



# Developing Support Systems to Promote Student Teacher Professionalism

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## Abstract

The role of the teacher alters with changes in society. In Estonia the person once perceived as the custodian of a single sided culture and responsible for distributing book knowledge has become an independent professional who is expected to teach pupils in a multi-cultural democracy in a multi-media environment and to support individual personal growth and development.

This survey by members of the Institute of Educational Sciences of the University of Tallinn (Estonia) describes the process and reports the results of an exploration of student attitudes to professionalism using interviewing and feedback as tools. The aim of the process was to encourage the use of reflection and self-assessment by students. The objectives were:

1. To give students the opportunity to reflect on their understanding of the teaching profession in the modern world
2. To give students a better understanding of the Teacher's Standard of Professional Competence of Estonia
3. To give the researchers experience of feedback, e.g., how to conduct interviews and what to discuss
4. To identify issues that requires the attention of the university pedagogues in order To sustain and develop the quality of teaching.

The research described in this paper was done in November 2007.

## Methodology of the Research

The steps of the survey were:

1. Design of the questionnaire
2. Application of the questionnaire with students
3. Assessment of the student's answers
4. Feedback to the students and observation of feedback
5. Reflection by the students on the interview and feedback
6. Reflection by the researchers on their learning

The questionnaire was designed to explore student's attitudes to teacher identity through responses to questions about different pedagogical problems or

situations. Model answers were based on the specifications of the National Teacher's Standard of Professional Competence of Estonia (2006) and the evaluation criteria for pedagogical practice of Tallinn University. The theoretical background of these regulations is based broadly on modern principles of inclusiveness and sustainability in education. (Beijaard, D et al, 2004; Freidson, E., 2001; Furlong, J. et al, 2000; Goldron, J. & Smith, R., 1999; Goodson, I., 1997; Robson, J., 2006; Sachs, J., 2001; Terhart, E., 2004; Van Dijk, T. A., 2005; Wenger, E., 1998)

The questions tried to cover as many aspects of teacher professionalism as possible and were divided into four major sections:

1. The teacher's role in society
2. The teacher's role as a manager of the learning process
3. The teacher's role as a supporter of individual growth
4. The student's role as a learner

Seven students in their first year of studies for the MA Teacher Education degree completed the questionnaire in tandem with the researchers. The students were chosen in order to be representative of different special subjects. Two students were studying to be foreign language teachers, three were studying to be science teachers and two were studying to be primary school teachers.

The researchers assessed the student's responses using (once again) the specifications of the National Teacher's Standard of Professional Competence of Estonia (2006) and the evaluation criteria for pedagogical practice of Tallinn University. The purpose of assessment was to provide students with the opportunity to evaluate their potential for the job as well as to help them become aware of different roles. Readiness was evaluated on a 10-point scale (1 complete lack of readiness, 10 completely ready).

Feedback was conducted a week after the questionnaire was completed. There were two interviewers (the authors of this paper) and one interviewee together at one time. One interviewer commented on the answers the student had given and answered questions whilst the second interviewer observed the interview and made a record of the process. Behavior was observed in order to provide additional feedback about the student's interpersonal skills.

The interviewers used the results (i.e., grades for the answers) for assessment of this research only.

## Conclusion

Finally, we found that the interviewers gained:

1. An opportunity to practice interviewing and feedback skills
2. An opportunity to uncover pedagogical issues that need development (e.g., the teachers personal influence on modern society, multicultural situations and teacher training in the context of EU requirements)
3. A great deal of professional and personal pleasure to be able to observe that our questionnaire and feedback process encouraged students to reflect more Profoundly upon the role of the teacher.

We found that work with individual students gave the students an opportunity to reflect on the different aspects and complexities of the teaching profession, on their values and on their futures and that they benefited from the opportunity to discuss these issues face to face with their supervisors.

We analyzed students attitudes to these major aspects of the teacher

profession: the teacher's role in society, the teacher's role as a manager of the learning process, the teacher's role as a supporter of individual growth and the student's role as a self aware teacher in the making.

We have concluded that the results of the survey indicate that much more attention should be paid to the following issues in early teacher training:

1. The importance of a teachers role and impact on everyday life
2. The importance of the effective implementation of a range of local, national and international education policies
3. The importance of leadership and initiative in teaching
4. The importance of understanding professional values and personal commitment in teaching.

The main outcome of the research is a proven, effective methodology for supporting student teachers professional growth. The aspects we have highlighted (see above) can be addressed by implementing semi- structured interviews and feedback at an early stage in training. (Timoštšuk, I. & Normak, M., 2008)

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