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Säntti, Janne

2018

Säntti, J, Puustinen, M & Salminen, J 2018, ' Theory and practice in Finnish teacher education : a rhetorical analysis of changing values from the 1960s to the present day ', Teachers and Teaching , vol. 24 , no. 1 , pp. 5-21 . <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2017.1379387>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/311233>

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2017.1379387>

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Theory and practice in Finnish teacher education: a rhetorical analysis of changing values from the 1960s to the present day

Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice

Janne Säntti, PhD (Corresponding author)

Teacher Education Department, University of Helsinki

Helsinki, Finland

Siltavuorenpenger 3a (PL 9)

00014 University of Helsinki

+358405583841

janne.santti@helsinki.fi

Dr Jari Salminen, PhD

Teacher Education Department, University of Helsinki

Helsinki, Finland

Siltavuorenpenger 3a (PL 9)

00014 University of Helsinki

+358504309608

jari.salminen@helsinki.fi

Mikko Puustinen, MA

Teacher Education Department, University of Helsinki

Helsinki, Finland

Urheilukatu 4 A 23

00250 Helsinki

+358503790616

mikko.puustinen@helsinki.fi

Our aim in this article is to examine the relationship between theory and practice in Finnish teacher education from the 1960s to the present. We identify four different periods to represent this relationship based on our analysis of national committee and evaluation reports. Theory and practice gradually converged, culminating in a research-based agenda that reflects the current situation. This relationship between theory and practice also reflects the ideal teacher of different times and what should be teacher's working orientation. We use rhetorical analysis and the concept of a 'philosophical pair' introduced by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca to interpret this development.

Keywords: theory, practice, teacher education, philosophical pair, rhetorical analysis

Introduction

Finland's education system has attracted attention and praise from around the world in the past two decades. Finnish teacher education, which is said to be exceptional, has similarly received its share of glory, even hype. The policy of training all teachers to the Master's level is unique. Beyond the hype, however, it is said, that Finnish research-based teacher education forges an inseparable connection between the teachers' research orientation and their practical day-to-day work. This is a strong statement given that the balance between the theoretical and the practical has historically been the subject of continuing debate in different teacher-education systems (Kansanen, 2014; Niemi & Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006; Sahlberg, 2011; Toom, Kynäslähti, Krokfors, Jyrhämä, Byman, Stenberg, Maaranen & Kansanen, 2010; Westbury, Hansén, Kansanen & Björkvist, 2005).

Although the Finnish system is clearly exceptional, the extent to which this exceptionality is based on rhetorical success is unclear even to scholars like us. It seems from our rhetorical analysis that the uniqueness of Finnish teacher education is largely maintained by Finnish scholars and teacher educators who see it as a historical triumph following the substitution of the out-dated teaching-college tradition with a successful academic culture.

We should stress that our concern in this article is not with the reality of Finnish teacher education, nor how teachers have been coping in everyday school work, in the last five decades. We rather focus on the kind of ideas and interests that have been presented in national committee and evaluation reports on teacher education during this period. We demonstrate how the analysis of these ideas and interests reveals hidden or unspoken values, and explains how the Finnish system

gradually developed into its present state.¹ We argue that our historical and rhetorical perspectives have enabled us to study and understand the tensions, some of which are political and others are connected to science policy and the professionalism of teacher educators.

Our journey starts in the 1960s when Finnish teacher education became fully academic, and ends in the current decade. We examine the relationship between theory and practice by means of rhetorical analysis, leaning especially on the idea of the philosophical pair as developed by Chaïm Perelman (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1971). For us, the main point is to identify the rhetorical changes, to which end we have constructed four rhetorically different periods in the history of Finnish teacher education. Before analysing them we will reconsider the concepts of theory and practice and introduce the idea of rhetorical analysis.

Theory and practice reconsidered

Theory, according to Kvernbekk (2015), is based on abstraction, selection and reduction. Like a map, it describes the real world as a model represented by selected criteria, and could thus say something substantial (or what is defined as such) about its objects. Ideally, it produces models that facilitate a deeper and clearer understanding of “real world” ideas and concepts, and provides a navigational tool. In some cases it explains various occurrences or phenomena comprehensively and also has predictive accuracy. As we will show, theory and research are often treated as one and the same thing in scientific discussion, and educational science represents both in our study.

Educational research could be defined broadly as encompassing the structures, processes, products and persons involved in the systematic development of educational knowledge. Finally, it could be said that research is an established convention, which is aimed at producing and publishing theory and is based on the systematic collection and organization of information or knowledge (Broekkamp & Van Hout-Wolters, 2007).

Practice, in turn, in the current context means everything that teachers do in their work, such as planning lessons, teaching, marking and communicating with learners. It can also refer to the practices of teacher education. Thus, educational practice also encompasses the structures,

¹ Surely, these ideas have also realized in Finnish teacher education. We will publish these results of our study in separate article.

processes, products and persons involved in educational institutions in which teaching takes place (Broekkamp & Van Hout-Wolters, 2007).

The perennial question in educational science seems to concern the relationship between theory and practice, often concretized in the claim that the theory-based approach is inadequate in terms of resolving concrete challenges and problems encountered in pedagogical practices (Biesta, 2007; Broekkamp & Van Hout-Wolters, 2007; Jörg, Davis & Nickmans, 2007; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; Labaree, 2000; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). It is also said that the teacher's knowledge of education is different from that of the educational researcher. The practical knowledge of teachers is revealed in day-to-day teaching practices in classrooms, whereas the knowledge of researchers is, let us say, published in scientific journals or disseminated in university lectures in the form of theory (Bartels, 2003; Clifford & Guthrie, 1988, pp. 49–50; Gore & Gitlin, 2004, Labaree, 2000, pp. 55–56).

Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) list three different ways of framing this alleged gap between theory and practice (see also Korthagen & Kessels, 1999). First, the knowledge-transfer problem implies that research knowledge does not translate or diffuse into practice. This resembles Biesta's (2007) notion of a technical role according to which academic knowledge is expected to produce ready answers for educational practice, in other words to instruct practitioners how to act in certain situations in order to ensure a particular outcome. Second, theory and practice are acknowledged as being different in nature, not necessarily directly opposed but rather as representing different kinds of complementary knowledge. In our opinion, the gap is acknowledged and also accepted from this perspective.

Third, the divide between theory and practice could be seen as a knowledge-production problem. This gap could be narrowed if teachers were to participate in knowledge production and theory building - as many educational scholars recommend (Broekkamp & Van Hout-Wolters van, 2007; Gore & Gitlin, 2004; Hargreaves, 2000, p. 231; Korthagen 2011; Vanderlinde & Braak van, 2010; Van de Ven and Johnson 2006, p. 303; Winch, 2004, pp. 190–191). It is acknowledged that educational science has not produced (and probably never will) instrumental knowledge that is universally recognized and applied in the manner of the theory-to-practice approach. Biesta (2007) emphasizes the cultural role of educational science in providing different interpretations and understandings of educational practices, rather than its technical role (see also Korthagen, 2011, pp. 32–33 and Winch, 2004, p. 186).

One approach to the knowledge-production problem would be to articulate the difference between ‘research’ and ‘inquiry’. Research is a systematic, methodology-conscious action accomplished by scholars, which is usually exposed to peer review, whereas inquiry is not intended to produce results and knowledge for wider audiences, and tends to lack methodological and academic rigour. On the concrete level, inquiry could refer to small-scale and classroom-based research carried out by teachers in order to gather information about their pupils (Munthe & Rogne, 2015, p. 18).

Finally, not everybody sees the relationship between theory and practice as problematic. The interpretation in some cases is based on the idea that such a dichotomy is erroneous as such, at least in teaching practice in which theory is allegedly embedded (Schön, 1983). In the opinion of some people, theory is burdened with irrelevant and false expectations, especially in educational science (Biesta, 2007). Others see the potential to bridge the gap by making various adjustments to teacher education or teachers’ working conditions (Hargreaves, 2000; Korthagen 2011, p. 44). According to some statements, however, there are teacher-education programmes in which theory and practice are successfully fused together (Kansanen, 2014; Westbury et al., 2005).

The methodological framework and the empirical data

Rhetorical analysis is rarely used as a method in research on education and educational policy (Edwards, Nicoll, Solomon & Usher, 2004; Winton, 2013). However, it has many similarities and connections with discourse analysis (Rautalin & Alasuutari, 2009). Whereas the rhetoric of ancient scholars focused on oratory, rhetorical analysis in the modern context is used for unfolding arguments. Chaïm Perelman launched this so-called *New Rhetoric* in the middle of the 20th century. He focused on the concept of the audience and how ideas are argued to different audiences: the argumentation is dependent on the addressee(s), and is tailored to securing the allegiance of the audience (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1971).

Earlier we described how rhetorical analysis could be used in education-policy research (xxxx 2015; see also Rautalin & Alasuutari, 2009; Winton, 2013). Briefly, education policy is rhetorical. Science, moreover, which tends to be presented as neutral or objective, or at least as striving for such ideals, is not free from rhetorical conventions, either. The politics of science and education policy, or higher-education policy to be precise, are intertwined and they both produce statements

that can be subjected to rhetorical analysis (Gross, 1990; Rautalin & Alasuutari, 2009; Winton, 2013).

Our focus in this article is on dissociation, and especially on Perelman's idea of the philosophical pair. Immanuel Kant's classic example concerns a stick that is partly immersed in water: it appears curved when one looks at it, and straight when one touches it, but in reality it cannot be both. The intent of dissociation is to split one originally coherent idea into two separate (although connected) sections to avoid incompatibility, which involves the association of one of the two concepts with the apparent and of the other with the real. In most cases the concept connected with the apparent will be considered less valuable than that connected with the real. Inherent in this process is a value hierarchy, which serves the purposes of the arguer. (Eemeren van, Garssen, Krabbbe, Snoeck Henkemansa, Verheij, and Wagemans, 2014; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1971).

Perelman's philosophical pair (or "appearance-reality" pair) comprises term I and term II. The former denotes something that is direct, well known and discernible, whereas the latter can be understood only in relation to it, embodying the criterion and the norm in the other part and defining simultaneously what is valuable and what is not. The prototype of the philosophical pair is appearance/reality, equivalent pairs including letter/spirit, subjective/objective, special/general, opinion/truth and finally also practice/theory. Perelman's conception of the philosophical pair is dynamic. In fact, he recommends turning the original composition upside down during the analytical process, thereby revealing the value hierarchies used by the arguer. (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1971).

Our empirical data consists of official committee and evaluation reports. Parliamentary committees controlled Finnish education policy from the early 1950s until the 1980s, when they were gradually replaced with evaluation groups comprising educational experts. These groups tended to make recommendations, not direct decisions as the committees had done (Autio, 1993).

We examine committee texts and evaluation reports as documents that regulate and guide education policy, especially teacher education. At the same time, these documents also guide teacher ideals and teacher's work orientations. We use rhetorical analysis as a vehicle to shed light on how the credibility and adherence to the cause of different teacher-education agendas was launched in our data. Because of our methodological choice we do not analyse the possible intentions or unofficial wishes of Finnish policymakers about the outcomes of the reports. When studying our data we

focused especially on words such as ‘theory’, ‘research’ and ‘practice’. We did not observe or count separate occurrences, but rather concentrated on analysing how the theoretical elements and research activities were expressed. Theory and research are commonly used as synonyms in our data, and are represented by educational science.

Finnish teacher education has been state regulated, and market forces have not affected it as strongly as in many other countries (Kivinen & Rinne, 1996, p. 77; Labaree, 2004). As a result, Finnish views of schooling have been close to unanimous, even though different voices are to be found (Simola 1996, 105). Our premise is that these committee reports have had a real influence on the practical aspects of teacher education and to day-to-day teaching practice. We argue that these committee and evaluation texts were written for specific audiences consisting of teachers, academics and members of schools’ administrative bodies.

Any argumentation begins from a commonly shared premise, which could be called a point of departure or object of argumentation agreement (Eemeren van et al., 2014). The point of departure in our data is repeatedly changing society, which has resulted in demands to change school and teacher education. This is the basis on which we constructed four periods of Finnish teacher education, each one representing a different kind of argumentation that is connected to the context of its time. After introducing these periods in more detail we reflect on our results and analyse the changing balance of theory and practice.

The retreat from tradition (the 1960s)

In the late 1960s Finnish society was in the process of deep change in its economic structure as the old rural and outmoded way of life was in turmoil. The new society also needed a new pedagogical approach that could satisfy demands for equality and individual needs, which were burning issues at the time. The comprehensive-school system was introduced in response to these demands. This school reform would entail more heterogeneous pupil groups, new teaching and studying methods and a more democratic climate, which reflected the forthcoming welfare state (Ahonen, 2003, Kivinen & Rinne 1996, 76).

The message in the committee reports of the 1960s is quite clear: the theoretical basis of teacher education was unequivocally inadequate. The old-fashioned and authoritarian teacher should be

reincarnated as a democratic, broad-minded and well-trained educator (CR, 1969, p. 17). The motto of the era was ‘more theory’ (CR 1967, p. 14, p. 50, p. 51; CR, 1968, pp. 10–11, p. 42; CR, 1969, p. 13, p. 36, p. 65). According to the new ideology, teachers were expected to rely on the findings and methods of educational science. It was also assumed that they would carry out small-scale pedagogical experiments in classrooms and analyse their own actions from a theoretical and critical perspective (CR, 1967, p. 14, p. 51; CR, 1968, p. 9, p. 11, p. 22).

Although the aspirations of all these committees were ambitious and demanding, teaching practice was still seen as the primary concern and the starting point of teacher education. The theoretical basis was emphasized, but at the same time teacher educators were warned against arranging overly theoretical education for prospective teachers, who would work in an environment requiring a down-to-earth and caring attitude (CR, 1969, p. 36). This produced inconsistent and unfocused requirements such as ‘teaching practice aims at theoretical matters’ (CR, 1967, p. 56), ‘The prospective teacher should acquaint himself or herself with preliminary scholarly thoughts’ and ‘student teachers should be trained to prepare simple reports on school issues’ (CR, 1968, p. 9). These expressions reflect the modest attention to academic skills among prospective teachers. The contribution of educational science to the practical aspects was also doubted: ‘The problem with the schooling seems to be that it takes a long time for the knowledge accumulated in research and experiments to be applied in practice’ (CR, 1969, p. 43).

The fragile connection with theory and practice persisted due the fact that humility also prevailed amongst the ‘fathers’ of Finnish didactic research. They expressed regret that schooling could not yet be founded solely on educational research, but hoped that would happen in the near future (Simola 1995, pp. 158–159; xxxx 2012).

It was during this period that the idea of incorporating teacher education into university curricula was first expressed (CR, 1969, p. 32). The committee members of the 1960s who represented teacher education were clearly trying to achieve a better academic status (Simola 1995, pp. 157–161). The forthcoming comprehensive-school reform and changing society, both of which called for well-educated, expert teachers, justified these demands. Theory would be the teachers’ good friend, possibly not their best or only one, but it would certainly look better in academia to declare a theoretical rather than a practical orientation.

Theory and practice are clearly presented as separate realms in these committee reports. It is cautiously proposed that theory should pervade and benefit teaching practice, and that the existing division between the two should be narrowed in the future. The 1969 report states this goal very clearly: ‘now it is necessary to change Teacher Education’ (CR, 1969, pp. 11).

Academia calling (the 1970s and the 1980s)

The comprehensive school reform of the 1970s gave a new impetus to teacher education and a feeling of optimism. The 1972 committee report (pp. 31–32, p. 133, p. 274) introduced the polytechnic model for university studies. The model was accepted especially in teacher-education committees because it was seen as a way of raising the academic status of the discipline. The polytechnic ideal is presented as a contrast to the conventional academic model, which was seen as detached from society and working life. The intention was to combine theoretical and practical knowledge in the spirit of multidisciplinary and critical thinking. Theory and practice would be closely aligned to benefit the whole of society. Teaching practice is outlined as a context in which theory is applied in real school situations, resembling scientific activity in which scientists use their theoretical knowledge when working in the laboratory (CR., 1972, p. 152; CR, 1975, pp. 34–35, p. 80). The 1975 report suggests that theoretical courses and teaching practice should be organized in closer co-operation in the future: ‘Research topics could be chosen from practical problems’, and ‘These studies are closely connected to practices’ (CR, 1975, p. 155).

The polytechnic model was politically delicate, however. It originated in East Germany, and thus was not accepted by conservative academic staff. This group also considered the practical orientation alien to academia (Autio, 1993, p. 188; Klinge, 1990, pp. 651–652). Representatives of Finnish higher education found it difficult to adjust to the new situation in which their traditional academic freedom and autonomy, which teacher education lacked for the time being, were sacrificed to the new doctrine of social policy and the needs of the state (Kivinen & Rinne, 1996, p. 78).

The pressure to raise the educational level of teachers was increasing, and words such as ‘theory’, ‘theoretical’ and ‘research’ occur frequently (CR, 1975, pp. 23–25, 47). The skill to think scientifically was characteristic of the professional and modern teacher of the 1970s: ‘Practical decisions should derive from research-based facts, not beliefs (CR, 1975, p. 41).

Some doubts and reservations lay behind the idea of the teacher as a researcher. Teachers were not proposed to be educated as 'real researchers': researchers would have to study research methods more extensively and more deeply than teachers, for example (CR, 1975, p. 54, p. 84). It is also repeated that there was not yet a generally accepted theory of education or instruction (CR, 1975, p. 39).

As a consequence, the new teacher would be a half-educated researcher who was expected to think and act as if fully educated, and also to take care of practical matters, social relationships and the learning of their pupils in everyday schooling (CR, 1975, pp. 84–85). This twofold role was to be carried out without appropriate education in research and methodology: preliminary scientific studies and the right attitude were considered adequate.

One could say that teacher education appeared in the right place at the right time in at least three ways. First, the chosen agenda to combine the theoretical and the practical was in line with the polytechnic model of the time. Second, teacher education did not have the negative image of scientific reclusiveness: on the contrary, it had the reputation of not being overly academic, and its practical nature and explicit focus on the work of teachers satisfied demands for real-life applicability. Third, its renewal coincided with the reform movement that stressed the significance of the education.

The constant refrain in the 1960s and 1970s was that something had to be done. The significant turn occurred in 1979 when the new university law recognized only Master's-level level studies. Consequently, teacher education (including primary school teachers) achieved full academic status. On the academic level, however, it was not ready at this point to engage in theory-based training. The change was driven mainly by political decision-making, and was promising as a starting point for the development of teacher departments, but on the other hand it was quite challenging in the longer term. As Simola and Rinne state (2010), the main factor behind the decision to promote classroom-teacher education to the Master's level was the restructuring in the University.

Theory was considered separable from practice in Finnish teacher education during the second period covered by our analysis. This was also the case in the previous period, but what was different was that the two were seen as intertwined and mutually beneficial, not contradictory (CR, 1975, p. 165). Teacher education was expected to serve the increasing needs of society, and at the same time

it had to convince the academic world that the teaching profession had proper theoretical foundations.

Rhetorical academisation (the 1990s and the 2000s)

By the 1990s the comprehensive school reform had stabilised and teacher education had been a university-level subject for over ten years. At the same time, Finland was suffering from a deep economic depression. The difficult economic situation provoked questions from other academics and university management as to whether the university was the right place for teacher education, and if classroom teachers needed Master's-level studies (Kasvatusala kohti...1994, p. 12; Helsingin yliopiston arviointiryhmä, 1993, p. 80).

The defensive reaction was to stress the theoretical aspects of teacher education, which intensified the rhetoric. Earlier, in the 1980s, the basic curriculum was the responsibility of the National Board of Education but each municipality and school was obliged to build its own local curriculum. As a consequence, teachers were expected to take care of planning and development work along with their teaching duties in classrooms (CR, 1989, pp. 31–34; CR, 1991, p. 16). This set new requirements on teacher education and was also seen as a chance to avoid the critical questioning of its academic status. One implication of the new status was the rhetorical choice to present teachers' tasks more broadly than in earlier periods: teachers were to be 'educational experts', not only schoolteachers.

The first report (CR, 1989, p. 6) of this period makes serious demands for the integration of theory and practice: 'teachers need strong theoretical foundations, but it is also necessary to promote a positive attitude towards scientific studies'. This is also demonstrated in statements insisting that scientific and professional studies should be affiliated more coherently (CR, 1989, p. 10, p. 14, p. 44, p. 111). Teacher educators were blamed for not being sufficiently theory-related. The low academic status and out-dated teacher-college culture were seen as problematic: 'The status of teacher education could be improved by presenting educational science as a scientific discipline' (Teacher education as...2000, p. 20). Thus, teacher educators were expected to do more research, which would mean lightening their teaching burden (CR, 1989, p. 111; Educational studies... 1994, p. 20; Teacher education as..., 2000, p. 20, p. 40).

According to the evaluation texts, this scientification process would improve educational theory building and strengthen the research-based agenda in teacher-education departments. Teacher educators were expected to explain to their students in concrete terms the meaning of theory in practice, which required them as well as their students and practising teachers to accept this theoretical viewpoint both in their rhetoric and in their actions: 'In educational studies it is necessary to learn basic concepts of scientific aspects and to adopt the teacher-as-a-researcher attitude [...]' (Kasvatusala kohti...1994, p. 48). This brought about a significant change in the mid-1990s, when theoretical studies were readily included in the curricula of Finnish teacher-education departments.

An international review team supported the scientification process in Finnish teacher education, but not without reservations. While praising the educational-science curriculum for ensuring that practitioners were introduced to research activities, it expressed concern that this agenda did not take the different educational tasks into account: 'it is not reasonable or practical to expect practitioners to conduct research throughout their careers. They have neither the time nor the resources to do so' (Educational studies...1994, 20).

A thought-provoking finding from our analysis is that the closing report (Kasvatusala kohti...1994) of the international review compiled by Finnish scholars made no mention of the comments concerning whether or not practitioners should also engage in research activities, although all the other observations of the international team are listed in detail. It was rhetorically wiser to emphasize the demanding nature of teachers' duties. These arguments, although abstract and equivocal, were used to convince decision makers that fully academic teacher training was necessary.

The most recent evaluation of this era sums up the reports from the 1960s onwards and draws a clear conclusion: theory and practice still seem to be 'far apart'. It states quite clearly that 'the theory-based approach crumbled' in teacher education (Teacher education...2000, p. 7, p. 15, p. 20, p. 31). The evaluation team investigated in particular whether there had been any progress since the preceding evaluation project of 1993–1994 (Educational studies, 1994; Kasvatusala kohti..., 1994). The conclusion was that there had been no significant changes. Given this background, it is even more interesting that the closing report of the international review team does not refer to the controversial nature of the theory vs. practice debate, nor does it articulate the historical obstacles.

The strategy was successful, and Finnish teacher education remained at the university level. From then on it was quite clear that teacher-education departments were not only preparing teachers but were also expected to produce educational research. In addition, they had to ensure that every teacher, whether prospective or appointed, adopted a research orientation as a guiding principle. The general tone in the evaluations and committee reports of this period is somewhat pessimistic. The relationship between theory and practice is said to be incompatible in teacher education, and in some cases it was kept quiet. The optimism of the 1970s had turned to stagnation. On the other hand, on the rhetorical level there were high demands for a stronger research-based orientation when the on-going practical implementation was still very problematic.

Real academisation? (the current situation)

It became clear during the 1990s that Finnish teacher education was popular and highly regarded by students and fellow-citizens. International review teams described it as of high quality. To be more precise, the Master's degree programmes, the coordination of teaching practice with theoretical tuition and the highly developed professional culture were applauded (CR, 1989, pp. 110–111; Niemi & Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006; Kasvatusala kohti..., 2000, p. 4, p. 21, p. 53). The international evaluation of the new millennium crystallized the situation: 'It is always possible to make good even better' (Teacher education...2000, p. 21).

The 2000 report (Teacher education..., 2000) demonstrates this rhetorical turn as a new self-confident way of describing Finnish teacher education emerged. The report heralds its prime quality, which had been acknowledged in international comparisons. Although expressing concern that theory and practice are still apart (which is why it belongs to the previous period of our analysis), it states that the Finnish model sets a good international example of how teachers should be educated. The latest teacher-education report from 2007 goes even further: 'Finnish experts have had significant representation in these groups and Finnish teacher education programmes have been acknowledged as a desired goal for other countries' (Opettajankoulutus 2020, 2007, p. 11).

All in all, the situation in Finnish teacher education and in the school system was very promising a decade ago. The good learning results in international school-achievement tests silenced the critical voices. At the same time, the academic profile of Finnish teacher educators was now on a par with that of other members of academia: they were expected to have a PhD, and to carry out research

duties (Hökkä 2012; Krokfors, Kynäslähti, Stenberg, Toom, Maaranen, Jyrhämä, Byman, & Kansanen, 2011; Munthe & Rogne 2015; xxxx 2014).

Nevertheless, major critical points were raised, mainly concerning the need to further strengthen the research-based agenda. No contradictory comments were made. While praising Finnish teacher education and the research-based agenda, the 2007 (Opettajankoulutus 2020, 2007) report also makes it clear that educational research in Finland is not well organized, cumulative or of high quality compared with that in other academic disciplines such as medicine. It also states that educational science fails to provide prospective teachers with the requisite skills. These viewpoints blatantly contradict the laudatory views expressed earlier in the same report. The statements in the report reflect the ethos and narrative of Finnish teacher education in the last ten years. From a rhetorical perspective, the comparison standard is interesting: medicine has traditionally been rated much higher than education.

The 2007 report makes an exceptionally strong statement in declaring that teachers are educational experts who show a research orientation in their daily work and who undertake research in their own working environment: 'Research knowledge is also the starting point in other European teacher education programmes but in Finnish thinking, a research orientation and teachers' day-to-day work are inseparable' (Opettajankoulutus 2020, 2007, p. 37). Unlike its precursors of earlier decades, the report does not recognize the ambivalence between theory and practice. Nor does it refer to the negative reception of teacher education among students, which is noted in the reports of the 1990s.

The impression of a solved problem is stronger in other documents: 'The Finnish system has a special feature which supports both a theoretically enriched program and its integration with practice' (Kansanen, 2014, p. 281). The teacher-education programme at the university of Helsinki states that in teacher studies 'research, theory and practice are fused - with the idea of research-based thinking as the connecting glue' (Westbury et al. 2005). It seems even from scientific journals that Finnish teacher education has reconciled the demanding relationship between theory and practice and has achieved full academic status (Hökkä & Eteläpelto, 2014; Kansanen, 2014; Niemi & Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006; Toom et al., 2010).

In sum, the rhetoric of the last decade is optimistic and promises a lot. The relationship between theory and practice no longer seems to be a problem: on the contrary, they appear to have found each other in the various daily routines of schoolwork and in teacher education. Our empirical data

does not reveal whether or not theory and practice have really found each other in the pedagogy, all things considered. As noted at the beginning of this article, this is not our aim. Instead we will give a more careful analysis of our findings on rhetorical changes.

Changing the balance between theory and practice

As we see it, the story of theory and practice in Finnish teacher education is quite clear. At first they were presented as separate domains of teacher education and of the teacher's work. Later, eloquent attempts were made to bring theory and practice together, especially in the 1970s when the need to convince academia was the burning issue. The concern in the 1990s was that theory and practice were still unrelated regardless of all the hard work. Finally, at the dawn of the 21st century it appeared that there was actually no gap between these domains.

The four periods of our analysis reveal how Finnish teacher education has transformed from craft-based apprenticeship to professional and academic study. What gives particular cause for concern is that not a single document in our research data explains what theory and practice, either separately or together, actually mean. Hence, further examination is needed to draw conclusions on what theory and practice really meant during the decades of our study. Insofar as our data deals with both, the concepts are sometimes connected to contexts such as teacher education and the teacher's work, and are frequently presented in connection with educational science. For the most part, however, they are not connected to any context or interested party. What seems to be clear is that there has been urgent need to forge educational theory and teacher practice together and underline the close relationship between teacher education and teacher's work.

According to Perelman's notion of the philosophical pair, a single concept is split in two in order to avoid incompatibility and to enhance argumentative force (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, pp. 416–417). Teaching practice was the starting point in the earliest period covered in our analysis. This day-to-day school practice encompassed 'real' and 'central' aspects of the original concept in terms of how teacher education and the teacher's work should be understood and organized. Thus, practice was term II in the philosophical pair during the 1960s, the earliest period covered in our study. At that time, theory was conceived of as peripheral and subordinate to practice, hence term II (practice) set the criteria for term I (theory). The incompatibility and separateness were not a problem at the time. Teacher educators, as representatives of educational science, could realize their

scientific ambitions as teachers were dealing with everyday school practice. The two parties did not yet have a compelling need to communicate on a professional level.

Theory and practice began to converge during the 1970s. Practice lost its supremacy in the philosophical pair and theory gained authenticity. Teacher education was in the process of academisation, and it was becoming harder and harder to defend the position of practice. Although its original application was still acknowledged in the 1970s, at the same time it was considered insufficient without a theoretical dimension. As the 1990s approached, it was clearly stated that a practical orientation was effectively a barrier to theoretical ambitions. It seemed that teacher education and educational science were progressing more quickly than professional knowledge in the practical field.

Finally, since the turn of the millennium when it was said that theory and practice had found each other, theory has become term II. Thus, the original composition has been turned upside down as theory, being the norm represented by educational science, defines what is currently valuable in the pedagogy. At present, theory represents the 'central' and 'true' aspects of the original single concept, which defines how teacher education (also the teacher's work) should be organized.

The concept of the teacher as a half-educated researcher still seems to persist. Although the teachers of the new millennium should subscribe to the research-based agenda, 'not every teacher is expected to be a proficient researcher' (Opettajankoulutus 2020, 2007, p. 43). Ironically, these definitions blur the explanatory power of the philosophical pair of theory and practice. Dismissive prefixes such as pseudo-, quasi- and non-, for example, naturally reduce the value of the term (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 437), and, quite understandably, are not included in definitions of teachers' jobs found in the committee reports. The teacher as a half-educated researcher is our interpretation based on these writings. As such, it assigns expertise in educational science to teacher educators, whereas teachers may find it puzzling, maybe even misleading, if they are referred to as scholars or theorists.

We have claimed earlier that explicit descriptions of theory and practice are absent in our data, although the two concepts are repeatedly represented. It could be interpreted from our analysis that this ambiguity may be intentional. As theory is promoted, which is the strengthening tendency in our data, it may be advisable not to reveal explicit theories or details, which could be questioned in their own right. On the other hand, practitioners could deny the legitimacy and usefulness of theory. It is rather difficult to oppose something that is equivocal and obscure.

A marriage of convenience?

There are various reasons why the relationship between theory and practice has not been considered problematic in recent years, and why a research-based agenda, which is said to allow the fusing of theory and practice, is widely promoted in Finnish teacher education and why this research-based agenda is expected to be also the due orientation of current Finnish teacher. For one thing, there are implications that something has really happened. It may be that educational science nowadays is able to produce useful and worthwhile educational research, and possibly even to develop ‘scientific technologies’, although Biesta (2007) who cannot conceive of education as having a technical role, seriously questions this. On the other hand, it is possible that educational science is more efficient in disseminating its research findings to practising professionals, thereby partially resolving the so-called knowledge-transfer problem (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006). Moreover, student teachers and teachers may have softened their attitudes towards research over the years. One explanation for this lies in the Finnish language: there are no relevant equivalents for the terms ‘research’ and ‘inquiry’ (Munthe & Rogne, 2015). When translated, both refer to something that is equivalent to the English term ‘research’.²

It is also possible that the strong relationship between theory and research is professed more readily than it is delivered (Munthe & Rogne, 2015). The predominant symbiosis is clearly manifested in Finnish teacher education, which produces masses of teachers (its professional school function) and at the same time is said to be of high quality (the academic study of education). Hence, it is promoted as being both professionally and academically strong, which is the real Finnish way. From this point of view, the predominant discourse portraying theory and practice as compatible and integrated is not only understandable, but perhaps also even necessary. What is equally important is that potential tensions between the traditional academic and the new professional culture, between theory and practice, are silenced (Clifford & Guthrie, 1988, p. 255; Labaree, 2008, pp. 292–293).

We argue, in any case, that the main reason for this allegedly successful marriage between theory and practice in Finland lies in the status of teacher educators (who are also mainly responsible for our data) and in their conscious efforts, based on rhetoric or true observations, to lift it. In fact, their

² Verb “tutkia” in Finnish.

prominence has changed quite dramatically during the period under study. A practical and down-to-earth ethos has changed into an academic approach as they have considerably improved their academic profile (xxxx, 2014). Current Finnish teacher educators appreciate the research-based agenda and agree that it is also beneficial to teaching practice (Krokkfors et. al, 2011; Tryggvason, 2012). But could it really be otherwise? These scholars must be sympathetic to this agenda, which quite naturally also resonates with their working attitudes. It is in their interest that the schoolteacher profession shares the same view about the significance of theory and research. As Labaree (2004, p. 12, p. 33) states, the status of teacher education is tightly connected to the status of teachers and schools. This is also the case in traditional professions such as medicine and law (Clifford & Brown, 1988, p. 329).

From a historical perspective, the education system in Finland has been a success story since the 1970s. The exceptionally rapid development of the Finnish welfare state created a situation in which the entire education system was modernized. Finnish teacher education and its providers gained a higher status in the wake of the university reform. There is no question about the progress inherent in this development. Nevertheless, on the basis of our rhetorical analysis and the balance between theory and practice it is justified to ask whether education as a science exists to produce better education and better teachers, or whether teachers exist so that educational science can produce better research and enhance the status of its scholars.

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