



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development  
of Vocational Training



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

## Study visit group report

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| <b>Group No</b>           | 172_2012  |
| <b>Title of the visit</b> | The Teaching Profession   |
| <b>Topic</b>              | Teacher Training and Basic Education in Finland, (University Teacher Training School, University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu) |
| <b>City, country</b>      | Joensuu, Finland  |
| <b>Type of visit</b>      | Lifelong Learning Programme   |
| <b>Dates of visit</b>     | 26. – 30. March 2012  |
| <b>Group reporter</b>     | Herbert Lauer, P. M.  |

The reporter should submit the report to Cedefop ([studyvisits@cedefop.europa.eu](mailto:studyvisits@cedefop.europa.eu)) within ONE month of the visit.

### I FINDINGS

This section summarises the findings of the group while visiting host institutions, discussing issues with the hosts and within the group. You will be reflecting on what you learnt every day. But to put them together and give an overall picture, you need to devote a special session to prepare the final report on the last day of the visit.

**In this section, it is important that you describe not only things you learnt about the host country but also what you learnt about the countries represented by group members.**

**1. One of the objectives of the study visits programme is to exchange examples of good practice among hosts and participants. Cedefop will select well-described projects/programmes/initiatives and disseminate them to former participants and a wider public, including potential partners for future projects. Therefore it is important that you identify and describe all aspects that, in your view, make these projects/programmes/initiatives successful and worth exploring.**

**Describe each of the good practices you learnt about during the visit (both from the hosts and from one another) indicating the following:**

| title of the project/programme/initiative   | country | name of the institution that implements it (if possible, provide a website)   | contact person (if possible) who presented the programme to the group | whom the project / programme / initiative addresses  | what features of the project/programme/initiative make it an example of good practice  |
|---|---------|---|---|--|--|
| What is a good learning environment like?   | Finland | University of East Finland and Länsikatu University Training School, Joensuu<br><a href="http://www.uef.fi">www.uef.fi</a>                                  | Dr. Heikki Happonen   | Teachers, parents, educationalists, <b>researchers</b> , politicians in charge of school building. | On a scientific basis, Dr. Happonen makes clear how the quality of the learning environment very strongly influences the teaching and the learning process of children. Länsikatu School in this respect is very special. The learning environment is abundant and of very high quality. It provides a very good background <del>für</del> <b>for</b> teacher education.         |
| Open learning at Heinävaara School  | Finland | University of East Finland, Joensuu<br><a href="http://www.uef.fi">www.uef.fi</a>   | Dr. Heikki Happonen   | Teachers, parents, educationalists, <b>researchers</b> politicians in charge of school building.   | This impressive flexible modern school building offers an ideal learning environment for its pupils and an ideal teaching environment for the teachers.  |
| There is a large hall similar to the middle ship of cathedral. Around this, the classrooms are arranged. From the hall, through large glass panels, the classes and teachers can be seen. This has a strong effect of openness and community. <i>“This sense of community is stressed and even widened by the fact that the school library can be found in the very centre of the school building, serving not only as a library but also as a further classroom and – once a week - as the community-library.”</i> |         |   |   |  |  |
| Finnish craft and technology education  | Finland | University of East Finland, Philosophical Faculty/ School of Applied Education and Teacher Education, Joensuu<br><a href="http://www.uef.fi">www.uef.fi</a> | Dr. Sirpa Kokko   | Teachers, parents, educationalists, politicians  | “Crafts” as a school subject is compulsory years 1 – 7, obligatory in years 8 – 9. This develops the pupils’ skills with crafts, supports their self-esteem, joy and satisfaction of work, increases their sense of responsibility for the work and the material, and teaches them to appreciate quality and to take a critical, evaluative stance towards choices and products. |

|  |         |   |  |  |  |
|--|---------|---|--|--|--|
| Research-based Teacher Education in PISA Finland: What does it mean in practice? | Finland | University of Eastern Finland, Philosophical Faculty / School of Education and Philosophy, Joensuu)<br><a href="http://www.uef.fi">www.uef.fi</a> | Prof. Dr. Päivi Atjonen  | Teacher educators in universities and schools, researchers, educationalists, politicians | This is the backbone of Finnish teacher training which ensures its high academic standard. The research-based approach ensures a theory-friendly attitude of the student teachers. They apply teaching principles and methods and control their effects in a scientific way, thus isolating best practice examples. As a result, rationally proven teaching methods are established and can replace traditional ones with less impact. |
| Teaching practices integrated in the university based teacher training           | Finland | University of East Finland, Joensuu<br><a href="http://www.uef.fi">www.uef.fi</a>   | Dr. Petri Salo, Managing Principal of Tulliportti University Teacher Training School | Teacher trainers, teacher trainees, educationalists, politicians                         | This ensures that the student teachers have an intensive experience of practical teaching under the supervision of an experienced trainer. There are four key people involved in this part of the teacher education process: the trainee, a peer student, the university supervisor and the mentor at the school.  |

Teacher education in Finland is university based. Since 1979, kindergarten teachers must take a Bachelor degree, all others a Master degree: primary school or classroom teachers [grades 1- 6] and secondary teachers / subject teachers for two subjects [grades 7 – 12]. The two subjects are mainly chosen for practical reasons, e. g. Mathematics and Physics or German and English. For primary teachers, the major study subject is “education science”, including philosophical and psychological elements. Prof. Atjonen gave an overview about the main components of the teacher education programme for primary school teachers. It included the latest results and research methods of teaching and learning, scientific writing and optional studies in Finland. The following four aspects are crucial:

1. Teacher educators undertake research themselves.
2. Teacher educators base all their teaching on research evidence.
3. Student teachers put theoretical studies into practice during their teaching practice periods.
4. Students undertake research as an obligatory part of their university studies (candidate and master thesis): attitude or mind.

**Details on teaching practices**

| Phase    | Practice   | ECTS credit points (à 27 hours) | workload |
|----------|--|---------------------------------|----------|
| Bachelor | Orientation to teaching practice                               | 3                               | 81       |
| Bachelor | Basic teacher training   | 7                               | 189      |
| Master   | Applied teacher training (“field placement” – possibly abroad) | 4                               | 108      |

|  |                            |  |   |  |
|--|----------------------------|--|---|--|
| Master   | Advanced teaching practice |  | 8   | 216  |
| Sum  |                            |  | 22 ECTS points  | 594 hours  |
| Life Sciences and Mathematics to foster the use of new learning environments and the cooperation between schools, universities and companies | Finland                    | LUMA Science Education Centre of North Karelia, Joensuu<br><a href="http://www.helsinki.fi/luoma/english/">http://www.helsinki.fi/luoma/english/</a><br><a href="http://www.scifest.fi">www.scifest.fi</a> | Mr. Ville Nivalainen, (coordinator)<br>Ms. Vesa Tenhunen, (coordinator)<br>Mr. Marjo Voutilainen, (researcher)<br>Mr. Mikko Laamanen, (student) | Teachers, <b>researchers</b> , educationalists, politicians<br><br>This institution supports the use of new learning environments in a very convincing way. The ITC media are used in a practical – often playful – context.<br><br>The science fest in Joensuu is a large international event to promote greater use ITC media.   |
| Teacher talk analysis in science teacher education   | Finland                    | University of East Finland, Joensuu<br><a href="http://www.uef.fi">www.uef.fi</a>  | Dr. Heikki Saari  | Teachers, teacher trainers, <b>researchers</b> , student teachers<br><br>Dr. Saari has found out that science teachers use certain speech patterns. He has developed instruments to document these, so that teacher talk can be analysed, discussed and improved – to the benefit of the pupils in science classes.  |
| Apple ipad project at Tulliportti School   | Finland                    | Tulliportti School, Joensuu  | Mr. Lasse Eronen, Mr. Jussi Suokas, Mr. Sampo Forsström   | Teachers, teacher trainers, <b>researchers</b> , student teachers, politicians<br><br>Tulliportti School in 2011 bought 250 ipad computers for all pupils in the first year of upper secondary level. It has started a project which is accompanied by a research team. The aim of this project is to find out if learning and learner autonomy can be improved by the use of ITC technology.  |
| Finnish special education and teacher training for this special education  | Finland                    | University of East Finland and Länsikatu School  | Prof. Hannu Savolainen, Vice Dean   | Teachers, teacher trainers, student teachers, politicians<br><br>Special education plays an important role in the Finnish school system. This is not only directed to children with special needs who regularly need support, but to all pupils who experience periods of learning difficulty. They receive special support over a limited time. 25 per cent of the Finnish teachers qualify to teach pupils with special educational needs. E. g., at |

|   |         |   |                             |   |  |
|---|---------|---|-----------------------------|---|--|
|   |         |   |                             |   | Länsikatu School there are support teachers at work, working with one to three pupils to secure their return into normal lessons.  |
| The atmosphere in Finnish schools and the resources | Finland | Länsikatu School, Tulliportti School, Heinävaara School | Headmasters, headmistresses | Teachers, teacher trainers, student teachers, politicians | <p>There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding. Pupils seem to feel very much at home in their schools and identify with them. The atmosphere is relaxed and friendly. The home situation is supported by the fact that pupils do not wear street shoes at school. Every day, every child receives a free midday meal.</p> <p>There is an abundance of high quality resources in the schools, eg. ITC equipment, music instruments, machinery for technology and craft classes etc.</p> |
|   |         |   |                             |   |  |

\* You can describe as many good practices as you find necessary. You can add rows to the table.

**2. The study visits programme aims to promote and support policy development and cooperation in lifelong learning. That is why it is important to know what you learnt about such policies and their implementation during your visit. You are invited to describe your findings concerning the following:**

**2.1 APPROACHES TAKEN BY PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES (BOTH HOST AND PARTICIPANTS') REGARDING THE THEME OF THE VISIT. ARE THERE ANY SIMILAR APPROACHES/MEASURES IN PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES? WHAT ASPECTS ARE SIMILAR AND WHY? WHAT ASPECTS ARE DIFFERENT AND WHY?**

The theme of the visit was “The Teaching Profession - Teacher Training and Basic Education in Finland, (University Teacher Training School, University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu)”.

Most participants of the study group had applied because of the excellent results of Finnish pupils in all three surveys of the “Programme for International Student Assessment” (PISA). All of the participants were keen to gain a better insight into Finland’s approach to achieving this level of success.

All participating countries demonstrate differing approaches towards (basic) education and schools, as well as towards teacher education. These approaches have much in common, and at the same time they differ in many ways. The study visit group agreed – instead of focussing on aspects they only could tell one another – to focus on things that could be experienced – seen, heard, felt, touched – in Joensuu.

Many countries are undertaking efforts to improve the PISA results of their students. For instance, almost all German laender have changed their curricula from input orientation towards outcome orientation, with emphasis on the pupils’ increase in competencies. Changes in initial teacher training are being made, mostly in the so-called Bologna Process. In Hesse, Germany, a totally new school inspections system was introduced to ensure an improvement of schools. So far, there is no proof of a positive outcome.

Finland seems to have approached improving the efficiency of its school system far earlier and more thoroughly than other countries. It has done this consistently so that no child is left behind despite the potential cost. Most participants had little experience of observing such well-designed and well-equipped schools as Tulliportti School, Länsikatu School, Heinävaara School or Joensuun Lyseon Peruskoulu (junior high school) with its futuristic architecture.

All of these schools contain well-equipped kitchens that provide a daily free school meal for every child. They also include spacious craft rooms with modern machinery and music rooms with plenty of instruments for all pupils to play together. All classrooms are large, well-lit and well-equipped. Rarely did the participants see more than 20 pupils in these classrooms. Often a second person such as a school helper or student teacher on placement would be observed assisting the teacher. ICT resources are extensive with many classes equipped with interactive whiteboards. Students have easy access to computers and new

technology. For example, as part of a three year project Tulliportti School has bought 250 tablet PCs (ipads) so that all students of grade 10, for a small contribution, can have one to use. The participating teachers themselves will be part of this research based project to investigate the advantages of using this technology compared to more traditional forms of teaching and learning.

Finland seems to be able to attract the most talented students for teaching, which seems to be unique in Europe. Reasons for this may lie in the high social esteem for and prestige of teaching in both primary and secondary schools. Other possible factors include the:

- trustful cooperation with the school administration
- the collegiate interaction amongst staff
- positive and relaxed working conditions with learning-oriented, motivated pupils and students in schools
- relatively good levels of pay.

Another decisive element could be the modern, very roomy school buildings and the abundance of high quality school equipment. These contribute to excellent working conditions for teachers and pupils alike.

The study group talked to many student teachers who said that they regarded teaching as an interesting and challenging activity which gave them much satisfaction. They also said it was a job in which they could use their skills and have some autonomy to make decisions.

As there are on average ten applicants for each primary teacher student place at university, the universities are able to choose the best trainees. Furthermore, completion rates are very high with the vast majority of primary trainees going into teaching.

Whereas primary or elementary teacher students (also called classroom teachers) do not really see many alternatives to teaching, it is a little different for trainees in some specialist subjects for secondary teaching. For instance, in some subjects, there are alternatives because there is a demand for specialists in subjects such as mathematics, chemistry or physics within the economic and industrial sectors. Consequently, not many students want to become physics or chemistry teachers. However, this is different for the subjects of Finnish or history where these subjects continue to be a popular choice for secondary trainees.

## **2.2 CHALLENGES FACED BY PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES (INCLUDING HOST) IN THEIR EFFORTS TO IMPLEMENT POLICIES RELATED TO THE THEME OF THE VISIT. WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES? ARE THEY COMMON CHALLENGES? IF SO, WHY? IF NOT, WHY NOT?**

The **challenges in education and schools** are to support all children, girls and boys alike, so that they aspire to and reach their potential. No child must be left

behind. All children should be accepted in their individual ways, talents and possibilities.

Many participating countries represented at the study visit seem to lack the financial means to create an ideal learning environment or the right conditions for open learning. Others may not see the necessity. This ambiguity may be applied to all aspects mentioned.

Some participating countries seem to believe that a strengthening of school inspections and the installation of a close control of schools can improve the learning outcome of the pupils and students. It is remarkable that Finland went the other way by abolishing school inspections and controls of schools and teachers. Instead, they rely on trust.

Trust and a sense of community seem to be two key aspects of Finnish school life. While this seems to work out well in the Finnish national context, it may be more difficult to duplicate this in other more heterogeneous countries. However, the study visit participants shared the very strong impression that the Finnish teacher education system is very systematic, logical and of an especially high quality.

All participating countries share similar **challenges in teacher education** in being able to attract the very best students into teaching. Once selected, the next challenge is to educate them in the best way possible so that they can teach their pupils, educate them and support their development into well-rounded individuals. However, in many participating countries, being a teacher is not always regarded as being socially equal to other academic careers; for instance, being a doctor, a lawyer or an engineer. Many young people with good school exams, especially young men often prefer not to go into teaching in other participating countries.

Some participating countries are attempting to address this problem through specific initiatives. For instance, participants learnt that the UK has implemented a route into teaching called 'Teach First' where the most able graduates are recruited from the best universities to train and work in challenging city schools within England whilst being paid a salary.

It was noted that practicing teachers in Finland undertake update training similar to that of most European Union countries. As teachers in Finland only undertake mandatory training for a few hours each year practicing teachers undertake continuous teacher training on a voluntary basis at any time during the school year. Teachers dedicated to the role of trainers of such teachers, demonstrate similar difficulties to those in participating countries of incorporating more time for the training of teachers.

**2.3 NAME AND DESCRIBE EFFECTIVE AND INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS YOU HAVE IDENTIFIED THAT PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES (BOTH HOST AND PARTICIPANTS) APPLY TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES MENTIONED IN QUESTION 2.2. PLEASE MENTION SPECIFIC COUNTRY EXAMPLES.**

The study group focussed on the following Finnish solutions:

### **The most convincing solutions identified concerning education and schools:**

- A very good learning environment
- The right conditions for open learning
- Craft, art, music and technology education (esp. in primary or elementary schools)
- Life Sciences and Mathematics to foster the use of new learning environments and the cooperation between schools, universities and companies
- Good practice (ipads for pupils and teachers, but accompanied by scientific research on their effectiveness)
- Finnish special education and inclusion policies
- The positive climate for learning and high quality resources in Finnish schools.

### **The most convincing solutions identified concerning teacher education**

- Research based teacher education
- Teaching practices integrated in the university based teacher training
- Teacher talk analysis in science teacher education
- Teacher training for Finnish special education

## **2.4 ASSESSMENT OF THE TRANSFERABILITY OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES. COULD ANY EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE PRESENTED IN THIS REPORT BE APPLIED AND TRANSFERRED TO OTHER COUNTRIES? IF SO, WHY? IF NOT, WHY NOT?**

### **The general impression of the study group concerning transferability was this:**

- All elements of Finnish schools, teaching and learning named above could be – mutatis mutandis - transferred to other countries.
- All elements of Finnish teacher education named above could also – mutatis mutandis - be transferred to other countries.

However, since Finland's crucial starting point (or ideological basis) of the whole school system is the so called 'policy of trust', other participants' countries might face a change in their approach concerning the system of education, depending on the general approach to the idea of man in each case."

The participants were impressed, how very strongly the Finnish school system is based on social values (such as respect, trust and a sense of responsibility), and how closely students, teachers, parents, headmasters / headmistresses, educationalists and politicians cooperate in the name of these shared values. For some countries, the first step could be to discuss and agree on their own shared values, whereupon they could build a school system reflecting their society.

**There were some aspects of good practice the participants found especially worth regarding:**

The establishment of schools where the staff are members of the Faculty of the University, and which are aligned with and partners in teacher education, is an excellent mechanism to enable the seamless development of theory and practice for student teachers. In addition to the formalised periods of Teaching Practice, the students had access to the schools on an informal basis and when required, as part of their studies, they could visit the schools and try out ideas/observe classes and use the school as a site of research and learning. The school, the teachers and the children, formed an integral part of the teacher education programme. To establish such a system in another jurisdiction would be challenging and would demand that the hierarchy which may exist between layers of the education system be dismantled and due recognition be given to the professionalism of teachers.

A further example of excellent practice was that inquiry and research were core aspects of the work of teaching. The capacity of teachers to engage in researching their own school and community was clearly evident. To bring about such a development in many countries would demand not only that teachers have the appropriate research skills, but also it would entail a radical change in the culture and nature of teaching.

The physical design of schools where each teacher has his/her own workspace beside the classroom, and there are multiple small meeting rooms, where all desks tessellate, underpins the expectation that teachers spend time in school collaborating, planning, designing their curriculum, and working collegially. This investment in school buildings reflects the importance the state places in teachers' learning and the role of the school as learning community. Again to implement this excellent practice requires significant shift in the culture of schooling in many countries.

## TO SUM UP

**4. What is the most interesting/useful information that the group believes should be communicated to others? To whom, do you think, this information will be of most interest?**

The information the study visit group to Joensuu gathered could be of interest for a wide variety of people involved in school, school architecture and environment, teaching and learning as well as teacher education (initial and in service): teachers, headmasters/headmistresses, members of education authorities or school boards, school architects, teacher educators in universities and post university institutions.

**The most useful information:**

There is clear evidence of a **'family of learning'** in Finnish schools consisting of pupils or students, teachers, other school personnel, and the school administration. The most distinctive features of this 'family of learning' approach are trust, community, fellowship, solidarity where there is a very strong community commitment of teachers and pupils or students.

In this context can be understood that there seems to be only little involvement of parents in the school in the sense of control, whereas they come in large numbers to school concert, in which their children sing and perform.

This 'family of learning' is effectively accommodated. School buildings appear to be light, open and airy spaces flooded with light. They are built in a roomy way with large spaces to facilitate open learning environments. They are buildings in which people like to be, not only pupils or students. They are characterised by large wooden and brick constructions, halls with high roofs, surrounded by generously spaced classrooms with large glass panes towards the interior and the outside. There are vast spaces for meetings, gatherings, individual work, and a spacious school restaurant. Often a large fireplace or tiled stove in the middle of the schoolhouse invites the pupils to congregate around it to read stories they have written to one another. Even though the university teacher training schools visited may not be fully representative or typical, group members were very impressed by the excellent quality of the equipment in each of these schools.

There is evidence that the Finnish school system may be a microcosm of the Finnish society with a strong sense of truth, honesty, and decency. This sense of personal responsibility and trust is evident around the schools and in classroom situations. The pupils are trusted to work on their own and to sensibly using their time, and they live up to this. They are personally engaged in their learning and self-motivated rather than being extrinsically motivated by testing. Their teachers trust them to use methods of self-assessment with a focus on self-awareness and self-reliance.

Every child gets a free midday meal, which is eaten as a school community. These meals are healthy, varied and always include a salad. Members of the study group wondered if this is why there were only very few overweight children around.

Pupils and students generally give an impression of being happy at school, probably not all of them all of the time, but most. It is felt that Finnish boys tend to be much happier in school than girls but fewer go to university than girls. Girls perform much better than boys in each age group and at A-Level equivalent. Some host speakers expressed the view that this is possibly the backbone of the Finnish PISA success.

Art, **Craft**, Music, and Technology are fundamentally important subjects in the Finnish school system. The schools are excellently equipped for these subjects. No member of the study group could report of similarly abundant equipment in their own country. These subjects contribute to a good balance between cognitive learning and musical or artistic learning. As we know from scientific research, playing a musical instrument can improve the intelligence quotient.

If pupils fall back in a subject through illness or any other reason, there is special support at hand. In the schools visited, there were many classroom situations in which a teacher was working with only one, two or three pupils at a time. These pupils had been taken out of their regular classes to assess their learning difficulties and to help them to make up lost ground in the subjects concerned. This seemed a remarkable alternative to the repeating of forms as practiced in many of the participants' countries.

Finland ensures that only the very best teachers are good enough to be members of this "family of learning". As a result, there is always a good choice of teachers, teacher trainers and student teachers working in Finnish schools. In particular, student teachers give the impression of being totally committed to being teachers and strong academics. The research based teacher education in Finland clearly is an advantage, leading to a better interlinking of academic theory and practical teaching.

Finally, one could assume that an excellent school system needs a lot of external and internal evaluation, supervision, school inspection, and control. To the surprise of the study group, the Finnish school system thrives without all this.