

General Didactics in Finish Teacher Education - the case of class teacher education at Åbo Akademi University

Sven-Erik Hansén, Gunilla Eklund & Jan Sjöberg*

Åbo Akademi University

The idea of a university-based and a research-oriented teacher education is today broadly accepted by the Finnish society. The academic connection is considered to guarantee quality and to secure appropriate professionalism in a changing society. The research oriented approach is fundamental for our understanding of constituting characteristics of teacher education in general but also for understanding the conditions for knowledge production in didactics. From a historical point of view, a research oriented approach is quite a new phenomenon and has been practiced in Finland only for a few decades. The aim is therefore to expose our way of understanding the foundation for the content structure and the function of general didactics for qualifying professional teachers. We argue for a set of orientations, individual, societal, social and research, which together constitute the foundation for the construction of concrete courses. Since the strong emphasis assigned to research orientation we deepen this part of the analysis and also include student teachers' voices. In order to highlight the relation between research orientation and practice, we make a cross-sectional analysis of the orientations in relation to theory and practice.

Keywords: teacher education, general didactics, master thesis

* Corresponding author, e-mail: sven-erik.hansen@abo.fi

Introduction

On an overall level, the Finnish concept of teacher education is constituted by the major subject, science of education and didactics in various shapes. The former is described as hierarchical and broader than the latter that is more specifically associated with the content and forms of teaching activities¹. In didactics the theory is overall connected with the teaching practice and as a descriptive science aiming at developing models of teaching, studying and learning processes (Kansanen, 1999) and thus providing us with knowledge of teacher's profession. The descriptive knowledge of didactics provides us with concepts for the teaching process. As a research field didactics is not normative and has thus an important position for organizing and conducting teacher education (Kansanen & Hansén, 1999).

Theories and models of didactics are presented to student teachers who implement and use them in their own teaching practice. Dealing with everyday practice and acting teacher is fundamental for the professional development. The interaction between teaching practice and theory of didactics is accentuated throughout the studies. The potential for the development of student teacher's thinking is considered appropriate when teacher education succeeds in integrating theory- and practice-based elements in the program (Sjöberg, & Hansén, 2006a).

In Finnish tradition models of teaching are developed within the frame of what we call general didactics and subject didactics. The way teacher education program is organized is depending on how the proportion and interplay between general and subject didactics is conceptualized and realized in practice. The proportion and interplay between general and subject didactics has varied over time and this circumstance has made it possible to develop different perspectives and orientations interrelated to the content.

Up to 1970s, teacher education for primary school teachers was a practical vocational schooling and was located in seminars outside universities. The knowledge promoted was not research oriented, instead rather experiential, practical and normative. The seminars in Finland became under solid criticism in 1950's and 1960's when the academic opinion claimed that they were not able to implement and apply research findings that had been developed in educational sciences in their own existing teacher education program. (Nurmi, 1979) Due to the development, particularly of educational psychology, research orientation conquered its present position. The speculative educational knowledge was gradually replaced by a more objective and research oriented educational understanding of educational phenomena. In 1970's teacher education became a part of the universities and in 1979 the program was renewed and linked to a masters' examination for all teachers in the school system. The main discipline in class teacher education program became education (general didactics) and a research oriented approach was implemented, intending to lay a stable foundation for students' professional qualification.

Today teacher education is fully integrated into universities and its examination system. A master's degree is required for teacher legitimation and student teachers practice both teaching and researching during their studies (Väljärvi & Heikkinen, 2012). Research

¹ In Finnish teacher education different concepts of didactics has been used. Applied education is used at Åbo Akademi University, while Education is a common concept in other universities. In this article we argue for the concept of general didactics and subject didactics. Both research activities are part of Science of Education.

orientation forms an obvious explicit part of the program containing courses in research methods including quantitative and qualitative aspects (60 ECTS). The qualitatively oriented research of didactics has over time strengthened its position and has thus become the dominating profile. The main part of educational research is mainly conducted at faculties of education, responsible for teacher education. This fact has obviously contributed to the acknowledge success of Finnish teacher education. (Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2006)

A further institutional interaction and even integration between general didactics and subject didactics has been essential from an educational scientific point of view and a demand for institutional integration. The insight that the teaching profession requires advanced subject knowledge and social as well as didactical capabilities of teachers is commonly accepted. Research activities in general didactics and subject didactics are for this reason mostly kept together in the same institutional framework.

The necessity of an institutional affiliation between organizations that enables practically oriented parts is manifested in the system of university-based practice schools and to some extent also in field schools. The interactional relation between theory of didactics and teaching practice is apparent along the studies. This relation is important for understanding the idea of a research oriented approach. Student teachers are involved in different aspects of teacher's work through practice and research endeavors. Particularly university practice schools provide natural opportunities to integrate theory and practice oriented content knowledge.

The aim of our article is therefore to expose the foundation for the content structure and the function of general didactics for qualifying professional teachers. A problematizing discussion concerning the development of a stable conceptual foundation for general didactics is essential for enhancing the quality in teacher education. By conceptual we mean a theoretical structure of assumptions, and principles, resting on reasoning behind ideas, and strategies that holds together the ideas and forms a foundation. In this article we will, drawing on research on teacher education, and on student teachers' views of research oriented approach of teacher education, and contribute to that discussion.

Content orientations

In this section we will deepen the discussion concerning what the introduced approach and perspectives mean for further elaborating the foundation of general didactics for teacher education.

The curriculum content is, as Wågsås Afdal (2012) states in her comparison of teacher education in Finland and Norway, developed in close congruence with national policies. Compared to the Norwegian curriculum content the Finnish is considered to be based on government-initiated policy processes emphasizing strong academic autonomy with focus on inquiry-orientation. The assigned autonomy means that political bodies only monitor the content on a quite broad level while teacher education institutions themselves construct and develop the curriculum content. While Norway applies a state steering model the Finnish approach can be labelled as a state supervision mode. No governmental body above teacher education institution carries the responsibility for the knowledge construction like for instance in Norway where all institutions are bound to a common national curriculum. Finnish programs for teacher education institutions will vary but through a

national project VOKKE² (2003-2006) representatives for all institutions have agreed on following the same broad guidelines.

Using Bernstein's (2000) terminology teacher education institutions represent both the field of knowledge production through research and the field of re-contextualization where knowledge is produced, selected and re-located in the curriculum content, i.e. the course program. Muller's (2009) theory of differentiating the epistemic profiles of professional educational programs has been utilized by Wågsås Afdal (2012) in her comparison. The Norwegian program for teacher education is characterized by a horizontal knowledge structure stressing what Muller calls *contextual coherence*. Curricula are segmentally connected and every segment is adequate to a context (Muller, 2009). It "...aims to produce knowledgeable professionals, and is thus oriented more to the demands of the workplace (p. 217). The professional knowledge structure in the Norwegian program is expressed in everyday language and closely attached to the field of professional practice and pursued by learning-by-doing. The Finnish program again mirrors *conceptual coherence*, i.e. a hierarchical knowledge structure regulated by adequacy of the logic of the discipline and tied to the language of academic disciplines and distanced from everyday language.

When proceeding further in our efforts to give an understanding of the foundation for the content and structure of general didactics in Finnish Teacher Education, we will use the program at Åbo Akademi University as an illustration. Based on our sustainable experience and the Bologna process carried out in 2005-2006, four orientations have been extracted as our way of understanding general didactics in teacher education; *Individual*, *Social*, *Societal*, and *Research*. The text about the orientations is a further elaboration of earlier presentations and discussions. (e.g. Hansén, Forsman, Aspfors & Bendtsen, 2012; Hansén, Sjöberg & Eklund-Myrskog, 2005).

Individual orientation: As already discussed, educational psychology played an essential role in the process of transition from an experiential and normative or a seminarian approach to a research-oriented one. Educational psychology is focused on the individual's cognitive and emotional development and on aspects such as learning, individual differences and learning disabilities. Educational activities are directed towards the processes of the individual's learning and influencing people, despite taking place in collective contexts. Therefore the focus is on the individual's cognitive, affective and psychomotor development. For instance Kansanen (2002) stresses individual orientation as closely connected with educational psychology and the learning individual is in focus. Educational psychology studies learning and psychological processes related to teaching as well as to the individual's and the group's psychological development and adjustment. For instance Biesta (2006) refers to and analyses Kant's individual view of educating oneself to become a democratic person capable of utilizing his/her capacity for the common good. Professional teachers need knowledge and understanding of the growing human's psychology as well as of the social dynamics in the pupil's surroundings. During the last decades, studies of the socio-cultural processes in human psychology have largely been connected to the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. The pedagogical aspects of his theories have had great influence on the understanding of learning. According to this view, teachers should be able to use

² VOKKE in English stands for "The National-Level Coordination of Degree Program Development in teacher Education and in the Sciences of Education"

pedagogical tools, aiming at helping the pupils achieving more advanced knowledge and skills. In qualifying teachers, insights and competences into educational psychology are therefore of fundamental importance.

Social orientation: Social orientation in teacher education falls within the part of sociology of education which is occupied with issues of how public institutions like schools, and individual experiences influence education and social development. Teachers need profound knowledge and understanding of the actions of individuals in groups, i.e. the social dynamics of groups, in and outside school. Dewey's social concept of the democratic person is well known and man's ability to think is according to this view the result of the life of cooperation, relations, transmission and accumulation, not a prerequisite (Biesta, 2006; Dewey, 1980). Social orientation is manifold and deals with relations and individuals as members of social communities characterized by verbal communication. Schoolbased curriculum work is the common responsibility of all members of the teaching staff at school, and they are required to coordinate their activities in order to develop and sustain a well-functioning school. Another community is constituted by outside partners such as parents. The growth of a solid professional identity of the teachers is promoted through the strengthening of student teacher's ability to handle such relations.

Societal orientation: The society's intentions for the school are embedded in the curriculum, which can be formulated as broad directives or detailed and strictly regulated. Schools and educations are societal institutions and for student teachers it is necessary to understand the relationship between the society and the school. Our ambition here is to highlight the external societal conditions for schooling and to argue for the necessity of emphasizing a broad societal view of the reciprocal interplay between them by exposing some themes.

Growing to be a member of the society of citizens is distinguished as a guiding principle in Finnish curricula for the comprehensive school (Framework Curriculum for Comprehensive school, 1994; National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, 2004) and in the new curriculum which will be launched in 2016. Historically the school has been tightly bound to the nationstate and the teacher's duty to contribute to building and in the Nordic countries strengthening the welfare state (Sjöberg & Hansén, 2011). Up to late modernity schools have been closely connected to the idea of citizenship and nation building. Young people have been socialized into a specific society which teacher education also is a part of. Today this situation is changing. What does citizenship mean in an increasingly globalized world? Supranational federations, for instance the EU and the OECD, are making decisions with farreaching consequences for citizens in different nation states (Hansén, Sjöberg & Sjöholm, 2008). Other Finnish researchers have shown how, for instance, quality assurance and evaluation now form a vital part of education governance and this development has occurred through a high adaptation pressure of Europeanization. This change evokes the question of what kind of standpoint teacher education should take to a widened view of citizenship, particularly when we consider the alarming decline of active participation in societal life and in the numbers of young voters in Finland like in many other countries.

Even if citizenship is still connected to the nation state, the expanding globalization hardly maintains the traditional culture of citizenship bound to the nation state and its politics, cultures, languages and traditions. For future teachers it is therefore necessary to understand and act from a broad societal perspective. In an increasingly internationalized world, new pre-

requisites for the interchange of information have emerged. Information society crosses national borders and is labelled by expanding information and new ways of dealing with information. The program for teacher education therefore needs to equip student teachers with the capacity to critically scrutinize the school as a societal actor, locally and globally. In more concrete terms, they need knowledge and skills regarding the legislative, economic and administrative prerequisites which regulate schools (Hansén, Sjöberg & Eklund-Myrskog, 2005). The curriculum, which represents a collective view on the task of the school, is a central instrument for understanding the relationship between school and society.

This orientation captures school as a societal organization and the complex relationship between school and society. Schools in the Nordic countries are driven by society and are responsible for societal reproduction and renewal. General didactics together with societal subject matters is, in particular, held responsible for this. Socialization of new societal norms and its cultural traditions, to provide students with knowledge and skills in order to function in society still remain the responsibility of the school.

Research orientation: As discussed earlier, the motive for a research orientation is linked to the view of the professional qualification and is both implicitly and explicitly present in the program, and forming the foundation for teacher's work. Teacher education itself can be developed only through continuous and manifold research of high quality. Implicitly the orientation is aimed at permeating the whole program with the ambition of qualifying teachers through the development of the ability for critical reflection and for a systematic scrutiny of their daily work (Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2006). Research orientation supports teacher's professional actions and develops a conscious ability to make use of adequate analytical tools in order to deconstruct problems and reconstruct solutions. The explicit part of this orientation comprises carrying out independent studies by using scholarly methods for a bachelor's and a master's thesis. This work is supported by courses in research methodology, seminars around the theses as well as individual supervision and guidance (Hansén & Forsman, 2009). Since this orientation is considered to specifically characterize Finnish teacher education approach, it will be further elaborated later in the article.

All orientations are aimed at promoting teacher's professional actions. Teachers materialize, through continuous decisionmaking about teaching and learning, their ability to bind together theory and practice, and to integrate general didactic knowledge with subject and subject matter. Parallel to the practical action level within a normative curricular framework, the program for teacher education contains a theorydriven activity within a descriptive framework (Kansanen, 2002). Activities on this level support student teachers in developing their thinking, and reflection and research activities are regarded to be a central means to meet the requirements. Teacher professionalism includes ability to utilize theories in their daily work, and to generate ideas and materials for further development of their theoretical understanding of their work, or in other words, to further elaborate practical theories (Westbury, Hansén, Kansanen & Björkqvist, 2005). The basis for general didactics in teacher education can be schematically viewed in the following figure:

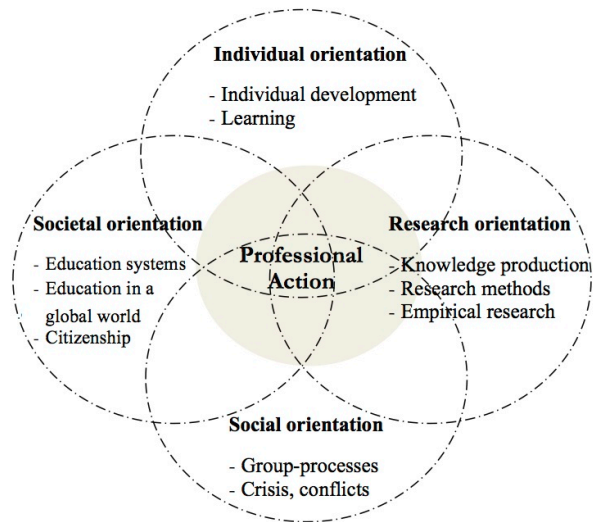


Figure 1. Orientations in constituting general didactics in teacher education program

From orientations to courses

As the discussion shows, the orientations function as a foundation for the composition of the course program. Some courses are closely linked to one orientation while other are constructed as a mixture from different orientations. The awareness of this platform provides possibilities for a conscious and systematic course planning covering the constituting orientations. However, we are not proceeding with a detailed analysis of how concrete courses in the teacher education program are derived from the foundation laid. Since the relation between theory and practice permeates all kinds of teacher education approaches, it is crucial to expose the relationship within the Finnish approach. Therefore, we do a cross-sectional analysis of the orientations scrutinizing the relationship between theory and practice. Finally, we find it appropriate to focus on the strongly emphasized research orientation and also listening to student teachers' voices.

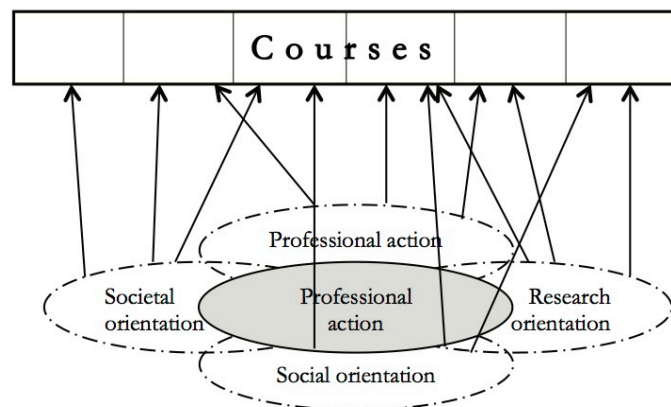


Figure 2. A schematic figure of the relation between the orientations and courses.

General didactics in relation to theory and practice

The qualification of student teacher's professional action is through all orientations permeated by theory and practice related activities. Practice means within the context of teacher education to handle and solve problems in concrete mundane situations in school and is bound to intentions concerning aim and content, stipulated in laws and curricula.

In order to highlight the relation between what we often carelessly label as theory and practice, a smallscale study was carried out among teacher educators (x) at the Faculty of Education at Åbo Akademi University and at the practice school (e.g. Sjöberg & Hansén, 2006b). The study was carried out within an ongoing project called TP-project (Theory and Practice project). Teacher educators were asked what theory, practice and the relationship between them are in teacher education and as a result of the qualitative analysis, three categories could be identified.

In the *first*, theory was labeled as the opposite to practice. The relationship was described in terms of a tensionladen polarization. Practice was recognized as the positive, important and real part of student teacher's qualification, while the attitude towards theory could be interpreted as more ambiguous and hesitant. Theory was seen as distant and abstract, and its relation to practice was referred to in a vague and escaping way.

In the *second* category, theory and practice were approaching each other but still clearly conceptually separated. It was suggested that theory could be useful for practice and that practice could also highlight and nurture theory. Theory and practice were accordingly seen as able to mutually support each other and characterized as necessary parts of the qualification process. Shulman (2004) criticizes the common view of theory reflected in the first category above and partly also in the second, which implies that theories are invented and then applied to practice. He goes beyond this concept of mutual nurturing by rejecting the deductive idea of theories as developing independent of practice. Instead he emphasizes the wisdom of practice through an inductive approach trying to find things working in practice before trying to make them work in theory.

In the *third* category the qualitative distinction between theory and practice had been dissolved and instead their transactional and integrative nature was stressed. Theory was saturated by practice and practice by theory, and the distinction between them is mainly gradual and a matter of focus. Therefore it is more relevant to talk about a theory and practice orientation, which will soften the contradictive character of theory and practice. Biesta and Burbules (2003) point to a similar view by referring to Dewey, who rejected the idea of a conceptual difference. According to their interpretation the difference is gradual and functional, and appears only in emphasis. Dewey goes beyond traditional ways of separating theory and practice by claiming that both represent two kinds of practices. In his view, theory is not only restricted to knowing and practice not only limited to action, but both contain a blend of knowing (theory) and action (practice).

The view of the relationship in the third category stands for an ideal conception and matches our ambition to qualify reflective practitioners able to make sense of the integrated view of the relationship.

Practice oriented activities are organized in special university practice schools, and partly in ordinary field schools. General didactics carries the main responsibility for practice, of course in close collaboration with subject didactics. Periods at the practice school

are characterized by a tight three part connection between lectures at the university practice school, lectures at the faculty and the student teachers. The university practice school and the faculty are also physically close to each other, facilitating quick move between the university practice school and the teacher education institution. The close relation between the parts also supports an intellectual understanding concerning issues related to the students' development to professional teachers.

Every practice period has a certain aim and characteristics and to create a fruitful relation between theory and practice in order to enhance students' professional acting. Two principles guide the theory and practice relation. The first one concerns the ambition of giving the student teachers a various and broad view of the whole school community and not only of a narrow teaching process in the classroom. During the practice periods students have different kinds of tasks aiming at giving them a decent understanding of the professional teacher work as a whole (figure 3).

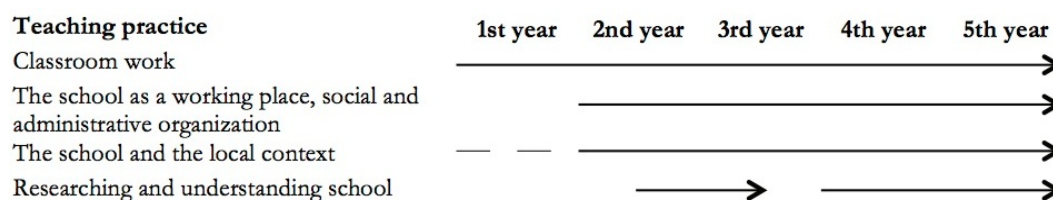


Figure 3. A schematic view of a differentiated practice

The second principle concerns the progression during the practice periods. During the first periods, the student teachers act more collectively, work together in small groups, and receive mostly feedback and support in the group. Gradually they act more individually and independently and in the last practice period, they get mainly feedback in relation to the forthcoming teacher work and insights into how to act as fully fledged professionals (figure 4).

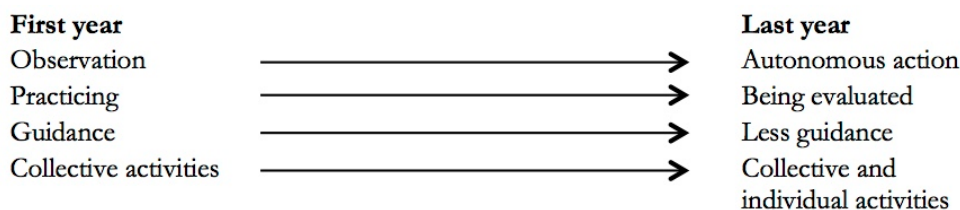


Figure 4. A schematic view of the practice progression.

Research orientation – science and research

Research orientation was confirmed in 1979 and even more emphasized and strengthened 2006 when the program was refined in accordance with the Bologna reform (Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2006). The motive behind the orientation is that the students get preparedness to systematically and in a reflective way investigate issues and develop their own practice as professional teachers. An essential part of the research orientation is explicated in student teacher's theses writing. The scientific theses form an integrated part and play a significant role for the emerging teaching profession. Theses mean that students become

familiar with scientific tools such as methods for gathering data, systematic analytic thinking, and interpretation and evaluation. All these components are of central importance in a reflective teacher practice and therefore we will go closer and investigate student teachers' perspectives looking at their conceptions of doing research as a part of teacher education. In addition to explicit research-oriented activities, the entire program is expected to be closely related to and based on current research. Therefore teacher educators have to be research qualified and all positional teacher educators are required to have a doctor's degree.

Within the teacher education program, student teachers have explicit research oriented studies at both levels, at the Bachelor of Education Level they write a candidate thesis (6 ECTS) and at the Master of Education Level they write a master thesis (35 ECTS), usually empirically based. Students have method courses at both levels, where they are qualified into how to carry out a research process and write a scientific thesis, including seminars where they present and defend their theses (Eklund, 2010; Hansén, Sjöberg & Eklund-Myrskog, 2005; Sjöberg & Hansen, 2011) Faculties of education and departments of teacher education provide full programs up to the doctoral level and it is possible for the student teachers to apply for postgraduate studies directly after the completed master's degree. Although the education has got much publicity and credit, the research orientation has been discussed and criticized (Hansen, Forsman, Aspfors & Bendtsen, 2012; Westbury, Hansén, Kansanen & Björkvist, 2005). For example Hansén, Forsman, Aspfors and Bendtsen, (2012) point out four dilemmas, one of which is the relation between the research- and practice-oriented teacher education approaches. According to the critics, too much focus has been on conventional social sciences instead of more emphasis on the qualification of teachers carrying out research in their own working situation.

In several studies, students' views of the research oriented teacher education have been investigated. (Eklund, 2010; 2012) The results firmly show that at the beginning of the research process, the students have a quite confuse and divergent view of the research oriented teacher education. However, the interesting and relevant question is in what sense students' view of the teacher education may change during the education, which was the point of departure in this study (Eklund, 2014). The study was qualitative in character (see for example Bowden & Walsh, 2000; Marton & Tsui, 2004) and data were collected at the Department of Teacher Education at Åbo Akademi University. A total number of 75 student teachers participated in an advanced research course; Qualitative research methods and analysis (4 ECTS). At the end of the course, students wrote essays about having research courses and writing a thesis. Altogether 69 essays (about 1-3 A4 pages long) were collected from the students and meaning categorization was used as the method of analysis (Dahlgren & Fallsberg, 1991). As a result of the analysis, three main aspects concerning students' views of the research studies and the thesis were identified: Students' *positive* and *negative* views of the research studies and the scientific thesis as well as their *alternatives* to research studies and thesis.

Generally, all students experienced research studies and thesis in a positive way and as many as 185 *positive* views could be identified. According to all students, research studies and thesis mean something positive and they accentuated aspects as deep knowledge in a subject (n=34), an education on master level and higher status (n=30), professionalism (n=29), understanding and ability to carry out studies (n=22), maturity and personal development (n=17), critical thinking (n=16), good language (n=15), interest for further re-

search (n=14), and contribution to something new (n=8). Consequently, the students expressed a wide range of positive views, both in relation to their future teacher profession and personal growth. The dominant student conception was the realization of research as an important tool for qualifying professional teachers.

Some *negative* views (n=48) of research studies and thesis could also be identified among students. According to 33 students, research studies and thesis mean something negative in terms of a weak relation to the teacher profession (n=28), a too large part of the education (n=13), pressure and performance anxiety (n=3), a too theoretical education for a practical profession (n=2), no support for a critical thinking (n=1), and no use for the society (n=1). As a consequence student teachers experienced a weak relation to the profession and research studies as a too large part of the education. However, students' negative views were accompanied by positive ones, forming together a general understanding of the content and structure of education.

Some students also gave *alternatives* to research studies and thesis. The alternatives (n=45) could be categorized into practice and practice-related work (n=19), as well as courses such as practice (n=6), special education (n=5), pedagogy and general subjects (n=3), and pre-school education (n=2). According to students, the education was too theoretical and they wanted more practice, both teacher practice in the field and practical courses.

In relation to previous research (Eklund, 2010, 2012) students' view of teacher education has changed into a more positive direction and their understanding of research orientation has increased. A number of 185 positive views were found compared to 48 negative views, and the alternatives given were mainly seen as improvements of education and not as replacements of research studies and thesis. However, the students found the education too theoretical and the theoretical part too dominating. At the end of the education they felt unsafe when discussing their future teacher job in practice. Research oriented education therefore means a dilemma. They understand it and they see the point with it, but at the same time they feel that it does not give them enough practical tools before entering the reality of teacher's work.

Although research studies and thesis are not anything new within teacher education, there is still a need for development. The positive aspect is that students do not any longer question the research orientation, but discover and hopefully realize its importance and relevance for the status of the teacher profession and teacher's professionalism. Referring to the earlier identified three categories of the relationship between theory and practice between teacher educators (Sjöberg & Hansén, 2006b), students expose a view of their emerging professionalism, which might be related to the third category meaning an integrative view of the relationship between theory and practice. However, some students still have difficulties to see the relation between the practical teacher profession and the thesis, which corresponds to the first identified category, a tension-laden polarization between theory and practice.

In order to develop education and solve students' dilemma, more accent could be put on projects and development works in schools and classrooms as well as on action research within the education (for example Jyrhämä & Maaranen, 2008). This kind of research would to a larger extent correspond to students' need for a closer connection between theory and practice. In the same way, Niemi (2008) points out a stronger relation

between theory and practice and a focus on practice related works in order to further develop the Finnish teacher education.

Concluding remarks

The aim of our article has been to present and analyze principles underlying general didactics in Finnish Teacher Education, more specifically the case of teacher education program at Åbo Akademi University. The orientations, *the individual, the societal, the social* and *the research* form together the foundation for developing the content distributed on a set of courses. Depending on new research results within the frame of the orientations and the societal development courses can be renewed and restructured but always with the platform of orientations as the starting point. An argued, stable and conceptually coherent platform for construction of the course content offers suitable conditions for an ongoing and organic development of the content. This offers a potential for the development and renewing of courses aiming at qualifying professional teachers, able to make sense of an integrated blend of knowing and action. (e.g. Dewey, 1980/1917)

The analysis has also shown various views of the relation between theory and practice. A challenging task for general didactics is therefore to continue enhancing the concept of an integrated understanding of the relationship between, using Bernstein's (2000) terminology, knowledge production and action. The nature of action has over the years gone through a development from a narrow classroom focused view of practice to a wide encounter with the entire teacher work. This development has been accompanied with a conscious effort to build in a progression starting from more collective activities, like following one another others' teaching and other related activities, to a more individual and independent way of acting in the later part of the studies. The entire program is encapsulated within the frame of a research orientation. The profile of the approach, referring to Wågsås Afdal (2012), has, as shown, a *conceptual coherence* in accordance with the logic of the disciplinary core. The approach is formative and requires student teachers to actively get involved in research endeavours which authorize/justify even a use of the label research-based (Muller, 2009).

In the article we have argued for the necessity of a consciously and conceptually constructed foundation for a program of general didactics in teacher education. The program containing four orientations is connected to an ideal view of a research-based theory and practice integration for qualifying student teachers for professional actions in school and classroom.

Notes on contributors

Sven-Erik Hansén is professor of Education at the Faculty of Education and Welfare Studies, Åbo Akademi University, Finland, professor II at the University of Oslo 2010 – 2013, docent at the University of Helsinki. Participated in and chaired several evaluations of teacher education and higher education institutions and of research project applications in the Nordic countries. Current research focuses on teacher education and on teachers' professional development, particularly on support for newly qualified teachers.

PeD Gunilla Ekelund is an acting professor in Applied Education at Åbo Akademi University and docent in Education at Åbo Akademi University. Her research concerns students'

learning in higher education and Finnish teacher education. At present she has a research project focusing on students' views of the research-based teacher education in Finland.

PhD Jan Sjöberg is working as a Senior Lecturer in Applied Education at Åbo Akademi University. His research concerns the relation between theory and practice in teacher education. Other research subjects are about understanding didactics in teacher education programs and teacher education as a societal phenomenon.

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