across our 23 sampled countries, we see that Finland does in fact have the most skilled teachers by the PIAAC measures" (p.27).

One point to note from this paper is that quality teacher education matters. And if quality teachers can improve students' academic achievements, could teachers' increased understanding of diversity enhance the wider awareness of inclusion and diversity in the society?

What is inclusive education?

Research papers on inclusion seem to suggest that inclusion is a rather elusive and confusing concept (Florian, 2015) thus it is difficult to have a unified definition of inclusive education. (Inclusive Vocational Education and Specialised Tailor-made Training, INVESTT, 2013). There seems to be various determinations of the concept that are highly context depended. Thus it can be emphasised that inclusive education is a culture and context specific concept.

One common determiner for the various definitions is that they stem from the principle of human rights as identified by UNESCO (2001, 2003). The definition of inclusive education offered by UNESCO (2008) states that it is: '*an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination*' (p. 3). (Donnelly & Watkins, 2011).

A number of other words and terminology commonly attached to inclusive education are, for example, "participation", "access" and "diversity". Concepts such as "belonging" and "universal design" are also crucial within the context of inclusion. The former meaning feelings of being a full member and connected to an educational environment and society as a whole and being engaged with the same activities as others and with others (Florian, 2005; Martin, 2008). The latter refers to a process of design that creates products, systems, and environments that are as usable as possible by as many people as possible, regardless of age, ability or situation (Steinfeld & Maisel, 2012). As can be seen the thinking and understanding of inclusion and inclusive education has moved beyond of a narrow view of it being an individual deficit. This narrow view of overcoming an individual deficit has been replaced by wider understanding of diversity concerning issues of gender, ethnicity, class, social conditions, health and human rights, encompassing universal involvement, access, participation and achievement (Ouane, 2008).

While we know that the concept of inclusive education is wider and is implemented in different ways in different contexts, varying according to national policies, something can be learnt from exploring a framework of key aspects in successful inclusive VET education. Those aspects will be introduced in the following paragraphs, however, it must be emphasised that there is no one model that suits every country's circumstances.

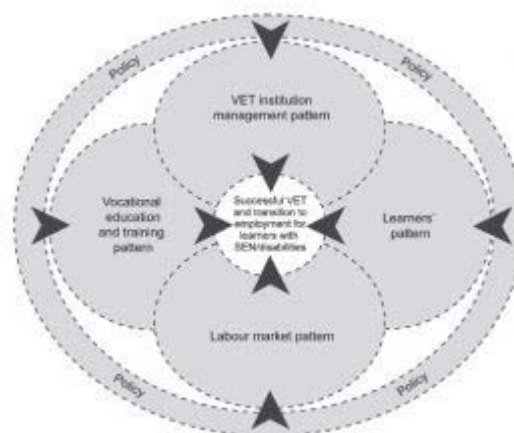**Key aspects of successful inclusive VET practice.**

Figure 2: Schematic view of VET

This model was created in a project by The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education that investigated the key aspects of successful inclusive VET practice. In their report on ; Patterns of Successful Practice in Vocational Education and Training (2014), the explanations of 'what works', 'why it works' and 'how it works' in VET for learners with SEN are reported. The report has been developed in cooperation with experts from 26 countries and as a result of a coherent and comprehensive analysis of 28 VET practices.

At the centre of the model is the main aim of VET organizations; providing successful VET and transition to employment for learners with SEN. The frame includes the four success factors (i.e. patterns) in VET and how their inter-relation and contribution in achieving this main aim. The four distinguished patterns are: VET institution managers, VET staff, learners, and current and future employers/labour market representatives. The presence and implementation of policies, as represented by the outer circle, need to be considered as they may impact upon the factors within the patterns. All factors, including any recommendations at the policy level should be considered in a way that they can make the optimum contribution towards VET's main aim. (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2014).

Exploring the model in more detail can offer some indications for teacher education organisations as to what kinds of skills and competencies teachers would need in quality inclusive settings. Themes such as working in multi-disciplinary teams, using innovative and learner centred approaches, acknowledging learners' strengths, matching labour market requirements to learners' skills, supporting employers and learners throughout the transition phase can be found.

Inclusive teacher education- what is it like?

An important event, the World Education Forum, took place in May 2015, in Incheon, Republic of Korea. There representatives from 160 countries adopted the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030, which lays out visions for education for the next fifteen years. The declaration for Education 2030: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all, further stresses the importance of teacher education as commitments have been made in four major areas. First, for inclusion and equity, 'to address all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes'. Second, for equality and in particular gender equality in teacher training and curricula; and by eliminating gender-based discrimination. Third, for quality of education to improve learning, in that 'teachers and educators are empowered, adequately recruited, well-trained,

professionally qualified, motivated and supported'. And lastly, lifelong learning opportunities for all, in all settings and at all levels of education including technical, VET education and higher education and research. In addition, provision of flexible learning pathways, as well as the recognition, validation and accreditation of the knowledge, skills and competencies are stressed along with more effective use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in supporting learning.

As it has been acknowledged by the Declaration and Education 2030 and other research, teachers are the key to good quality education and learning achievements as well as for the understanding and appreciation of diversity (Hanushek et al. 2014). However, research also suggests that some of the biggest barriers to the development of inclusion are teachers themselves. It has been noted that many teachers do not have the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to carry out inclusive work or teacher education has been inappropriate (Forlin 2001 in Rouse 2008). Based on this background the question can be raised as to what kind of teachers are needed in inclusive settings.

Profile of inclusive teacher

Some indications of teacher profiles were provided by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education. They conducted a 3-year project on Teacher Education for Inclusion (TE4I) that involved experts from 25 European countries. One of the main output of the project was to develop a profile of Inclusive Teachers (http://www.european-agency.org/agencyprojects).

The project focused on considering the following issues:

- What kind of teachers will be needed for an inclusive society in a 21st century school?
- What are the essential teacher competences for inclusive education? (p.8)

As a result of their investigation, four core values relating to teaching and learning were identified as being at the heart of all teachers' work in inclusive education.

Those four core values are:

1. Valuing learner diversity – learner difference is considered to be a resource and an asset to education;
2. Supporting all learners – teachers have high expectations for all learners' achievements;

3. Working with others – collaboration and teamwork are essential approaches for all teachers;

4. Continuing personal professional development – teaching is a learning activity and teachers take responsibility for their own lifelong learning (p.11)

In addition to these core values, positive beliefs and attitudes as well as skills and knowledge are required in order to implement the competencies attached to the values in practice. As teacher educators we need to consider how to support the development of these skills during teacher education programmes.

Teacher education for inclusive life-long contexts

There are many ways to implement inclusive teacher education. Some researchers (Rose, 2008; Florian & Rose, 2010) have discovered Shulman's (2004) ideas of three 'apprenticeships' to be useful when describing inclusive teacher education at philosophical and practical levels. Shulman stresses the need to ensure that training and induction in all professions has three essential elements that must be addressed. The first element is 'the head' by this he means the cognitive knowledge and theoretical basis of the profession. The second apprenticeship is 'the hand': this would include the technical and practical skills that are required to carry out the essential tasks of the role; and finally the 'apprenticeship of the heart', which entails the ethical and moral dimensions, the attitudes and beliefs that are crucial to the particular profession and its ways of working (Shulman, 2004).

Based on research by Florian & Rose (2010) they argue that only increasing teachers' knowledge about diversity does not lead to the development of inclusive practice. They noted that many teacher education programmes on inclusion tend to focus on extending knowledge and skills instead they should encourage teachers to do things differently and re-evaluate their attitudes and beliefs. They believe that teacher education programmes should consist of elements that encourage knowing, doing and believing (Rouse, 2008). The idea of the framework is that when two of the corners are in place, the third one will follow. In other words, if a teacher believes in inclusion and implements it in practice, they will end up developing knowledge. Or if they have the knowledge and put it into practice they will start to believe in it. (Florian, 2015)

Combining their ideas a theoretical framework can be developed to illustrate how to prepare teachers for inclusive lifelong settings.
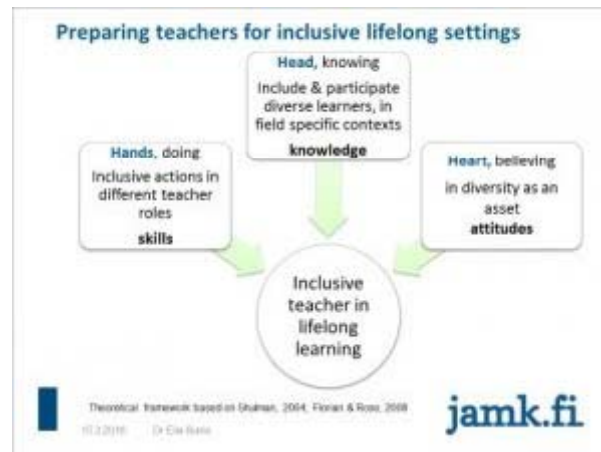
Figure 2: Theoretical framework for preparing teachers for inclusive settings

An example of teacher education offered by JAMK University of Applied Sciences

The Teacher Education College of the JAMK University of Applied Sciences defines four competence areas (http://www.jamk.fi/en/Education/Teacher-Education-College/

- Facilitating Learning
- Developing the Educational Environment
- Cooperation and Interaction
- Continuous Learning

Facilitating Learning and Developing the Educational Environment are the core competence areas required from vocational teachers. These areas are not separate from one another, rather, they are closely interconnected. The same holds true for the Continuous Learning and Cooperation and Interaction areas, which are interlinked to the Facilitating Learning and Developing the Educational Environment areas. Assessment and evaluation of learning and competences are based on these competence areas. Furthermore identification and assessment of prior learning are based on competence descriptions of the courses.

Facilitating learning

Facilitating learning always constitutes a practical activity irrespective of whether it takes place in an educational institution, in the student's workplace or in virtual environments. High-quality facilitation of learning and its development is based on (1) sufficient theoretical knowledge of learning, (2) and developing one's own skills and competencies, and (3) understanding human beings as learners.

Knowing the principles of learning and understanding the theoretical backgrounds of teaching implementation are the core competences of a teacher. Teachers must also understand the diversity of learning. As students' cultural backgrounds become

increasingly diverse, teachers must have the capacity to act in accordance with the capabilities of the learners and to respond to the individual learning needs of different learners.

The planning of learning processes and learning environments always involves value choices that reflect the conceptions of teacher communities and individual teachers regarding the desired outcomes. Teaching thus constitutes a deeply value-based and ethical activity.

New learning environments and their utilization expand the traditional conception of teaching work. A central development target in the near future will be the development of pedagogical solutions enabled by new technologies for guidance of learning. Different solutions must be economically sustainable requiring teachers to have the ability to utilise resources available efficiently.

Developing the Educational Environment

Teachers' work also involves developing different educational environments. Teachers are always members of their immediate community. Developing the activities of an educational institution or a department requires each teacher to possess both individual and community-oriented capabilities for research, development and innovation. Working as a teacher thus involves a strong element of entrepreneurial thinking and a requirement of quality and financial awareness.

Teachers' educational environments consist of various cooperative relationships with local and regional professional fields. At its broadest, the operating environment of a teacher consists of different national and international networks. Knowing the sustainable development on both global and local levels and identifying the directions of change in society and working life constitute essential competence requirements for teaching work.

To meet the requirements of developing meaningful pedagogical solutions, teachers need to obtain a theoretical and practica   nt. As cooperation with working life expands and workplaces become increasingly significant places for vocational learning, new methodological solutions need to be continuously developed.

The development of working environments requires skills related to critical information management, in which ethical dimensions should always be considered. In a similar way, teachers' values are connected to both information management and to the planning of learning processes and learning environments. These dimensions can be seen, for example, in the choices teachers make regarding research and development

targets. They also become apparent in the teacher's efforts and dedication to influence both their communities and their working environments.

Teachers' work always takes place in a specific socio-historical environment. Teachers have the opportunity to impact the nature of working life and society by engaging in public debates. Teaching is thus ethical by nature: the activities of teachers have a central significance in the development of society and working life through a variety of choices made by all teachers in their daily work.

Cooperation and Interaction

Teaching work has always been social in nature and based on interaction between people. The social nature of the work has been defined in different ways in different times, but teaching/learning situations have always been based on human interaction. The capacity for positive, ethically sustainable interaction with learners is the corner stone of high-quality learning.

Cooperation and interaction are closely linked to facilitating learning and developing the educational environment. Cooperation is often related to aspects such as national or regional planning and implementation of teaching or different development projects carried out in cooperation with working life.

Cooperation on the level of educational institutions covers the ability to form functional guidance and peer relationships, work groups, etc. From a broader perspective, it also contains the ability to act in networks made up of the representatives of different educational institutions and working life. For teachers of vocational institutions and universities of applied sciences, such requirements are present in their daily activities like on-the-job training and constantly increasing project work. At its broadest, interactive competence reaches to international and global arenas.

Continuous Learning

The requirement of continuous learning is connected with other competence areas. The concept of reflection joins these areas of competences together. Teachers' work includes sharing individual expertise jointly with a community. Defined in this manner, the professional competence of a teacher contains the element of reflectiveness: teachers are researchers and developers of their own work, building constantly in cooperation with others their own competencies and competencies of the community.

Reflection, in other words, critical self-assessment is a part of teachers' competences. Personal reflection and the ability to make independent choices and decisions are

essential in the midst of constant pressures for change. Critical self-reflection is not only essential at the individual level, but also at the organisational level. In this way, communication becomes an essential tool, which enables a common understanding to be formed among the work community.

Our student's voice on video

I will finish my presentation with a testimonial from one of our teacher trainees (available via the author)

Thank you

References

- Donnelly, V. & Watkins, A. (2011).Teacher education for inclusion across Europe. », *Lanouvelle revue de l'adaptation et de la scolarisation* 2011/3 (N° 55), p. 17-24.

- European Agency for Special Needs and Inc usive Education (2014). *European Patterns of Successful Practice in Vocational Education and Training Methodology Paper*, Odense, Denmark: European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education.

- European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2013). *European Patterns of Successful Practice in Vocational Education and Training – Participation of Learners with SEN/Disabilities in VET.* Odense,Denmark: European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education.

- European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2012). *Profile of Inclusive Teachers,* Odense, Denmark: European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education.

- European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2010). *Teacher Education for Inclusion – International Literature Review,* Odense, Denmark: European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education.

- Florian, L. (2005). Inclusive practice: What, why and how? In K. Topping & S. Maloney (Eds.). *The Routledge Falmer Reader in Inclusive Education*, (p. 29–40). London and New York: Routledge Falmer.

- Florian. L. (2015) The Inclusive Pedagogical Approach. In T.Pynninen & S. Väyrynen (Eds.) *Voices from the north: Calling for Inclusion* in Education Conference publication. University of Lapland Printing Centre.

- Florian, L. & Rouse, M. (2010) Teachers' professional learning and inclusive practice. In R. Rose (Ed.). Confronting Obstacles to Inclusion – International Responses to Developing Inclusive Schools, pp. 185-199, London: Routledge.

- Hanushek, E.A.; Piopiunik, M.& Wiederhold, S. (2014) *The Value of Smarter Teachers: International Evidence on Teacher Cognitive Skills and Student Performance*. Program on Education Policy and Governance Working Papers Series.

- INVESTT, Inclusive Vocational Education and Specialised Tailor-made Training. (2013) EASPD. Research Paper. Retrieved from http://included.eu/sites/default/files/documents/investt_research_paper_en.pdf

- Kumpulainen, T. (2013). *Opettajat Suomessa. [Teachers in Finland] Koulutuksen seurantaraportit 2014:8*. The Finnish National Borad of Education Tampere: Juvenes Print, Suomen Yliopistopaino Oy.

- Martin, N. (2008). *REAL: Services to assist university students who have Asperger Syndrome*. London: NADP.

- OECD (2013), *OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills,* OECD Publishing.*http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264204256-en*

- OECD Skills Matter: Further Results from the Survey of Adult Skills (2016) OECD Publishing.DOI:10.1787/9789264258051-1-en

- Ouane, A. (2008) *Creating education systems which offer opportunities for lifelong learning.* Paper presented at UNESCO International Conference on Education 'Inclusive education: the way of the future' 48th session. Geneva, 25–28 November 2008

- Rouse, M. 2008. *Developing inclusive practice. A Role for Teachers and Teacher Education?* Education In The North, University of Aberdeen. Issue: 16, Vol: 1 (2008).

- Steinfeld, E. & Maisel, J.L. (2012). U*niversal Design: Creating Inclusive Environments*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, Inc.

- Shulman, L.S (2004) *The wisdom of practice: Essays on teaching, learning, and learning to teach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- UNESCO. (2001). *Open File on Inclusive Education – support materials for Managers and Administrators.* Paris, UNESCO.

- UNESCO. (2003). *Overcoming Exclusion through Inclusive Approaches in Education: A challenge & a vision*. Paris, UNESCO.

- UNESCO, (2008). Inclusive Education: the Way of the Future, Conclusions and Recommendations of the 48th session of the International Conference on Education (ICE), Geneva, 25-28 November 2008.

- TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey) (2013). [Opetuksen ja oppimisen kansainvälinen tutkimus TALIS 2013]. Publications by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture 2015:4.