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Reasons behind the Results - case admission test for class teacher education

The world is constantly changing. Both global and local phenomena, globalisation of cultures, climate change, psychological malaise of young people, individualism, changes in organisation culture, and technological development create new demands for education and for the work of teachers. The new nature of the teachers' work puts a great strain on the teachers. For instance, teachers must deal with uncertainties, constantly flowing information that is contradictory, changing situations, and as I have pointed out *"The teacher's work is occasionally as living in the middle of a draught, which is chaotic and fragmented"*. Due to this the teachers need mental clarity and understanding of "who am I" and "where do I want to go". In order to combat work fatigue and to be able to manage their work, teachers need to have solid professional and personal identities, courage to show themselves as incomplete persons, possess observation skills, and be able to deal with one's own feelings and experiences.

In order to be able to constantly learn in their work and develop their own actions, teachers need meta-cognitive skills, which are important for observing their own activities. Additionally, teachers ought to have self-confidence, courage, skills, and will to function as a subject in the school community. The teacher's work also demands a lot of improvisation and throwing oneself into situations. Teachers also need creativity and versatile problem solving skills. In order to be able to manage their work, every teacher needs rational decision-making skills, intuition, and sensitivity.

The teacher's core competences include also a well-structured understanding of child development and learning and their guidance, skills to direct interaction, as well as ability to create learning environments that raise questions and which are open as well as safe. This is why the teacher needs to act responsibly, ethically, and promote the child's positive view on him/herself, others and life in general. The teacher's work consists of balancing between different situations and cooperating with different people at different levels inside and outside the school organisation. The teacher has a strong impact on the creation of a cooperative climate in the classroom i.e. a climate in which

children learn how to meet other people, how to solve problems etc. The teacher influences also with his/her own actions the social atmosphere of the classroom. Moreover, the teacher is a central figure, together with children and other adults, in creating a school community with a safe and open learning environment. In such learning environment attention is paid on teaching and learning processes instead of social roles in the classroom. In other words, the teacher has an impact on what kind of participation the children are socialised to.

The aim of the admission tests: to find the committed students who want to become teachers

With admission tests we should be able to find students, who possess a readiness for academic studies and who have the potential for learning the abilities needed in the teacher's profession. The selected students should be motivated and committed to studies, to developing themselves, and to work as a teacher in the future. Admission tests can be explored from the point of view of the society or the applicant. The society needs competent workers, who are able to move the society forward. It is also important to take into consideration education political factors and the amount of study places, multiple and overlapping educations, the slow placement of upper secondary school graduates in higher education, overlapping applications and acceptances to different universities, the underutilisation of study places and the complexity of the admission tests. In other words, the problem is mainly how to bring together the benefits for the society and the individual.

Different actors have defined different aims and criteria for what type of students the admission tests should aim to select. University of Helsinki's common criteria for selecting undergraduate students are reflected in the University of Helsinki's class teacher education's admission tests. According to the criteria, the aim is to select students who are educable, motivated, and talented. There are also contradictions between the expectations raised by different actors. On one hand, the aim is to select students, who have versatile experiences and a broad worldview. On the other hand, the aim is to speed up the academic placement of new upper secondary school graduates with education political means.

Approximately 300 students have been selected through the joint-application process, coordinated by the University of Jyväskylä, to take part in the admission tests organised in Helsinki. In the joint-application process, the applicants get points according to their grades in the matriculation examination, previous higher education studies, work experiences in schools, and in the past also of

exams completed in music, physical education or arts. These so called hobby points have been abolished since the admission tests in 2001. However, there is ongoing discussion in different teacher education units if leisure-time interests should somehow be noted in the first phase of the admission process. Though, in the second phase leisure-time interests are taken into consideration. The appropriateness and the aims of the joint-application system are under discussion.

The admission test consists of three different phases: a book exam, an interview, and a group session, which was earlier a demonstration lesson. In the book exam essential questions based on the admission literature should be answered. The responses are evaluated according to following factors: ability to receive information and process it critically, ability to make a distinction between relevant and irrelevant information, and ability to form synthesis. The tasks also leave room for creating own ideas, argumentation, and personal opinions.

Since 1999 one phase of the admission test has been group sessions in which every applicant has prepared a discussion, held a teaching session, or an activity session after which the applicant has lead the group discussion. Moreover, the applicants have taken part in the group discussions lead by other applicants. The social skills, communication skills, as well as the presentation and managerial skills have been evaluated in this task.

In relation to the admission test, the applicants' suitability for the study programme and the educational field has often been discussed. Suitability, as a concept is easily associated with a person's natural born and unchangeable characteristics. Therefore, it would be important to use suitability as a subordinated concept for educability. The concept of educability emphasises the individual's capability to learn and develop as well as the role of education in development.

Above I have described qualities, which teachers should have in the future in order to be able to promote their own well-being as well as that of their work community (including the students) and the whole society. When we reflect upon educability we must ask ourselves: Which of the above-mentioned qualities the applicant should have in order to get the study place? Which of them can be provided by education?

Since we are born, we learn thinking and action models in interaction with our environment. The models become part of the individual's personality. However, very often the human-being can adjust his or her behaviour and actions in a quite flexible manner in different circumstances

according to the factors that regulate them such as social norms. Nevertheless, human-beings have some qualities, which they consistently seem to have from one situation to another. Such situations are for instance information processing. Traditionally, Finnish academic education has focused on substance knowledge and on providing guidance for scientific research. However, many important skills and insights are gained outside the educational system - in real life. The class teacher education of today at the University of Helsinki offers teaching practice combined to theoretical studies, supervision and support for setting personal study-learning targets, self-reflection, as well as possibility to do scientific research.

Except for the actual teacher's profession, there are also other factors that put requirements on educability. Such are the demands of academic studies, for example, processing and analysing information, critical thinking, finding relevant information, expressing own views orally and literally, active participation in the study community, and ability to direct one's thinking and learning. Although many of the qualities seem unchangeable, the human capability for learning is tremendous. So far, there has been more research focused on the permanence than change of personality. The crucial question is how to organise education so that the aims set for it can be reached. For the development of what kind of abilities does the education provide a favourable learning environment and supervision?

Motivation is a complex concept. Motivation has been dealt from many different aspects by different researchers, who have referred to somewhat different phenomena. In relation to student admission, motivation can refer to study motivation (commitment to studies) and motivation to work as a teacher later in life (commitment to professional tasks). When the aim is to find out the applicants' motivation to be a teacher, it is essential that some things are considered in the selection process. Firstly, it is essential to know what studying means for the student. The study motivation can derive from an inner motivation to experience success or it can be a desire to learn and develop oneself. These can be described as two different orientations: orientation to learn and orientation to achieve. We can talk about achievement motivation when studies and success in studies is a medium for the student to achieve social acceptance or the desire to complete a degree is a way of getting a formal qualification. The educational arrangements should respond to the expectations of the applicants and in the same time be challenging enough so that the study motivation and commitment will be upheld throughout the studies. The student admission process should select students who have a realistic view on the nature of the class teacher studies as well as inner

motivation to learn and develop themselves. The students should be able to develop and strengthen their ability to work as a teacher.

The construction of personal identity is related to the choice of career. Marcia's (1993) theory on the formation of adolescent identity defines four development stages for identity: uncertain identity (diffusion), adopted identity (foreclosure), exploring identity (moratorium), and constructed identity (achievement). The young person, whose identity is diffuse, is uncertain about the life decisions made and he/she nor has drawn or is going to draw any conclusions on the decisions made. The adopted identity means a state in which the person is following other people's (normally parents') values and viewpoints without questioning them or going through an identity crisis, which one should experience when moving to another stage. The young person who is in the exploring stage is seeking and researching actively on who he/she is and how he/she wants to live. The constructed identity is a stage in which a person has through an identity crisis and searching found their own place and they are committed to their own values and actions.

An applicant with an adopted identity can choose the teacher's profession because it is the applicant's parents' (desired) profession. Those with an unclear identity or exploring identity most likely do not know what kind of work they want to do in the future. Thus, one can argue that the teacher education admission tests should select students who have a constructed identity. They know what they want to do in life and they are committed to their group. In these cases it is also important to find out the applicant's view on the teacher's profession so that those students selected to the study programmes in addition to commitment also are open for new ideas and ways of thinking. Rainerma and Kämäräinen (2001) have studied how teachers' career choice decision has had an impact on their work as teachers. According to their research, those teachers who made a confident and explicit decision were more satisfied in their work and developed their work more than those who made a weak decision.

Lastly, student selection to teacher education is a way to ensure that we can find the students who are most suitable for the teacher's profession and do well in their work. In Finland we consider that it is very important to assess the suitability for the field, because the meaning of school education for a child's/young person's personality development is unquestionable. The society wants that the development of its members is supported by suitable and knowing professionals. The PISA-study showed indirectly that the admission tests to teacher education has for some part had an impact on the good and praised results.