

The Meaningfulness of the European Commission Policy Paper *Improving the Quality of Teacher Education*: Estonian Teachers', Teacher Educators' and Policy Makers' Perspectives

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Abstract

The Commission of the European Communities has recently prepared a policy paper entitled *Improving the Quality of Teacher Education* for the European Parliament. The Communication describes a vision of a European teaching profession that is characterised by well-qualified professionals, lifelong learners, with readiness to mobility and collaborative partnerships. The aim of our study was to analyse Estonian teaching professionals' views of the policy paper.

For the purpose of our study, nine teachers, teacher educators and policy makers provided their interpretations of the EU communication paper in written and focus-group interviews. The teachers' regarded the paper as an excellent guideline, but simultaneously idealistic. The teachers felt that the teacher education in the university was described accurately in the document. Time limitations and dissatisfaction with salary were regarded as obstacles for the development of the teacher profession. The teachers emphasised that the document needs systematic implementation and decisions on national level, but raised the question of how to actually carry through the implementation of the ideas. Further, the question of school leadership was emphasised. The teacher educators and policy makers regarded the national support structures, including induction year and mentoring as good solutions, but identified the need to expand the support structures beyond the novice year. They also identified development needs with regards to teachers' skills and competences to engage in reflective practice and research. Joint research initiatives between schools and universities were strongly encouraged.

The teachers' interpretations of the Communication paper were analysed against Estonian policy documents, such as Teachers' Standard (Õpetaja, 2005), which describes the teacher's role and competencies, and Framework Guidelines for Teacher Education, which describe general and special requirements for teacher education (Framework Guidelines for Teacher Education, 2000). The teachers' interpretations and the analysis of these against the Estonian policy documents provide useful insights for the further development of national teacher education policy.

Keywords: Teacher education, European Commission policy paper, Estonian teacher education policy

The Need to Improve the Quality of Teacher Education

The Commission of the European Communities has recently prepared a policy paper on *Improving the Quality of Teacher Education* for the European Parliament. The policy paper was launched for public discussion in August 2007, and approved October 26, 2007. The policy paper introduces the challenges of teacher education in the European context, relates teacher education policy to other relevant policies of the Union, summarises the changing demands of the teacher profession, and outlines a framework for action.

Our central question is how teaching professionals themselves experience the challenges and opportunities outlined in the commission paper, and how they feel that the paper reflects the Estonian context. The aim of our study was to analyse Estonian teachers', teacher educators' and policy makers' views about the policy document. Our paper describes an exploratory study based on written and oral focus-group interviews. With this study we would like to facilitate the dialogue between teacher education policy makers who outline national agendas and the teachers who in their daily work are at the implementing end of the education policies.

The following is an introduction to the Commission paper, which is a result of a process that begun with the Lisbon agenda for growth and jobs in March 2000. The Commission paper summarises the changing demands on the teaching profession. According to the paper, teachers are increasingly needed to help young people develop into autonomous learners by acquiring skills necessary in the society rather than just memorising information. In light of what we know from research about learning, teachers are expected to develop their pedagogical approaches to include more cooperative and activating methods instead of transmission of knowledge to passive recipients. The fact that groups are larger and more heterogeneous displaying a variety of abilities requires the teachers to facilitate the learning of mixed groups as well as of individual learners. At the same time the teacher is part of the school community, working with other teachers, the pupils' parents, organisations etc. The paper goes on to state that initial teacher education is not sufficient to equip teachers with all necessary skills that they will need during their teaching career. The paper sees teachers' commitment to reflective practice, a research base, and continuous professional development as vital in how well teachers are able to meet the demands of the profession.

Many European countries struggle with providing teachers the opportunity update their skills and knowledge (OECD, 2005). The lack of opportunities relate particularly to updating teachers' competence in pedagogy including supporting individualised learning, facilitating autonomous, self-regulated learning, dealing with the diverse needs of pupils in heterogeneous classrooms, and preparing learners information literacy skills. The lack of coordination between initial and continuing teacher education, and the lack of a link to school improvement of the training initiatives does not make the situation any easier in many European countries. Investment in continuous training and development is fairly low across Europe, and only half of the countries offer new teachers support in the form of induction or mentoring, for instance (Ibid.)

Further, the Commission paper mentions remuneration and the age structure in the teaching profession as factors affecting the profession. Labour market conditions and teachers' salaries in relation to average national income affect the competitiveness of the profession on the job market. Teachers' salaries may not be competitive compared to those offered in

other organisations. There will be a substantial demand for recruiting and retaining a sufficient work force in the teacher profession when the large cohorts retire.

Common Principles for Developing Teacher Education and Steps to Be Taken

The Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications (2005) outlines a vision of a European teaching profession. In the vision, teaching is envisioned as **a well-qualified** profession meaning that all teachers hold a higher education degree, and have suitable pedagogical knowledge and cultural understanding. Teachers are seen as **lifelong learners** who continue their professional development throughout their careers. Teaching is **a mobile** profession in which teachers work and study in other European countries for professional development purposes. **Partnerships** among teacher education institutions, schools, local work environments, work-based training providers and other stakeholders form a supportive network for teachers and their work communities.

Based on these common principles, the Commission paper outlines a set of steps to be undertaken in order to improve the quality of teacher education in Europe. These steps include life-long learning, skills development, reflective practice and research, development of qualifications, development of teacher education as a higher education degree, and emphasising the teacher's role in the society. When facilitating the dialogue between educational policy and individual teachers, the most interesting ones for the purposes of our paper are the steps of lifelong learning and reflective practice and research. The theoretical justifications for emphasising these two aspects – life-long learning, and reflection and research – can be found in a body of literature on adult learning and teacher development.

Life-long Learning

Teachers' professional development has been approached through different theoretical perspectives, among them developmental stage theories (Furlong & Maynard, 1995; Kagan, 1992), socialisation theory (Zeichner & Gore, 1990), cognitive and personality theory (Calderhead, 1988), and workplace learning (cf. Mezirow, 1991). The Commission paper takes as its point of departure the fact that initial education cannot provide teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary for the entire teaching career. Developing as a teacher is a lifelong task, and it is best supported when teacher education and continuing development are properly funded, and nationally coordinated as a coherent and continuous system. In practice, this means that teachers:

- “take part in an effective programme of induction during their first three years in post / in the profession;
 - have access to structured guidance and mentoring by experienced teachers or other relevant professionals throughout their career;
 - take part in regular discussions of their training and development needs, in the context of the wider development plan of the institution where they work”.
- (Improving the Quality of Teacher Education, 2007, 13.)

Further, teachers would benefit from

- encouragement and support throughout their careers to develop their competences through formal, informal and non-formal means and the recognition of these as valid means of development;
- having access to other opportunities for continuous professional development, such as exchanges and placements;
- having the opportunity and time for further qualifying studies and taking part in study and research at a higher education level; and
- participating in creative partnerships between different institutions, including higher education institutions. (Ibid.)

Reflective practice and research

By reflection we understand the meaning-making process of experiences as a means for the teacher to recognise his or her learning, analyse it, and share the understanding with peers (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 2003; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Wang & Odell, 2002). The aim of reflection is not only identification of problems or weaknesses, but also the improvement and development of practice: the understandings created based on the experiences should be transferable or applicable in practice. Thus, reflection is also a means to deepen the understanding of one's thinking and behaviour. A constant dialogue between one's previous and current experiences is necessary in order to analyse the underpinnings of one's behaviour and thinking. (McAlpine, 1993; McAlpine & Weston, 2000.) Practical, cognitive and metacognitive skills need to be integrated. The teacher's work, as a continuous knowledge-building process, should be anchored in ontological and epistemological assumptions acknowledged by the teacher (Pickle, 1985).

On reflective practice and research the Commission paper takes as its point of departure the teachers' role in helping "young people to take responsibility for mapping out their own learning pathways throughout life." (Improving the Quality of Teacher Education, 2007, 14.) The teacher's work is ethical by nature and as such it requires reflection (Pickle, 1985). To meet up to the expectations of this role teachers need themselves an awareness of their own learning pathways. Teachers are also expected to be developers of their professions indicating that they have a responsibility to develop the knowledge base in the field. In a context of lifelong learning, the teachers' professional development implies continuous reflection on practice; undertaking classroom-based research and incorporating the results of classroom and academic research into their practice; evaluating the effectiveness of teaching; and assessing own training needs.

Teacher Education in Estonia

The development of teacher education practices and support systems for teachers' professional development in Estonia has emerged from problems such as perceived low prestige of the teaching profession and high average age of teachers resulting in retirement of those teachers. Currently there are 16 500 teachers in Estonian comprehensive and vocational schools and pre-school institutions. The percentage of over 50-year-old teachers has increased by 63% compared to the year 1993; their percentage to the total number of teachers has grown from 23% to 35%. 11% of teachers working at comprehensive schools are under 30 years of age. Although the figure is similar to that in, for example, Finland

(7.6% of teachers are under 30), there are difficulties in motivating and recruiting prospective teachers in Estonia. For instance, Portugal (23.8% of teachers are under 30) and Great Britain (18% of teachers are under 30) have managed well with recruitment of prospective teachers. In these countries the percentage of teachers representing younger generations is as high as 18-24. (Õpetajakoolituse ... 2006.) The foreseen mass retirement of teachers is likely to affect Estonia.

Since 1993, the formal educational level of Estonian teachers has increased in terms of numbers of teachers with a degree from a higher education institution among comprehensive school teachers and vocational institution teachers. 75-80 % of comprehensive school teachers now have a degree in education. Teacher education is provided in the form of degree studies regulated by the *Framework Guidelines for Teacher Education* (2000). The framework guidelines set out general and special requirements for teacher education, induction year, and in-service training. Teacher education for all school levels consists of three parts: (1) general studies; (2) speciality studies; (3) pedagogical studies including educational science, psychological and didactic studies, and practical training. The general studies focus on the development of the teacher's overall cultural, communicative, and social competencies, whereas speciality studies provide subject-related knowledge and skills based on current requirements for the profession. An important aspect is also to provide the skills for how to combine this knowledge with an understanding of the human being, the surrounding environment and society. The general studies in educational science, psychological, didactic studies and practical training aim at developing didactic mastery of the subject, provide skills of applying psychological knowledge, and provide knowledge and skills of organisation, classroom and group management as well as team work skills.

Method

Aim and Research Questions

The aim of the study was to analyse Estonian teaching professionals' views of European policy paper *Improving the Quality of Teacher Education*. The document emphasises teachers' life-long learning, reflective practice and research (among other things). The central question was: What relevance do these concepts have as presented in the policy paper for educational practitioners? The paper describes an exploratory study based on written and focus-group interviews with teachers, teacher educators and policy makers.

Participants

The participants consisted of two groups: 1) teachers (N = 4) who after reading the EU policy paper shared with the researchers their reactions to the document in writing. These four teachers were a primary school student teacher in her fifth year of study, a subject teacher with seven years of teaching experience, one teacher with ten years of teaching experience, and a former primary school teacher with 20 years of teaching experience who currently works as a teacher educator (because of her extensive experience of teaching this participant was placed in the group of practicing teachers). The data were collected in October 2007. 2) Teacher educators and policy makers on the ministry level (N = 5) who

provided their reactions to the European policy paper in a focus-group interview in January 2008.

Data

The study utilises thematic, written and oral interviews. The data were content analysed (cf. Marshall & Rossman, 1995), and responses were divided into thematic blocks describing the meanings given to the policy paper. The written responses were in the Estonian language.

The policy documents relevant for the study are:

- *Improving the Quality of Teacher Education* by the Commission of the European Communities (2007)
- Estonian Teachers' Standard (Õpetaja, 2005), and
- The Estonian Framework Guidelines for Teacher Education (2000), which describe general and special requirements for teacher education in Estonia.

Results and Reflections

Practicing Teachers

In the data collected from practicing teachers (including one student teacher) the following themes emerged: Opportunities (mobility) and threats (low salary, insufficient time) for developing the profession; relationship of the policy paper to the Estonian teacher education context, and suggestions for improving the situation (systematic implementation and decisions on a national level, developing schools as learning communities, leadership).

The teachers regarded the **document** as **sound, but general and even idealistic**. The teachers raised the question of whether the teaching professionals are in a position to meet the changing requirements of the professional as described in the policy paper. As the second quote implies, teachers of different generations may see the teachers' possibilities to develop themselves professionally in quite a different light

“The document is quite general. The question arises how the written things work out in real life? For example, teachers must have additional time to do scientific work, put together study materials or carry out research. Currently, teachers use their own free time to do these things. If teachers want to write their master's thesis, they can take only two weeks of study-leave.” (Teacher, 20 years teaching experience)

“On the whole, I think that this document demands too much perfection. Of course it would be nice if all teachers could improve and develop themselves in different areas, but in the Estonian context this kind of try-out could be hard to achieve. I presume that we have still too many “old-school” teachers, who wouldn't go along with new ideas, no matter how good those could be.” (Student teacher)

It would however be desirable that all teachers regardless of age have the opportunity to deepen their professional knowledge and understanding through degree studies in a higher education institution. For conceptual change to take place, long-term studies are needed. Short one or two-day seminars and workshops may provide insights, but they are not likely to change the teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning in a fundamental way (Postareff, Lindblom-Ylänne & Nevgi, 2007; Postareff, Lindblom-Ylänne & Nevgi, in press). The slow conceptual change is also echoed in the quote from the following teacher, who implicitly appears to suggest a stronger emphasis on development of teachers' pedagogical skills alongside subject matter content:

“The main change of teachers' way of thinking should be that they work with students, not with subject. Most of teachers see their professional development through the amendment of the subject-teaching methods because they have been prepared to work with subjects, also the former trained class teachers, and schools are compared with one-another. They think that it is measurable.” (Teacher, 10 years teaching experience)

Another aspect of the development of teacher education, in which a generational gap may appear, is the opportunity to engage in teacher exchange. The EU policy paper emphasises teacher **mobility** as an important element in the development of the profession. The student teacher strongly emphasises the need for mobility and relates it to her own career path:

“I would like to emphasise one main feature of the teacher's profession: mobility. For me as a student teacher, mobility is definitely one of the most needed elements in the teacher's profession”. (Student teacher)

She then goes on to note that despite good intentions, all efforts to develop the profession necessarily requires that **sufficient time** is allocated for this purpose in the individual teachers' schedules: “Teachers need opportunities an *time* (emphasis on the word in the interview) to get extra qualifications. It would be interesting to know, how these things are given to teachers”. Another teacher (7 years teaching experience) makes the same point: “Teachers cannot cooperate because there is no time and place, everybody has their own issues”. Dealing with one's own teaching is seen as the most urgent and time-consuming task, but in the long run cooperation, for instance, could work to ease the individual teacher's burden.

Salary is seen as an important incentive for the individual teacher, and a political tool on the school and society levels. The relatively **low salary** level was perceived as a problem in developing the profession. The student teacher notes that “Nobody is going to outdo themselves for such a small salary”. Another teacher relates this individual level challenge to the broader context of local schools and politics:

“If a teacher raises his/her qualification, he/she wants higher compensation. The allocation of salaries in schools doesn't change because of the growing qualifications of teachers. In many schools, the management does not support the teachers' careers because then some teachers would demand a higher salary. This is a great problem in small schools”. (Teacher, 20 years teaching experience.)

The Estonian teacher education received positive evaluations from the teachers. They maintained that the **teacher education** appears to a large extent to **fulfil the requirements set forth in the document**. The student teacher praised the practical training included in the teacher education programme:

“The teacher training in college is focused on the creation of positive cooperation between schools and teachers, and on real teaching experience. This is shown by many practices which a student must undertake in five years. I am sure that if the students get a realistic view of schools, they will be able to manage their work better in the future”. (Student teacher)

Despite the fact that teacher education received positive remarks from the teachers, they called for an open discussion on a national level regarding the development and future of the teaching profession and teacher education. This was regarded crucial in order for the document to find practical relevance. **Systematic implementation and decisions on a national level** following an open discussion were seen as vital. Getting practitioners and those involved in teacher education and policy development to participate and act in the systematic implementation of the ideas presented was regarded as an important element in the development of teacher education. The responsibility of all parts involved and the continuous nature of learning was called for by one of the teachers as exemplified in the following quote:

“Our teacher profession standard supports the same competences. The teacher cannot plan his/her professional development if nobody gives adequate feedback and if there is no systematic development and organised training activity in the organisation. The priorities should be negotiated on every level, like the Finns did in the 1960-70s. They understood that many investments should be made in teacher retraining and continuing professional training. This is a question of mentality and teachers should realise that taking courses is at the core of what teaching is, it is not just fulfilling the qualification demands.” (Teacher, 10 years teaching experience)

A national level discussion could also work to trigger the internal dialogue in schools. The individual teacher acts in a community of fellow teachers, school staff, pupils, parents, organisations, and so on. The individual teacher’s efforts, be they professional development or classroom research, should be seen in a broader context, the context of a **learning community**:

“It seems that a very important and right way is to think thoroughly about yourself and the development of the school, and to educate yourself systematically. The research, for example in the classroom, is really valuable, but still questions arise – why should I do this and what do I get from it? So, the most important thing is to create supportive mechanisms. I started to think about my development..., meaning that the document is also useful for the active teacher”. (Teacher, 7 years teaching experience)

If schools are to function as learning communities, **leadership** questions rise to the fore. One of the teachers painted a gloomy picture of the reality in which the school as a community does not support teachers’ professional development. As the teacher points out, the situation is symptomatic of the lack of mutual support and leadership:

“The school leaders are indifferent. Some teachers are in such a hopeless situation that they don’t want anything else but to give their lessons. I personally have had enough opportunities to develop myself and every time I come back from a training course I’m full of new ideas and excitement. But at school, everything goes back to zero. The investigation of my own work needs more time and cooperation. I think that a lot depends on the leader of the school. Our teachers are pretty well educated, but the culture of the school is in a very bad condition. (Teacher, 7 years teaching experience).

Another example shows that teachers wishing to participate in continuing training may be expected to pay themselves for the substitute. This indicates a strong lack of support from the school leaders:

“The substitution of lessons depends on the compliance of the school management. Sometimes, teachers have to pay for the substitutes.” (Teacher, 20 years teaching experience)

To summarise the teachers views, the document was regarded an excellent guideline, but simultaneously idealistic. The teachers felt that the current teacher education at the university level was described accurately in the document. Time limitations and dissatisfaction with salary were regarded as obstacles for the development of the teacher profession. The teachers emphasised that the document needs systematic implementation and decisions on national level, but raised the question of how to actually carry through the implementation of the ideas. Further, the question of school leadership was emphasised.

Teacher Educators and Policy Makers on the State Level

In the data collected from the teacher educators and policy makers the following themes emerged: national support structures, in-school reserves, school-based and network-based mentoring, teachers’ skills and competences to engage in reflective practice and research, and joint research initiatives.

The focus-group interview with teacher educators and policy makers on the state level (N = 5) assured that the first year support programme, the induction year, is well implemented. Structures are in place to provide support for novice teachers. The interviewed group expressed a concern for the adequacy of support for the teachers in their second and third year of teaching. The group maintained that the support pretty much depends on the local school culture, and identified the need to develop teachers’ opportunities to get support either in the school environment, the university or a county centre. **National support structures** for this group of teachers who are no longer in their novice year, but have limited teaching experience, are mainly connected to furthering the career, not developing pedagogy. Teachers are not aware of these opportunities, and these courses do not provide teachers the much needed feedback on their development. The interviewees saw teachers’ professional unions and county sections as possible actors in developing support structures for these teachers, but at present not all teachers are members of those organisations. The ideal situation would be to develop an organised programme through the first, second, and third year of teaching. This time is important as the teachers may, at the end of the third year, apply for a certificate on improved competence. The group expressed that the

threshold to seek help may be high for beginning teachers. The need for help may be seen as a sign of failure.

In addition to the national support structures, **in-school reserves** should be prepared to support the teachers' development. The same idea was echoed among the practitioner teachers. The interviewed group suggested that teachers should have access to structured guidance and mentoring by experienced teachers or other relevant professionals throughout their career. Again, a lot was seen to depend on the teachers themselves, and the level of cooperativeness in the school culture. It was noted that in some schools the support of novice and beginning teachers was assigned as the vice principal's task. The fact that the responsibility is assigned to a specific post helps to maintain the task on the agenda.

From here the discussion emerged into a serious challenge: the need among teachers for guidance and psychological counselling to prevent or to facilitate recovery from burn out. The group raised the question whose responsibility it is to deal with this challenge, whether the responsibility of national institutions, evaluators, or study support and support centers in regions.

The Estonian induction year is systematically implemented and appears to fulfill its role in supporting novice teachers. Some of the means of support, such as mentoring, could be expanded to include also other than novice teachers. The group suggests that all schools should have at least one staff member who has supervision and guidance skills; a **school-based mentor**. Trust and personal relationships were emphasised, leading the group to consider the possibility of having more than one person in the school possessing such skills. Again, the issue of the school as a community was brought to the fore. The group further explored the idea of establishing **network-based mentoring** on a regional level. They envisioned that teachers who have undergone mentor training could function as a resource for each other and for their colleagues who need support. Within the network, teachers could take part in regular discussion about their training and development needs, and get support in relating it to the wider context of the development plan of the institution in which they work.

Teachers continuing training should be planned according the needs of school development. The priorities of schools should be the basis for teachers' training plans. Teachers' individual development ought to be connected to the **broader school context**. Making the connections could be facilitated through a **forum for discussion**. The implementation of new initiatives takes time, and the school leaders are in a key position to implement in initiatives. Teachers need awareness and knowledge of the relationships between national policy and priorities and the schools' own plans.

With regards to **reflective practice and research**, the interviewed group concluded that the readiness of teachers to investigate their own work is weak. Teachers do not engage in research of their practices, or they disregard it as being non scientific. Estonian teacher's professional standard emphasises action research in everyday work, but one of the interviewees regarded teachers' not well prepared for such a task. The work of class teachers, however, involves discussions with parents on the pupils' progress and development. For this purpose, it would be important that teachers also investigate their teaching. As one of the interviewees explained, she asks other teachers' opinions about the pupils' development and compares these with her own interpretations. Despite the weaknesses in teachers' readiness to engage in research, many continuing professional

training courses involve conducting research on teaching. Another opportunity to research one's teaching is to engage in degree studies within a subject. As noted in the responses from the practising teachers, the amount of allocated time to work on a master's thesis is very limited (two weeks of study-leave), which certainly may not encourage teachers to undertake such research work. Again, a generational gap was envisaged by the interviewed group postulating that older cohorts may lack the research skills as these have not been emphasised in their training.

Yet, the interviewees felt that teachers are keen on doing research provided that they possess the required skills, and the school context appreciates its teachers engaging in research. The initial education at the university may not be enough to fully develop the skills required for the research of everyday teaching practices if focus is solely on academic or scientific research. One of the interviewees provided the following examples: "How should I analyse the test results? What do you do with the answers of the questionnaires?". Asking relevant questions from a practical point of view and utilising these to improve practice may require a different approach to the research task than traditional academic research. The interviewee calls on universities to take action: "Lecturers must be cooperative in initiating research needed in teacher education."

To further teachers' research initiatives, activities on a national level are suggested, particularly for those teachers whose initial training has included developing research skills. Educational researchers, teachers and university lecturers could benefit from working together in this area. Joint research projects between schools and educational researchers and lecturers at universities were suggested as means of furthering teacher research nationally. Such initiatives would require that teachers are allowed to take time off, for instance one semester at a time, to improve research skills and to engage in research projects.

To summarise the findings from the interview with teacher educators and educational policy makers, the need for national support structures for teachers beyond the novice year needs to be developed. The induction and mentoring could work as a model for the expansion of support structures. The possibilities of utilising in-school reserves, such as school-based mentoring, were discussed, and ideas on establishing network-based mentoring and a common discussion forum were presented. The teachers' skills and competences to engage in reflective practice and research were regarded as vital, but in the need of development. National level initiatives and joint projects between schools and universities were strongly supported by the teacher educators and policy makers.

Relating European Policy to National Policies

Teachers' competences have been the core question in Estonian education policy in recent years. The competence expectations for teachers were first described in the Teachers' Standard (2005) and in the National programme of Teacher Training (2006). In the Teachers' Standards the teachers' competences are described in eight areas (Figure 1). The first blocks are related to formation and leading the learning process (including planning and management, formation of the learning environment, provision of information and learning, analysis and assessment of learners, development and the learning process). Interpersonal competences, such as communication, cooperation and motivation form the

second block of competences. Professional development lays on the presumption of self-analysis.

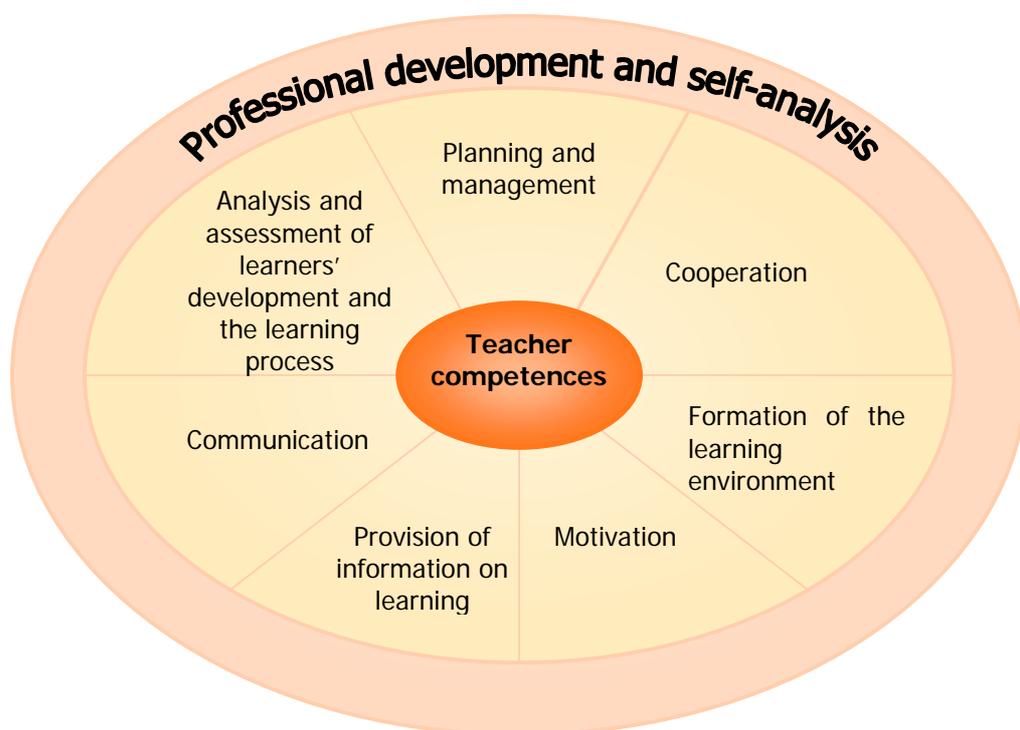


Figure 1. Teacher competences according to Estonian standards

The Estonian Teachers' Standard emphasises the building of an attitude and understanding of the teacher as a reflective practitioner and a life-long learner. In practice, the Estonian teacher is responsible for his or her own professional development and for identifying and planning personal learning needs. The goal of facilitating life-long learning and reflection among teachers is very similar to what is envisioned in the European policy paper. The teachers' status and role expectations, however, are influenced by values and attitudes in the society, and this may be a point where the countries meet different challenges.

In Estonia, there has been particularly strong development in the area of supporting novice teachers in the early stages of their career. In 2004, the induction year programme was initiated as part of the teacher education programme. After the first stage involving all novice teachers who started work in comprehensive schools, it was extended in 2005 to include novice pre-school and subject teachers. The purpose of the induction year is to support novices' adaptation to the educational institution in which they work, and to promote the development of their professional skills through continuous analysis of practice and learning. The launching of the induction year in the entire country included the evaluation of the implementation model and empirical analysis. The outcomes of the evaluation enabled the identification of problems in the theoretical foundations of the model for the induction year, and the planning of activities to overcome these challenges (Eisenschmidt, 2006).

The Estonian induction year is based on the vision that teacher education in the areas of pre-service, induction, and in-service as outlined in The Framework Guidelines for Teacher

Education (2000) forms a unified entity with the provision of support for the teacher's professional development as a guiding idea throughout the entire setup of training. This supports the goals outlined in the European policy paper.

Concluding Remarks

After analysing Estonian teacher education policy documents and interviewing specialist from in the area we conclude:

- the regulations of teacher education in Estonia support similar goals as the EU policy document, but
- teachers' working conditions, school contexts and schools as organizations often do not support teachers' professional development strongly enough to fully live up to the expectations on developing the teacher profession as outlined in the European policy document. From this follows that
- there is a need to support school development and school leadership as a whole for individual teachers to be able to fully develop their potential. For this purpose
- policies outlining educational initiatives for school leaders and local administrators are needed.

There are a number of factors influencing the teacher profession in the European context. For instance, globalisation tendencies, economic trends, competitiveness of societies are powerful indicators for educational policy including teacher education and the teaching profession itself. In creating a common European education area also other aspects of the society needs to be taken into account.

Acknowledgements: The project is funded by the European Union



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