

## **INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION IN TEACHING CONTEXT**

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Teacher education is provided in the form of master degree studies at the university and regulated by the *Framework Guidelines for Teacher Education*. The framework guidelines determine general and special requirements for initial teacher education, novices' induction year, and teachers' in-service training (Framework Guidelines for Teacher Education, 2000).

### **Overview of initial teacher education in Estonia**

Initial teacher education is only a part of the long-term and life-long process of teacher's professional development and consists of three parts: (1) general studies; (2) special studies of subjects; (3) general studies of educational science, psychological and didactical studies and practical training.

General studies focus on the development of the teacher's overall cultural, communicative, and social competences based on the teacher's presumed vocation, profession and occupation.

Special studies aim at: (1) providing subject or specialty-related knowledge and skills based on up-to-date requirements for the vocation, profession, and occupation; (2) providing a systemic understanding of the human being, the surrounding environment and society, and the skill of viewing them from the angle of the subject or specialty.

The aim of general studies of educational science, psychological, didactic studies and practical training (pedagogical studies) is to: (1) develop didactical mastery of the subject or specialty, including the ability to respond to changing educational needs and adjust to them; (2) provide skills of applying the kind of psychology-based study methods that foster individual growth and coping in a multicultural environment, including a multicultural learning environment; (3) support teachers' coping, including providing knowledge and skills of organization, classroom, and group management as well as team work.

There are three practice periods during the initial study time. In observatory practice (3 ECTS) student teachers have the opportunity to observe and analyze active teachers' and learners' work as well as the school environment. Observation assignments are based on theory provided by lectures and the results are analyzed in seminars guided by supervisors at school. The main purpose of the observatory practice is to make the students see the connections between theoretical studies of educational sciences and real school practice. Experience acquired through observation makes students understand the importance of pedagogical knowledge (including subject-related studies), and facilitate profound acquisition of relevant subjects.

During the I phase of teaching practice (6 ECTS) student teachers can apply their professional skills in real classroom context. Supervisors from the practice schools and the university support student teachers during this period.

During the II phase of teaching practice (6 ECTS) student teachers practice their professional skills in a wider school context. They have to work in a team with other teachers and teach at least two subjects.

### **Partnership agreements between teacher education institution and schools regarding the professional development of student teachers, in-service teachers and schools as organizations**

For the purpose of integrating theoretical and practical studies, universities have developed a cooperation network with practice schools. The schools are in close contact with the centre of educational practice at the university. Mostly, this partnership is initiated by universities and schools are free to decide whether they wish to participate. The importance of educational practice to school development is recognized by some school leaders as a possibility to develop teachers' cooperation and self- reflection skills.

Additionally, student teachers' mentoring is an important criteria for in-service teachers' career ranking and provides a possibility for a raise in salary.

### **Framework and nature of mentoring and coaching student teachers**

The supervisors (mentors) in schools are experienced teachers. However, they have to obtain special preparation at the university as well. The supervisors' training gives 6 ECTS and is considered a part of the professional development of in-service teachers. The training consists of four modules: (1) trends in teachers' professional development and classroom practice, (2) contemporary trends in teacher education and an overview of university teacher's training program, (3) supervisory skills: observation, reflection and evaluation.

Evaluation of the practice system shows that the supervisor's role is very important. The feedback from the supervising teacher should not be limited to assessing student activity only. More attention should be paid to planning the activity, as well as closely describing and analyzing the objectives of students' activity and supporting their self-evaluation. Comprehensive feedback requires time and experience from the supervisor.

More attention should be paid to personal supervision of students and designing professional development during initial training. For that purpose an e-portfolio environment is established and supervisors from schools and from university have more possibilities to support student teachers' preparation and reflection processes.