

CORE CURRICULUM

VOCATIONAL TEACHER EDUCATION

**TEACHER EDUCATION
STUDY COUNSELLOR EDUCATION
SPECIAL NEEDS TEACHER EDUCATION**

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1 INTRODUCTION

It is the task of the Teacher Education College to support a research-based and development-oriented approach to teaching. Vocational teacher education and the further education provided promote the awareness of already working teachers and teacher students of the social and global connections of teaching work and develop their capabilities as responsible, proactive and critical actors in the Finnish society and the world as a whole.

The European Union has described general competence areas for teachers for the whole EU area. According to them, teachers must have the capabilities: 1) to work with information, technology and knowledge, 2) to cooperate with others – students, colleagues and other cooperation partners and 3) to act on the local, regional, national, European and global levels.

According to the Decree on Vocational Teacher Training (357/2003), the goal of vocational teacher education is to provide the student with: 1) the knowledge and skills to guide the learning of different students; and 2) the ability to develop their field of teaching taking into account the development of professions and working life.

The curriculum for vocational teacher education is competence-based. A competence-based curriculum usually relies on a clear idea of the work process-related competence to be developed through the education. In the following, we put forward perspectives regarding potential directions for change in the internationalising Finnish society and working life as well as the impact of these changes on vocational education and training and higher education in the country. These aspects form the essential operating environment for vocational teacher education. The definition of teacher's competences discussed in the following is linked to these anticipated changes.

2 OPERATING ENVIRONMENT OF VOCATIONAL TEACHER EDUCATION

2.1 Directions of social change

Finnish society and working life are becoming an increasingly integral part of the global community, economy and industrial life. Changes related to the economy and production are associated with the development of the capital market and the network economy. Both can be described as processes of a global nature. A way of doing things based on openness, sharing and freedom of communication provides opportunities for individuals and companies that have the desire and ability to act in virtual environments and flexible cooperation networks and are able to forge new connections between existing products and ideas to generate new innovations. Technological convergence and the opening of the capital market enable people and communities to connect to different networks technologically, economically, professionally and socially. The multitude of networks in the operating environment provides opportunities for a new kind of interaction and creativity. The international integration of economy also means common problems. For example, the indebtedness of public economies within the European Union will affect all member states in the near future. As a result, the opportunities of national economies to maintain public services, such as education and social and health services, at their previous level would appear to diminish in the coming years.

The ageing of the population and its anticipated consequences for the national economy constitute significant factors when assessing the future challenges of society and working life. As the size of working-age population decreases, it is necessary to develop new solutions regarding the structure and content of education that will enable us to meet the future need for workforce. Due to the need for workforce and the possible labour shortage, also the development of a more active immigration policy and the training of immigrants for the needs of Finnish working life emerge as questions central for the successfulness of the nation as a whole. The crucial factor is not simply the number of individuals who have undergone training, but the quality of training, too, is essential.

The interdependency, interaction and cooperation between different parts of the world increase in activities related to the well-being of people and the economy. The amount of cooperation is also increased in activities to mitigate climate change and to promote the sustainable use of natural resources. From the viewpoint of an individual person, globalisation means greater choice with reference to education, the labour market and the role of a consumer. In this development, all communities and citizens of the world have their own responsibility to bear. To assume such responsibility requires lifelong education that highlights ethical action and an understanding of a multicultural living and working environment.

2.2 Direction of changes in working life

The progress of the information society creates new professions, old professions become obsolete or the job descriptions of traditional professions merge. In some fields, the amount of work is reduced or runs out, whereas in others there is an oversupply of work. Current perspectives with reference to work, the economy and competence highlight the significance of sustainable development and entrepreneurship in regional, national and international contexts.

Broadly thinking, the questions of sustainable development are related to the well-being of citizens and their quality of life. Working life is a central part of people's daily lives. The perspective of sustainable development requires the development of working life by reinforcing its positive characteristics. In addition, the individual's personal development in his or her work and good leadership can promote the health and work ability of workers as well as increase well-being and the productivity and quality of work. Continuous development at work requires the development of new solutions at the interface between working life and education that address the structure and content of learning with the aim of enabling lifelong learning.

As the structures of working life change, an increasing amount of attention is paid to the strengthening of entrepreneurship in international, national and regional level policies, strategies and development programmes. Entrepreneurship is becoming an increasingly plausible way to gain employment and way of thinking and doing things. Support to entrepreneurial thinking and activities is seen as a particularly central part of training for different professions and as preparation for acting as an entrepreneur.

To secure their national and international competitiveness, many Finnish companies are targeting specialisation. This is not possible without networking. In a network economy, companies' dependency on other actors in the economy is highlighted: businesses are dependent on decisions made by other businesses and the changing needs and requirements of customers. The ever expanding networking of the economy brings with it the need for multilevel cooperation both on

both nationally and international levels. Consequently, an increasing number of companies are operating in an international environment. Developing competences associated with a multicultural environment and intercultural interaction is central in the working life of today and tomorrow.

Changes in work organisations are reflected as increasing demands for flexibility aimed at employees and as calls for a new kind of leadership. Workers are required to have the ability to anticipate and cope with changes in the number of staff and the amount of work, the extension of work careers and new competence requirements. In addition to demands related to flexibility, workers are also required to have a greater capacity to adjust to change and to tolerate uncertainty. A sense of community and issues related to well-being at work are increasing in importance. Competence areas common to a variety of professions and jobs of different levels have emerged alongside basic competencies required in individual vocations. Language skills, multicultural competences and the ability work with different people is required in both national and global operating environments. The ability to make oneself understood and use information and communication technologies in a versatile manner are an essential part of cooperative and interactive skills.

As the operating environment changes, new attitudes and communication culture are needed in leadership and managerial work. We need new methods and models of interactive leadership and communication that are based on openness and transparency and highlight a human-centric approach and a listening presence in the development of communication culture.

In a situation of constant change, the desire and ability of individuals and communities to learn new things are essential constituents of competence. They are the aspects that enable individuals to transfer to new work tasks in a flexible manner. Learning skills are metacognitive skills that emphasise the actor's capacity to evaluate his or her actions and his or her readiness to learn new things in changing operating environments. For communities, continuous learning provides the best framework for developing their expertise, which is the number one quality-related factor when competing in an ever tightening market.

2.3 Vocational education and training and higher education in transition

Changes in society and working life impact the development of vocational education on its different levels. The change factors affecting the organisation of vocational education and training can be crystallised into the following development perspectives, each of which has their own significance when considering the competence required from teachers in vocational education.

- structural changes in the educational system
- redefinition of the relationship between education and working life
- promoting entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial thinking
- increasingly diverse forms of internationalisation
- development of open learning environments
- guidance of individual learning processes.

The structural change of the network for the organisation of vocational education and training and the polytechnics network will be continued in the coming years. The units will grow in size and their numbers will be reduced. At the same time, their field of operations will expand and become

more diverse. This consciously guided development is aimed to secure the supply of labour and to achieve a better match between educational services and the needs of working life.

In the next few years, the aim is also to strengthen the prerequisites for lifelong learning and individual study paths and to secure the availability of educational services that respond to the needs of individuals. These measures are aimed to ensure the development of equality in education, which is a central goal of Finnish education policy for the next few years.

Constant changes in working life, including elements such as the extension of work careers and an emphasis on entrepreneurship, require constant renewal of competence through education. Increasing the working life orientation of education is a central goal of the development work to be carried out in the next few years. Traditional, institutionally-driven ways to organise education and training are proving too rigid for rapid response to the development challenges of changing competence needs. As vocational education and training and higher education aim to promote solutions that provide better integration between education and working life and solutions that develop both working life and individual competences, they must, at the same time, develop structurally flexible and pedagogically innovative operating methods.

Deepening the integration between studying and working requires cooperation between working life and education and training for example in the preparation of competence descriptions upon which curricula are based, basing studies on personal study plans and the development of study-related solutions and materials enabled by new technologies. New methods are developed to recognise, assess and accredit prior learning. Furthermore, education and training will be developed more into the direction of coaching, which would be more closely linked to work and its development.

Closer cooperation with working life is closely associated with the need to develop cooperation structures and networks. A central issue is the pedagogical development of learning taking place in working life contexts. Different types of working life cooperation will constitute an increasingly central part of the job description of teachers in both vocational education and training and polytechnics. This has meant a continuous increase of competence requirements regarding knowledge on working life and working life cooperation for teachers. Supporting regional development is a central task of all educational institutions.

The educational system has a central role in the development of entrepreneurial education, appreciation of entrepreneurship and the development of the operating environment. All level of schooling are required to support capabilities that promote entrepreneurial thinking, a proactive approach, initiative and the recognition of different opportunities for action. In addition to the above, vocational upper secondary education and training and polytechnic education emphasise awareness of the operating principles of an enterprise and the skills and knowledge required from a new and established entrepreneur. Alongside work to develop entrepreneurship in different educational levels and institutions, emphasis is also placed on many-sided network cooperation with regional and local actors in the field of entrepreneurial education.

Finnish society in the future will be more multicultural than it is today. For example, labour policy in the future will require a greater volume of immigration than is taking place at the moment. The educational system will have an important role in the promotion of domestication, too. Finding pedagogical solutions that enable the learning of students coming from different cultures will

emerge as an important development challenge for both vocational education and training and higher education. Another feature in the internationalisation development of education is expanding international networking and cooperation. It will concern the organisation of studies, teacher and student exchange and research, development and innovation activities and will affect an increasing number of teachers and students.

Increasing the flexibility of the structures and methods of learning and creating functional learning environments requires the continuous development of open learning environments. The need to accommodate students in different life situations challenges educational institutions to seek and develop new ways to implement education and training. Rapidly developing solutions of information and communication technology enable the construction of new kinds of learning environments. This requires the continuous development of pedagogical competence related to new technology on both institutional and individual levels. In the near future, a central development challenge will be the development and adoption of environments that, in addition to independent seeking and processing of information, enable different instructional and cooperative working methods.

The development of equality in education requires the development of pedagogical solutions that respond to the individual needs of students. This challenges those working in the field of education to develop their expertise with regard to learning and learners. Guiding individual learning processes will have an impact the work of special needs teachers and student counsellors. On the level of society, special needs education is a tool used to prevent exclusion and/or to reverse the exclusion process. Inclusive education supports the inclusion of individuals by enabling the formation of the personal learning paths of all learners and the creation of accessible learning environments. In terms of guidance, development targets include the development of lifelong preparedness for career planning and change situations and better planning and control of own actions in a variety of situations. The realisation of lifelong learning requires the support of guidance services that are implemented through cooperation between different administrative branches.

2.4 Changes and vocational teacher education

The JAMK University of Applied Sciences has chosen the quality of learning as one of the profiles of its development work. Based on the above-described development directions in society, working life and education, the quality of learning in vocational teacher education is enhanced by increasing the impact of vocational teacher education, which is based on:

- strengthening the prerequisites for innovation activities based on working-life oriented and regional research and development work,
- national and international educational partnerships aimed at developing operating environments,
- support to lifelong learning,
- the planning and implementation of learning processes that support cooperation with working life and entrepreneurial thinking and learning processes enabled by new technologies,
- identification of learning environments that combine different competence areas,
- the enabling of personal study paths,
- continuous assessment of activities.

3 TEACHER'S COMPETENCE

The task of vocational teacher education and further education provided within its context is to promote and support a development based on which teachers will be, for their part, able to respond to the above-described challenges as active and critical members of different professional communities related to their work.

According to the Decree on Vocational Teacher Training (357/2003), the goal of vocational teacher education is to provide the student with: 1) the knowledge and skills to guide the learning of different students; and 2) the ability to develop his or her field of teaching taking into account the development of professions and working life.

In the interpretation of the Teacher Education College of JAMK University of Applied Sciences, these target areas can be expressed more accurately as four competence areas and as eleven competences reflecting these areas on a more concrete level.

Facilitating learning competence area of guidance contains three different types of interrelated competence that are promoted and assessed during the studies:

- knowledge and understanding about learning,
- knowledge and understanding about learners,
- teaching and facilitating learning and assessment skills
- new technology skills

Developing the educational environment competence area also contains three different types of interrelated competences that are promoted and assessed during the studies:

- contextual skills,
- knowledge and understanding about working life and entrepreneurship
- developmental skills

The competence area of cooperation and interaction contains at least three kinds of interrelated competence, which are promoted and assessed during the studies:

- cooperation and networking skills, and
- interaction skills

The competence area of continuous learning contains two different types of interrelated competence that are promoted assessed during the studies:

- knowledge management skills and
- reflection skills

The below figure illustrates the interrelationships between the four competence areas described above:

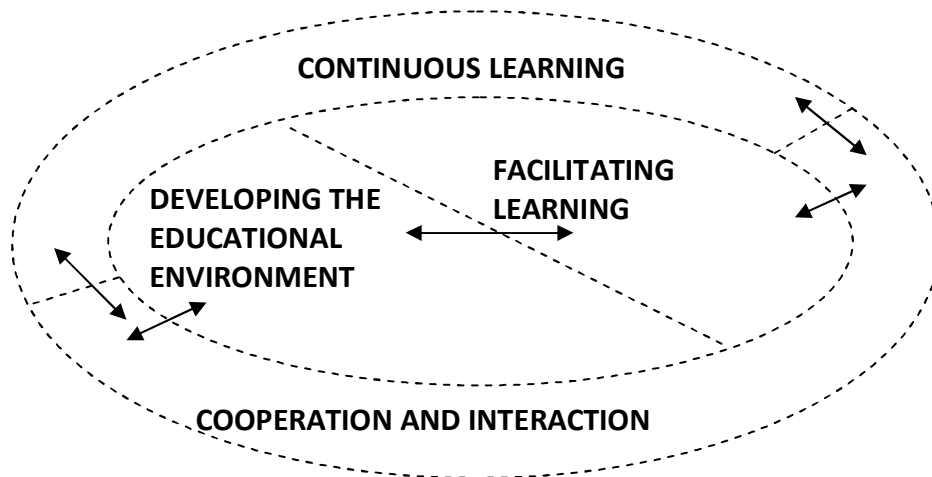


Figure 1. The competence areas of a teacher

Guidance of the learning process and the development of operating environments constitute core competences specific to the profession of a teacher. These two competence areas are not separate from each other but closely intertwined. Similarly, continuous learning and cooperation and interaction are closely connected with guidance of the learning process and the development of operating environments.

The studies and study modules in the curricula for teacher education are derived from the competence areas and competences. Recognition, assessment and accreditation of prior learning are also based on these descriptions.

3.1 Facilitating learning

Facilitating learning always constitutes a practical activity irrespective of whether it takes place in an educational institution, the student's workplace or in virtual environments. High-quality teaching facilitation of learning and their development are based on a sufficient theoretical knowledge of learning, the building of competence and of human beings as learners and builders of their own competence.

Knowledge of the fundamental principles of learning and a theoretical understanding of human activity, which is based on a valid conception of learning, thus constitutes one of the core competences of a teacher. Teachers must also understand the diversity of people as learners. As student's cultural backgrounds become increasingly diverse, teachers must have the capacity to act in accordance with the capabilities of the learners and to respond to the individual learning needs of different learners.

The planning of learning processes and learning environments always involves value choices that reflect the conceptions of teacher communities and individual teachers regarding the desired outcomes. By nature, teaching thus constitutes a deeply value-based and ethical activity.

New learning environments and their utilisation function to expand the traditional conception of teaching work. A central development target in the near future will be the development of

pedagogical solutions enabled by new technologies for the guidance of the learning process. The different solutions must be economically sustainable. This means that the teacher must have the ability to adapt the guidance activities to the resources available.

This requires the following skill set from the teacher:

- **knowledge and understanding about learning**, which refers to the teacher's awareness of learning from the theoretical and philosophical perspective,
- **knowledge and understanding about learners** meaning the teacher's awareness of the diversity of learners
- **teaching and facilitating learning and assessment skills**, which means the teacher's ability and willingness to account for the individual characteristics of the students in the planning and implementation of teaching and in the guidance and assessment of learning and his or her capacity to engage in positive interaction with different learners and skills to develop and renew teaching and learning environments in cooperation with other parties,
- **new technology skills**, which means the skills and motivation of the teacher to utilise the opportunities provided by new technologies in the development of learning environments and the ability to develop its use in learning, teaching and facilitating learning in a pedagogically sound manner.

3.2 Developing the educational environment

In addition to facilitating learning, the work of a teacher involves developing different educational environments. First, a teacher is always a member of his or her immediate community. Developing the activities of an educational institution or unit requires that each teacher possess both individual and community-oriented capabilities for research, development and innovation activities. Being a teacher thus also involves a strong element of entrepreneurial thinking and a requirement of quality and financial awareness.

Both educational establishments' and individual teachers' work environments consists of various cooperative relationships with local and regional professional fields. At its broadest, the operating environment of a teacher consists of different national and international networks. Knowledge of the preconditions of sustainable development on both global and local levels and identifying the directions of change in society and working life constitute essential competence requirements for teaching work.

To meet the requirements of meaningful development of pedagogical solutions, teachers need to obtain a theoretical and practical command of the content to be taught. As cooperation with working life expands and workplaces become an increasingly significant location for vocational learning, new methodological solutions are also continuously developed.

The development of operating environments also requires skills related to the use of information and capabilities in the area of development. Issues related to the use of information are part of the ethical dimension of teaching work. In a similar way that issues are connected in planning learning processes and learning environments, which reflect teachers' perceptions of the desired goals, information management is based on teachers' values.. They are manifest in the teacher's choice of research and development targets and in the teacher's dedication to the promotion of

issues they find important. They also become apparent in the teacher's efforts to influence their communities and their working environments

The activities of teachers always take place in a specific socio-historical environment. Teachers have the opportunity to impact the nature of working life and society by engaging in public debate taking place in society. Teaching is thus ethical by nature: the activities of teachers have a central significance in the development of society and working life through the great variety of choices made by all teachers in their daily work.

To be able to work in a meaningful way in a changing, multifaceted environment and develop it, teachers must have:

- **contextual skills**, which means having the skills to recognise and apply one's own actions in relation to the changing values and principles of one's organisation and work community. Furthermore, perceiving the changes in the educational environment and being able to react to those changes and challenges accordingly taking into account sustainable development,
- **professional development and entrepreneurship knowledge**, which means having a wide awareness of the latest developments in and knowledge of one's own field which can be combined with learning goals, in addition to an understanding of the significance of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial thinking in the development of working life and the motivation and ability to develop cooperation between education and working life, and
- **developmental skills**, which means the ability of teachers to develop their own activities and the activities of their community in relation to changes in the educational environment and the motivation and ability to develop one's own professional field on local, national and international levels.

3.3 Cooperation and interaction

Teaching work has always been social in nature and based on interaction between people. The social nature of the work has been defined in different ways in different times, but teaching/learning situations have always been based on human interaction. The capacity for positive, ethically sustainable interaction with learners is the corner stone of high-quality learning.

Cooperation and interaction are closely linked to facilitating learning and developing the educational environment. Cooperation is often related to aspects such as national or regional planning and implementation of teaching or different development projects carried out in cooperation with working life. Interactive competence is closely associated with the guidance of the learning process, for example.

Cooperation on the level of educational institutions covers the ability to form functional guidance and peer relationships, work groups, etc. From a broader perspective, it also contains the ability to act in networks made up of the representatives of different educational institutions and working life. For teachers of vocational institutions and polytechnics, such requirements are present in their daily activities through aspects such as on-the-job training and constantly expanding project activities. Cooperation reaches into international and global arenas, which has, for many teachers and institutes, become an everyday reality through international projects.

The competence of a teacher thus includes:

- **Cooperation and networking skills**, which is understood to mean the ability and motivation of the teacher to act in regional, national and international cooperation networks and
- **Interaction skills**, which means the ability of the teacher to act in different interactive relationships in a way that is meaningful and conducive to the goal of the activity in question.

3.4 Continuous learning

The requirement of continuous learning is connected with other competence areas. The concept of reflection is what joins these areas of competences together. To act as a teacher is to share individual expertise jointly with a community. Defined in this manner, the professional competence of a teacher contains the element of a professional acting in a reflective manner: a teacher is a researcher and developer of his or her own work, who, in cooperation with others, is constantly building his or her own competence and the competence of the community.

The capacity for reflection or critical self-assessment is part of the competence of a teacher. Personal reflection and the ability to make independent choices and decisions are essential in the midst of constant pressures for change. Critical self-reflection is not only essential at the individual level, but also at the organisational level. In this way, communication becomes an essential tool, which enables a common understanding to be formed among the work community.

In order to be capable of personal renewal and to also be able to generate renewal in his or her environment, a teacher will need:

- **Reflection skills**, which means the capacity of the teacher to realistically and critically evaluate their own work and their work community's principles and goals in relation to changes in the educational environment. They will also have the skills to set new goals to further develop themselves and their work community, and
- **Knowledge management skills**, which means the skills of a teacher to seek and critically select information and, in cooperation with other actors, construct practical and theoretical knowledge that serves the development of both their own competence and the competence of the community, as well as the motivation and ability to use this knowledge to promote learning.

4 ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING AND COMPETENCE

At the Teacher Education College, the guidance and assessment of learning is, by nature, development-oriented and open dialogue between students and trainers.

The assessment of learning and competence is based on learning outcomes: the guidance and assessment of learning takes place in relation to outcomes established for the courses. The assessment is also criterion-based: assessment decisions (pass/fail) are made based on criteria set for acceptable competence. Successful completion of a course requires that the criteria for acceptable competence are met. Assessment is based on learning assignments, observation, discussion and other qualitative materials and is thus qualitative in nature.

Learning outcomes function as starting points for the guidance of the learning process and for self-assessments and peer assessments. The guidance, different feedback and other assessments provided during the learning process are based on predefined learning outcomes as well as goals set by the students for their own learning. The assessment is thus development-oriented in nature. The self-assessments and peer assessments of students have a significant role in all stages of the studies. A self-assessment task is associated with each learning assignment.

The students of the Teacher Education College have the right to accreditation of previously acquired competences. Students may use previously obtained study attainments to substitute for predetermined courses. They also have the opportunity to incorporate studies completed elsewhere that support the aims of teacher education as part of optional studies. Students may also introduce for recognition and assessment studies completed or competence obtained elsewhere that match the learning outcomes of a specific course.

5 CONCEPTIONS BEHIND THE CURRICULUM

5.1 Conception of knowledge, humanity and learning

The curriculum for vocational teacher education, as well as the curricula for vocational special needs teacher education, and study counsellor education, is based on a conception of learning that relies on an *interactive* conception of the relationship between human beings and their environment, a *pragmatic* and *constructive* conception of knowledge and a *humanistic* conception of humanity.

The relationship between human beings and their environment can be viewed from different angles, each of which leads to a different conception of the nature of human knowledge formation and learning. One essential starting point for the pedagogical activities of the Teacher Education College is that people and their environment are understood to exist in an interactive relationship. The individual is thus not seen exclusively as a product of his or her environment. On the other hand, the college rejects the subjectivist notion of human consciousness and thinking as a fully independent and self-governing phenomenon within the individual that is in no way impacted by the objective environment.

The emphasis on the interactive relationship between people and their environment is based on a conception of the relative nature of reality and a pragmatic and constructivist conception of

knowledge. Reality is thus understood as a historically shaping entity. People obtain information about their environment through acting and simultaneously shape their environment. The learner is perceived to have an opportunity for goal-oriented and active acquisition knowledge as well as its processing and assessment.

The humanistic conception of humanity is based on the uniqueness and individuality of all people. This uniqueness is constructed throughout a person's lifetime, which is a process that requires the presence of other people. At their very core, humans are thus social beings. They are able to interact with others, and need others to grow.

The conceptions of learning upon which the activities of the Teacher Education College are based rely on both humanistic and cognitive psychology. Neither of these is a uniform school of thought. The activities of the Teacher Education College rely on the most essential observations of both research traditions with reference to human learning.

In recent years, the most central conception of learning based on humanistic psychology has been the idea of experience as a central foundation for learning. A central idea in experiential learning is that learning starts with the activities of an individual and the experiences obtained from those activities. Experiences are analysed, reflected upon and conceptualised in order to reach the next, qualitatively more advanced level of activity.

The central starting points of cognitive psychology are connected with the nature of human activity and cognitive functions: people are seen as beings acting in a goal-oriented manner who, in order to act, seek knowledge of outside realities. As a general rule, meaningful learning does not take place through a process of knowledge transfer; instead, the learner actively constructs his or her own knowledge. He or she selects and interprets information and structures it based on and in relation to prior knowledge. A learning process like this is always bound to the situation and culture where it takes place, and it is always anchored to the processes of social interaction and the structures of meaning that have been created through them. Learning is thus not only social but also contextual in nature.

From the learner's viewpoint, learning is defined by experience and how it is created, which, in turn, depends on situations, the environment and contextual connections, based on which the experience is formed. Learning is understood as a relationship between experience and context that is mediated by individual ways of orientation, individual and joint forms of information processing and the conditions provided by the operating environment in question.

The above starting points concerning reality, knowledge, learning and people as learners guide the planning and implementation of learning and development activities at the Teacher Education College as illustrated in the figure below:

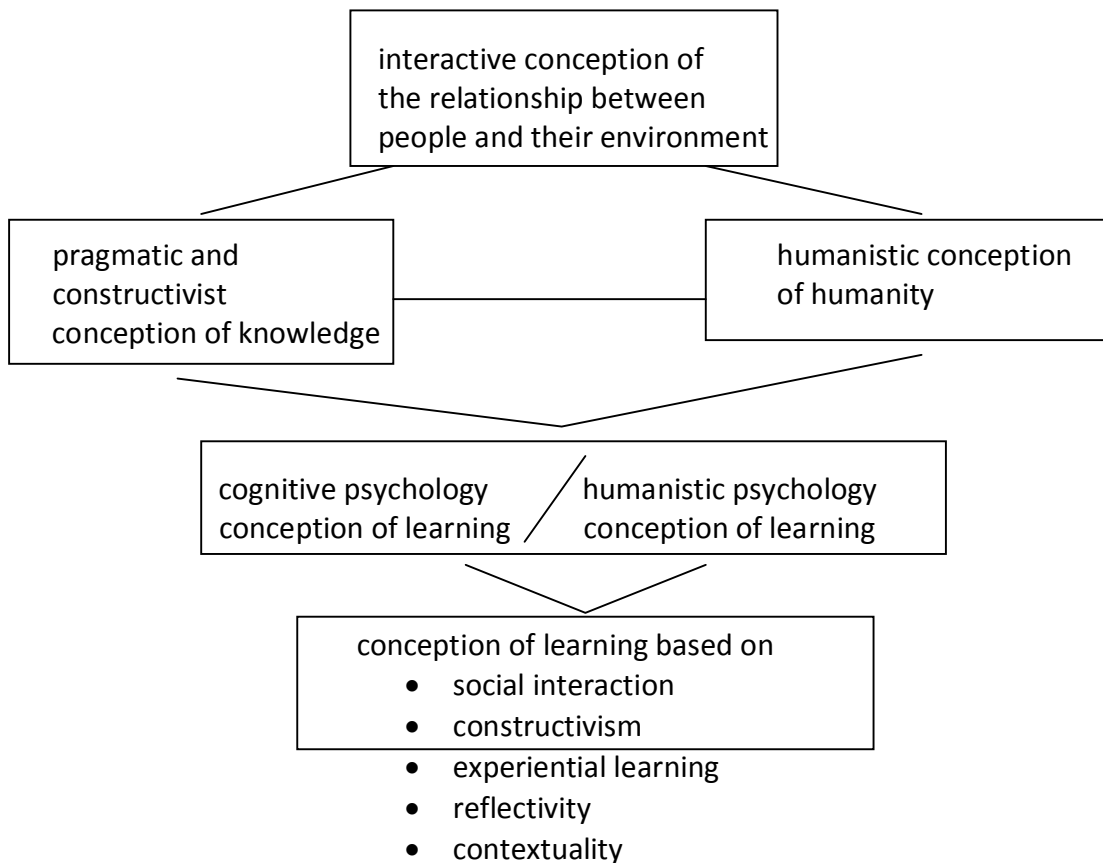


Figure 2. Conceptions of knowledge, humanity and learning

With reference to social interaction and constructivism:

Learning is seen as a community-oriented process of knowledge construction that takes place through cooperation between learners and in which individual construction of knowledge and the social element of learning are firmly intertwined. Learning constitutes assigning meaning to new ideas and concepts. The assigning of meaning is a social occurrence: the meanings assigned to ideas and concepts are generated in social interaction in which the individual takes part along with other members of the community. The pedagogical solutions of vocational teacher education highlight cooperative construction of competence in different interactive networks.

With reference to the experiential and reflective nature of learning:

Individual learning is based on experience. However, experience alone does not guarantee high-quality learning. In vocational teacher education, the starting point of experiential learning is reflective action by the learner, which is seen as a prerequisite for the learning of both individuals and communities. Pedagogical solutions emphasise a problem-based approach and the development of metacognitive skills.

With reference to contextuality:

Learning is based on experience obtained in a certain environment and operating context. Professional growth and learning are seen as processes of socialisation into different communities and of growing into their membership. In addition to socialisation, participation in the development of the operating cultures of the communities is also seen as important. The learning environments of the Teacher Education College are built and its pedagogical solutions developed in such a way that the learning can take place in environments that are diverse and authentic from the perspective of teaching work.

5.2 Students of the Teacher Education College

Students in the basic teacher training programme and the further education programmes offered by the Teacher Education College are adults who have already accumulated their own life experiences and also gained varying amounts of work experience. They are also very highly educated individuals. As a general rule, admission to vocational teacher education requires at least three years of work experience and a higher education degree. These experiences create the foundation upon which the learning of new knowledge and skills can be based.

The fact that the students are adults also means that they often have old habits they need to unlearn. The experiences accumulated and conceptions associated with them may have developed into ways of thinking and doing things that must be subjected to critical observation in the training and may need to be overcome before the formation of new structures. The desire to preserve the old but also to embrace the new and accept change goes hand in hand in the learning process.

In the case of mature students, learning features a strong element of reflection or assessment of one's own actions. As an element of learning, reflection is focused on the goals, content and productivity of activities. Importantly, regenerative learning always includes an element of critical reflection, too. Reflection is also focused on the reasons for doing things in a certain way, in which case the perspectives of meaning guiding the activities are altered and gain new content.

As adults, our students often lead their lives in several different arenas of activity, such as family, work and different leisure pursuits. They have already have various responsibilities and commitments. Learning and education are just one aspect of their lives – not their whole life. Mature students are forced to balance between the demands, challenges and opportunities of different parties. Finding a meaningful balance for how they use their time and input is thus of particular importance for them.

As a general rule, students in vocational teacher education are highly educated professionals who have gained work experience in their field; many can even be considered as genuine experts in their field. The diversity of professional fields and work experience among the students is an important resource for the education that creates a rich learning environment offering a large number of different perspectives. Even though the students are professionals in their field, the majority of them are only just beginning to build their pedagogical competence. In issues related to the development of pedagogical competence in the field of vocational education and training, the students are on very different levels depending on the nature of their professional field and past experience. For example, students in social professions have been faced with issues similar to the ones that emerge in the contexts of teaching in their prior education and work. Conversely,

persons who have worked in some other professions experience the questions and phenomena of work involving large amounts of social interaction as a new thing. Yet, everyone has their own strengths and development challenges.

Vocational teacher education is based on the notion that people are interested in developing themselves and learning new things. The underlying assumption is thus that students are curious, eager to experiment and need challenges. The students want to impact their work, participate and develop their environment. They seek change, and even though certain change resistance is also possible, change is more rewarding than keeping things the way they are. Change requires other people, support, encouragement and mirrors for one's own development.

The assumption is also that are students are able to set goals and objectives for themselves. They are able to make well-founded choices when seeking functional alternatives for the solution of problems related to their own pedagogic activities. This will also help the students in creating and maintaining motivation for their work.

5.3 Basic conceptions and vocational teacher education

Based on the above-described conceptions of knowledge, humanity and learning and perception of students in vocational teacher education, the Teacher Education College:

- builds a consciously open, equal cooperation culture,
- supports the reflection of the student's personalities in their work as teachers
- supports cooperation with a variety of different partners
- offers guidance and evaluation of learning in the form of open and continuous dialogue between students and trainers