

## PROMOTING TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULA BY USING METHODS OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH: ESTONIAN CASE

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**Abstract.** The main purpose of this historical case study is to show that by studying the past of teacher education at an institution of higher education or in a country one can capitalize on the already existing experiences and avoid wasting resources on reinventing the wheel, even where radical social changes characterize the studied period. This claim is exemplified by describing and analyzing teacher education organization, principles, and content at Tartu University, Estonia, over a period of eighty years. A special focus is given to the period of Soviet occupation (1940–1991) and its impact on the current subject teacher education practice in Estonia. The study proves that teacher education principles, organization, and content are more similar than dissimilar with the conditions characteristic of Soviet totalitarianism and liberal democracy, if the ideological biases and distortions of totalitarianism are filtered out.

**Keywords:** historical research, teacher education, teacher education curriculum, teacher induction, teacher education practice, educational renewal, educational research, teacher training

### 1. Introduction

Historical documentation and analysis of teacher education principles, content and organization can serve as a powerful tool for understanding and solving current problems of teacher education in institutions of higher education and universities. As noted by Fraenkel and Wallen, the main purpose of historical studies is making "...people aware of what happened in the past so they may learn from past failures and successes" (2003:548). This is just what the organizers of teacher education often fail to do. In reality, two radically different situations can be identified in the long-term operation of teacher education curricula worldwide. In countries with a relatively stable social order and long established traditions, the principles and organization of teacher education tend to remain unchanged for decades. For example, Houston (1996) pointed out ten years ago that, in spite of

numerous campaigns, most of America's teachers were still being prepared by the same framework employed six decades ago. In this case, an historical inspection of past practices and various campaigns (so characteristic of teacher education) might be helpful for understanding the meaning and perspectives of similar initiatives in the future, and thus decrease the threat or misery of reinventing the wheel, a common educational practice (e.g. Bloom 1974).

In countries that have suffered or are suffering under radical social changes and in which traditions and continuity in teacher education were destroyed, research into the historical experiences in this field could be valuable for understanding what is of temporary and what is of lasting value. This applied, for example, to post-Nazi Germany after World War II, and it especially applies today to many European post-socialist countries belonging to the former Soviet bloc. In these countries the Communist regime declared many deeply ingrained educational ideas, approaches and traditions as inappropriate for achieving its educational goals. For example, any reference to Western education ideas or attempts to use these ideas was strictly prohibited during the Stalinist period in the Soviet Union. Though the regime's grip weakened during Khrushchev's "thaw" in the beginning of the 1960s, no alternative ideology was tolerated, and the introduction of Western educational ideas was allowed only under the disguise of the "critical analysis" of these ideas right up to the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Publication of education papers in Western scholarly journals was practically impossible for the entire Soviet period. Isolation, ideological brainwashing and cultivating the so-called Soviet pedagogy lasted in these countries between 50 and 70 years. Such conditions instilled a biased and narrow worldview in many generations of people in these societies, and created a unique culture (e.g. Mestenhauser 1998).

Today, at least two questions arise when one tries to understand the changes in teacher education that took place under the conditions of establishing and building democracy in these countries. Firstly, what impact did the long Communist regime have on the emerging or re-emerging institutional and national systems of teacher education? And, secondly, what features of teacher education, if any, from the Soviet era could the new curricula and organization of teacher education benefit from or rely on? The last question remains typically unanswered, as experts from these countries usually emphasize the intended or ongoing changes in teacher education (see e.g. Karsten and Majoor 1994) but ignore parts of the former experience that deserve to be retained. For example, Razma (1992) claimed that after regaining national independence in 1991, Lithuania's new teacher education curricula would be free of ideology and would emphasize contemporary teaching structures; they would be humanitarian and would make use of the nation's history, its ethnic culture, traditions and understandings. West, Jarchow, and Quinsberry (1996), in their survey of teacher education systems in different countries, also do not see anything valuable in the past experiences of teacher education in these countries.

An examination of teacher education curricula and organization in the University of Tartu in Estonia (Krull and Trasberg 2005) proved that learning

about the past helps to answer the two questions raised above. In this light, the aims of the current study are two-fold: Firstly, to outline perspectives for promoting pedagogical content and organization of teacher education at Tartu University by learning from the past (in the conditions of a transition society); secondly, to show that the scope of this research methodology is not limited to the analysis of the history of one particular program of teacher education, but can be used for understanding and promoting the pedagogical preparation of prospective teachers, in general, by drawing on theoretical generalizations of issues in teacher education. However, the main focus of this paper is on the difficulties and problems that interfere with the promotion of teacher education in the conditions of the social transition from Communist totalitarianism to a liberal democracy.

For the sake of clarity, a short historical survey of subject teacher education at Tartu University in the pre-World War II period is necessary prior to focusing on the analysis of teacher education in Estonia during the Soviet occupation years and afterwards.

## **2. Teacher education at Tartu University before World War II**

In fact, the University of Tartu had been since 1802 the only institution of higher education preparing secondary school teachers in Estonia. It was not until the establishment in 1952 of the Tallinn University as a teacher education institute that another institution preparing secondary teachers emerged. During this two-century period the number of teacher education graduates at Tartu University has grown from less than twenty individuals to over 150 a year. Ideological and political changes that affected teacher education in this period practically reflect the major historical events in the life of the 1.4 million-strong nation.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Estonia belonged to the Russian empire, but due to the strong influence of the German landowners who first moved into this area in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, its higher education system operated mostly in the framework of Western European university traditions. Typically, the preparation of secondary school teachers took place over a one- or two-year period, and for more than one hundred years it consisted of theoretical and practical pedagogical studies at the University of Tartu after its re-establishment in 1802<sup>1</sup>. During this time the practical studies of teacher preparation involved supervised classroom observation, planning of lessons and teaching. The theoretical pedagogical studies foresaw the learning of pedagogy with psychology and logic, history of education, school hygiene, and the writing of analytical papers (Siilivask 1982, Muoni 1991).

When Estonia gained its independence in 1918, the University of Tartu became its only national university. By far the most significant step for the future development of higher studies of education was the founding of a chair of education at the Faculty of Philosophy headed by Professor Peeter Põld. From this time the pedagogical disciplines were taught like other academic disciplines at the lower,

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<sup>1</sup> The University of Tartu was founded by the Swedish King Gustav II Adolf in 1632.

medium and upper levels. All prospective teachers had to study pedagogical disciplines at least at the lower level (Tartu Ülikooli ... 1922–1939). A well-functioning system of secondary school teacher education was established during the following 22 years of independence. It was based on principles of postgraduate teacher education (PGTE) with extensive student teaching practice at schools and compulsory annual supervised internships involving regular seminars organized by supervising tutors. In 1922 a didactic-methodological seminar was established at the University of Tartu as a coordinating unit for the preparation of subject teachers. The admittance of students to the seminar was based on a complex entrance examination for persons who had already completed the cycle of pedagogical studies at the lower level, which involved learning psychology, logic, ethics, history of education, general pedagogy, and school healthcare along with taking the corresponding examinations. Student teachers' school practice ended with teaching a lesson that was assessed by a supervising tutor and cooperating teacher. The prospective subject teachers were licensed on the basis of a successful one-year internship and professional examination, where they had to prove their mastery of practical knowledge and skills necessary for a teaching career (Siilivask and Palamets 1982).

### 3. Teacher education at Tartu University during the Soviet occupation

In 1940 Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union and then by Germany in 1941. The majority of university teacher educators escaped from Estonia before it was re-occupied by the Soviet Army in 1944. After that the national system of teacher education was forcibly replaced by the Soviet system of teacher training in terms of its principles, content and organization. Furthermore, as teacher training was considered an issue of secondary importance in Soviet universities in comparison with academic and political studies, the volume of theoretical and practical studies of pedagogical subjects significantly decreased at Tartu University relative to the pre-war period. Instead, almost a year was used for studying the history of the Communist Party and communist social science in all university and other higher education curricula. Student teachers' school practice was reduced to only four weeks (Elango 1953), as per the Soviet regulations for universities (Zinovjev 1966)<sup>2</sup>. The studies of pedagogical subjects typically took place together with students' specialty subjects in a two- or three-year period (Elango 1953). The content of pedagogical studies was extremely politicized. For example, the guidelines for the course of general pedagogy and history of education, which were approved by the Soviet Estonian Ministry of Education for

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<sup>2</sup> The subject teachers for schools of general education were mostly trained at pedagogical institutes in the former Soviet Union. The pedagogical school practice in these institutions was significantly longer than at the universities providing teacher training. Though Tartu University was the only institution of higher education providing subject teacher training in Estonia, it had to comply with the general regulations established for the Soviet universities.

teacher training seminars in 1947 (but also serving as a model for institutions of higher education), called for the teaching of the following topics<sup>3</sup> (Sõerd 1949) (see Table 1).

From these 160 hours of classroom work, 54 hours were spent on topics (e.g. the aims of Communist education, moral education, labor education, organization of Pioneers, and what the classics of Marxism said about the teacher) having a heavily biased ideological dimension. Practically all textbooks of educational subjects used earlier were found as ideologically inappropriate by the Soviet authorities and were replaced with Russian/Soviet textbooks translated into Estonian (Krull and Trasberg 2005). Many teacher educators who were reluctant to accept the Soviet ideology and methods of teacher training were persecuted and made to denounce publicly their “bourgeois” educational views, or were imprisoned and sent to Siberia if they denied having been mistaken. For example, in 1946 the Soviet authorities found that the selected works of Johannes Käis (1885–1950), recognized as the most outstanding Estonian educator and a follower

**Table 1. The syllabus of general pedagogy and history of education for Estonian teacher training seminars (Sõerd 1949)**

Topics	Hours
Subject of pedagogy	6
Aims and tasks of Communist education	8
System of school education	4
Pre-school education of children	6
Education of children in early grades	6
Physical education at the elementary school level	6
Foundation of didactics; teacher’s leading role in educating children; principles of didactics, etc	14
Content of education and instruction at the elementary school level	6
School lesson and methods of instruction	25
Organization of lessons in multigrade classes	6
Foundations of moral education	8
Content and methodology of moral education (educating a scientific worldview, Soviet patriotism, etc)	22
Labor education	4
Esthetical education	6
Educating children outside classroom and school	4
Organization of Pioneers (young Communists)	8
Education of school-aged children at home	6
Planning and accounting of educational and instructional work by teachers	4
Teacher (Lenin and Stalin on the teacher, classics of pedagogy about the teacher, particularities of the teaching profession, etc)	4
School administration and management	6

<sup>3</sup> The first official program of pedagogy that was compulsory for all student teachers in the post-war period was published in 1972. Until this time the subject faculties themselves, in line with the ideological prescriptions of the authorities, compiled the programs of pedagogy. Unfortunately, none of these manuscripts were published or archived.

of Dewey's ideas of progressive education, were misleading and that they undermined Soviet pedagogical ideas (Rahva Hääl 1946). Aleksander Elango, an associate professor at Tartu University who initially approved the publication of Käis' works, was forced to admit publicly that he mistakenly approved them due to an insufficient knowledge of the good practice of the Soviet school and with the corresponding literature (see Elango 1946).

After Stalin's death in 1953, the political regime softened and the autonomy of universities gradually increased. By the end of the 1950s, Estonian educators started to reintroduce elements of teacher education once practiced before World War II. Even a short public debate took place to decide which system to introduce from among the student teachers' school practices used before World War II (see e.g. Elango 1957, Jaanvärk 1957).

In the following years the duration of student teachers' school practice increased gradually from 4 weeks to 18. In the 1960s a carefully elaborated and multiphase system of student teachers' school practice was established along with the compiling and publishing of the corresponding guidelines (see e.g. Tartu Riikliku Ülikooli ... 1965). The institution of a novice teacher's annual internship as a condition for being licensed as a teacher was also re-introduced. A few years later a comprehensive program for pedagogical studies, though in the vein of the ruling ideology, was introduced. It entailed studies of the foundations of pedagogy, didactics, principles of socialization, elements of school management and the history of education (Tartu Riikliku Ülikooli ... 1972).

Teacher training school practice was taken very seriously in the 1960s and 1970s and, in a certain meaning, it serves as a positive example of the teacher educators' dedication to student teachers' practical preparation even today. For example, the guidelines compiled by the faculty of the Department of Education at Tartu University required working as a Pioneer summer camp educator for a month<sup>4</sup> and an extensive practice at school. The subject teachers' school practice was divided into three phases (Tartu Riikliku Ülikooli ... 1965): Introductory practice (4 weeks), complex practice (4 weeks: meaning that student teachers had to practice at the middle and secondary school levels simultaneously), and an on-the-job qualifying phase, or internship as it was called at the time.

During phases one and two the student teachers went to schools in groups under the supervision of university lecturers. In the on-the-job qualifying phase the student teachers worked at schools as part-time teachers under the supervision of teachers and university lecturers. In the beginning of all phases of school practice the student teachers had to draw up an individual program of tasks for observing and practicing subject teaching, working as a class advisor and organizer of out-of-

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<sup>4</sup> Though the Pioneer camp practice had a certain ideological flavour, in reality, it was a good opportunity for prospective teachers to learn how to socialize with teenagers and to organize their leisure activities.

class activities<sup>5</sup>. The student teachers had to report the implementation of scheduled tasks in their daily diaries. The guidelines included a detailed program of school practice and clearly stated supervision obligations. In phase one the student teachers had to observe at least 2–3 lessons and produce a following daily analysis during a two-week period, and in phases two and three 2–3 lessons during a one-week period. The analyses of 1–2 lessons had to be presented in written form. In each phase of practice the student teachers had to observe an additional 4–5 lessons taught by a teacher who was not their supervisor. After the lesson observation period the student teachers started to teach lessons themselves. At the end of phases one and two the student teacher had to teach all his supervising teacher's classes (at least 4 lessons a week) at a certain grade level. In the on-the-job qualifying phase the student teachers' teaching load increased up to 8–12 lessons a week.

In the 1970s the Soviet authorities found that the share of pedagogical studies was too big compared with the share left for academic disciplines, thus the duration of school practice was shortened to eight weeks at universities (Unt and Kenkmann, 1982)<sup>6</sup>. However, many measures were taken by the teacher educators of Tartu University and by the central educational authorities in the following years to improve the quality of teacher education and retention of newly qualified teachers in schools. These reform initiatives lasted until the collapse of the Soviet regime and re-establishment of Estonian independence in 1991. The list of the main fields and topics of the renewed program of pedagogical studies (Tartu Riikliku Ülikooli... 1986) is given in the box overleaf.

Though this program of pedagogical studies was still ideologically biased, it had a positive side, too. Namely, a single lecturer typically taught it, meaning that the person in charge should be competent in all fields and topics of this course.

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<sup>5</sup> According to Estonian school traditions, an advising or class teacher is appointed to middle and secondary school classes to manage students' daily life. Typically, this teacher is expected to work with the appointed class until its graduation. The advising class teacher checks attendance, announces school events, monitors students' achievements across the subjects, counsels parents, maintains class discipline, etc. So, the student teachers are expected to learn how to advise a class in addition to teaching their subjects at their school practice.

<sup>6</sup> The new statute of study programs for Soviet universities ended the division of university studies into academic and pedagogical branches beginning in the 1974/75 school year, which meant that all students (studying subjects taught at schools of general education) had to study a minimum number of pedagogical subjects necessary for teacher preparation independent of their professional orientation and preferences. The Soviet authorities took this step with the purpose of solving the permanent shortage of schoolteachers. Consequently, many graduates were often appointed as teachers to schools against their will, and their job retention- became a serious problem (see e.g. Unt and Kenkmann 1982).

**The course of general pedagogy and history of education at Tartu University introduced in 1986**

- **General foundations of pedagogy** (subject of pedagogy, research work in pedagogy, development of personality and education, purpose of Communist education, system of education, teacher personality)
- **History of school and pedagogical thinking** (Not outlined)
- **Didactics** (subject of didactics, content of education, principles of instruction, methods of teaching, organizational approaches to instruction, independent work of pupils, programmed instruction, problem-based learning, learning difficulties, teaching aids, using technical equipment for controlling and assessing learning outcomes)
- **Theory of education (socialization)** (nature and principles of socialization, methods of socialization, shaping the Communist worldview, moral education, labor education, preparation of pupils for selecting a profession, esthetical education, physical education, environmental education, collective of pupils, class advising or work as a class teacher, foundations of children's home education, pioneer and young Communist organizations at school, students' self-governance, teachers' work outside classroom and school, pupils' self-education, promoting the awareness for disciplined behavior, educating and re-educating delinquent pupils, creating negative attitudes towards alcohol and smoking)
- **Foundations of school administration** (Not outlined)

Starting in the 1985/86 school year, the Soviet authorities introduced special measures for improving the quality of teacher training. One of these measures was the introduction of separate programs of studies for non-pedagogical (theoretical) and pedagogical branches at universities. Another measure was the introduction of a continuous pedagogical practice (see Tartu Riiklik Ülikool 1986), in addition to the core teaching practice, for those students preparing for a teaching career from their second term of university studies. Though this practice was never fully implemented for organizational and, mostly, for political reasons (*perestroika* had started) at Tartu University, this was probably the most comprehensive and long-term program of teacher training practical studies ever designed for the pre-teaching practice period (see Table 2).

Simultaneously with the introduction of the continuous pedagogical practice, a compulsory induction year was reintroduced for newly qualified teachers who were appointed to schools (Levald 1985)<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> In the Soviet period all graduates of higher education institutions were appointed by special appointment committees (consisting of institutional and ministerial representatives) to their future work places, where they had to work for at least three years.



**Table 2. Content and organization of the continuous pedagogical practice at Tartu University**  
(Continuous... 1986)

Semester	Organizing unit	Component of practice	Hours
II	Dept. of Education	<b>General issues of education</b> – Becoming acquainted with the practice school (3) – Implementing individual tasks of education (working with Pioneers, etc) (25) – Video-training of communication skills (8)	36
III	Dept. of major/subject studies	<b>Subject oriented work out-of-practice school</b> – Visiting out-of-school institutions like Pioneer hobby and leisure centers, physical training schools, music schools, etc (16) – Methodology of organizing field trips (4) – Field trips and excursions to the best schools in Estonia (16)	36
IV	Dept. of major/subject studies	<b>Subject oriented work at a practice school</b> – Becoming acquainted with teachers' methodological subject group activities (2) – Implementing individual teaching tasks under the supervision of cooperating teachers (34)	36
V	Dept. of psychology and logic	<b>Promoting pupils' vocational orientation</b> – Methods of analyzing and designing professional profiles (8) – Becoming acquainted with the school's work plan for social education and vocational orientation of pupils (4) – Becoming acquainted with the university center for vocational orientation and city advisory board for job choice (4) – Testing of pupils for vocational suitability (16) – Planning, carrying out, and analyzing an excursion to a manufacturing enterprise.	36

#### 4. Teacher education at Tartu University since the regaining of independence in Estonia

During Estonia's period of transition to democracy, the postgraduate system of secondary teacher education was restored<sup>8</sup> and the content of educational subjects was gradually replaced with ideas, principles and concepts accepted in Western democracies. At the beginning it was done mostly by translating Western textbooks into Estonian, and later by Estonian academics writing the necessary textbooks. Yet, the component of teacher education that was most damaged by the transition from one socio-political system to another was student teachers' school practice. Its organization and content has still not reached the quality of the period

<sup>8</sup> The Soviet Union's five-year university program was replaced with a 4+2 study system consisting of four years of bachelor studies (160 credits) and two years of master studies (80 credits), of which the master thesis was 40 credits. The subject teacher education programs consisted of four years of bachelor studies and one year of professional studies.

from the 1960s to 1980s. For example, the study aids published for student teachers' school practice since 1999 do not state clear tasks or programs of activities (see Kraav et al. 1999, Sisask 2003). The first decisive steps in the direction of creating new guidelines describing tasks and programs were taken only in 2005, and now the first draft versions of these guidelines have been made public (Tartu Ülikooli ... 2006). The same is nearly as true for novice teachers' internships, as these had not been in use since the late 1980s, and were reintroduced only in 2004 (Haridus- ja teadusministeerium 2000).

The postgraduate year of educational studies introduced for secondary subject teachers was organized in line with the National Guidelines for Teacher Education (Kultuuri- ja haridusministeerium 1995, Haridus- ja teadusministeerium 2000), and it involved components of 24 study weeks (credit points)<sup>9</sup> of theoretical pedagogical studies, 10 weeks of supervised school practice and 6-credit point work on a diploma project<sup>10</sup>. The compulsory courses of education involve a basic module of pedagogy and several courses of subject didactics and curriculum studies at the University of Tartu. The basic module involves four core courses of psychological and pedagogical subjects, each worth 4 credit points (Tartu Ülikool 2005):

- Foundations of cognition and behavior
- Pedagogical communication
- Foundations of pedagogy (covering seven different topics)
- Educational psychology

In reality, this set of courses represents a compromise between different stakeholders in teacher education rather than being grounded in research-based evidences of the effects of theoretical and practical pedagogical studies on teachers' professional development. These courses are thus relatively isolated and, even worse, parts of them are often taught by different lecturers. Though these lecturers introduce students to current research findings in their fields of studies, the conceptual coordination and integration of whole courses, to say nothing about the integration of theoretical and field studies, is practically nonexistent.

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<sup>9</sup> A credit point at Estonian institutions of higher education equals 1.5 ECTS-s (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System). The nominal workload of a full-time student during one academic year is 40 credits.

<sup>10</sup> Tartu University's introduction in 2005 of a 3+2 structure of studies after joining the Bologna Declaration imposed a division of student teachers' pedagogical studies over a two-year period of master studies. The National Teacher Education Guidelines are currently under revision. A major change that has already been imposed by the statute of university curricula (e.g. Tartu Ülikool 2006) foresees the completion of a 20-credit point master project, or the writing of two 5-credit master examinations as a condition of graduation. This means that the former 6-point diploma work has been replaced with a 20-point master project, or with a 10-point examination in the field of academic subject studies or of pedagogy.

## 5. Discussion

The problems related to the structure and content of pedagogical courses that Estonian teacher educators faced in the transition period actually lead to an eternal issue of teacher education that was already pointed out by John Brubacher (1969). He expressed it as finding answers to the question of whether education is a discipline on its own, or whether it should draw on such well-established disciplines as psychology, history, philosophy, and sociology by introducing their derivative disciplines: educational psychology, educational philosophy, educational history, and educational sociology, each taught by experts in their specific fields. The latter approach, as Brubacher explains, is logical, except for the fact that these experts well trained in their academic subject-matter disciplines are frequently not equally or well trained in problems of education. Furthermore, a substantial number of academically rigorous courses when not coordinated in terms of their content and conceptual bases often turn out to be thin and overlapping (1969:490–491). On the other hand, when a single lecturer teaches a complex course of pedagogy, it can be expected that this course has a coherent conceptual basis even though its academic quality might be compromised, as this person cannot be an expert in all underlying basic disciplines.

Of course, this dilemma was not raised so clearly at the end of the 1980s when *perestroika* was introduced in the Soviet Union through to the early 1990s, the period that culminated with Estonia regaining its independence in 1991. The main motive at the beginning of *perestroika* was the Estonian educators' desire to get rid of the ideologically biased Soviet pedagogy. However, the ideas of how to renew and update the theoretical content of teacher education were divergent. One group of teacher educators believed the solution lay in both the study and analysis of the traditions and content of teacher education characteristic of the pre-World War II period, as well as studying the current content and principles of teacher education in Western countries (e.g. Krull 1992). Another group saw the solution in updating and revising textbooks used during the Soviet period by removing their ideological and political biases and distortions. The opinions of radical reformers dominated, and an orientation was taken to introduce new courses of pedagogical subjects (those taught in Western universities) that were supposed to replace major topic areas of the former comprehensive courses of pedagogy. Some of the reformers tried to avoid splitting up the former course of general pedagogy into separate topics. For example, Kreitzberg (1993) tried to integrate several pedagogical disciplines on a philosophical basis into a comprehensive theory of education in his doctoral dissertation, and Krull introduced a course of educational psychology based on Lindgren and Suter's (1985) textbook, which he later translated into Estonian (1994). Despite the fact that a comprehensive course of educational psychology, practically covering the whole knowledge of a teacher's work, was introduced as a compulsory component of pedagogical preparation, and that an original Estonian textbook of educational psychology was published (Krull 2000), the fragmentation and isolation of pedagogical subject courses still

continues today. There have also been attempts to see this process in the light of an artificial confrontation between the traditions of German didactics (as former Soviet pedagogy was extensively based on Prussian didactical ideas) and the Anglo-American school of educational psychology (e.g. Mikser 2005).

To a certain extent, this situation can be considered as a normal consequence of the developments in Estonian teacher education related to the conditions of establishing a democratic state. The majority of teacher educators who were used to teaching Soviet courses of general pedagogy based on a unified and one-sided conceptual framework, suddenly faced a myriad of approaches to pedagogical issues. Not used to this variety of concepts, many of them just adopted the approaches that appeared to fit into their personal understandings of teacher education content without analyzing their wider validity.

Due to the difficulties of promoting a clear and commonly accepted conceptual basis for the pedagogical preparation of pre-service teacher education students, the coordination and provision of a terminological unity of core courses of pedagogy is still a serious problem. Poor coordination and the lack of a common conceptual basis of these courses undermine the development of sound programs for practical and field studies. So, the school practice of student teachers is often limited to observation, analysis and teaching tasks that are expressed in general terms without any methodological specification. In this sense, the guidelines used for student teachers' school practice almost 20 years ago were methodologically more elaborated and specific. However, it would be misleading to claim that the failure of creating programs for student teachers' school practice is caused only by the lack of theoretical foundations. In reality, the contents of the theoretical and practical pedagogical preparation of a student teacher are interconnected, and the student teachers' needs for a theoretical generalization of their school practice should play a central role in determining the content of theoretical studies as well (Krull 2002). Furthermore, the practice itself should be organized in Schön's terms of a practicum – articulated as a space designed specially to provide an approximation to a real life environment or a simplification of this environment that is within student teachers' powers of understanding and, therefore, helpful for promoting their reflection (Schön 1987, Wilson and Anson 2006).

Unfortunately, in real teacher education programs even the implementation of the principle of mutual coordination of theoretical and practical studies is a complicated issue and, consequently, the quality of its most practical component – student teachers' school practice – suffers the most. One explanation for this is, as highlighted in the comprehensive study of six different types of teacher education colleges in the United States by John Goodlad, the low status of cooperating teachers in practice schools (in terms of their involvement in the design of teacher education programs) "... who serve essentially as mentors but may also serve in a kind of clinical capacity, bringing the outside world of schooling into the campus class" (1991:245). The implementation of Goodlad's last mentioned idea would be a solution to the integration of theoretical and practice-based learning in teacher

education. Yet, the issue of a school-university cooperation partnership in teacher education is a comprehensive issue on its own (see e.g. Goodlad 1994), which is not the subject of this paper.

Finally, it is important to mention that the Soviet totalitarian regime most seriously compromised the development of teacher educators' research capabilities. Estonian teacher education research is not an exception. Yet, the lack of research traditions, contacts and the unfamiliarity with contemporary research methodology undermine not only the capability of Estonian educators to do educational research themselves, but often denies them access to the already available research in educational decision-making. The recreation of know-how, skills and traditions needed for participation in the international research communities has taken more than ten years (since independence was regained) before research papers written by Estonian authors started to appear in international scholarly journals cited in the databases of the ISI Web of Science (see e.g. Mikk and Luik 2003, Lahikainen, Kirmanen, Kraav, and Taimalu 2003, Krull, Oras, and Sisask, in press).

## 6. Concluding remarks

Our analysis of the history of subject teacher education at Tartu University, with a special focus on the Soviet period, shows that, despite the ideological biases and restrictions, the Estonian teacher educators and educational authorities' main (sometimes hidden) concern was how to provide schools with well-prepared teachers. To this end, many measures were taken for improving the quality of theoretical and practical pedagogical studies. Developing clear programs and guidelines for student teachers' school practice serves as evidence of these initiatives. Also, the measures taken for inducting newly qualified teachers deserve the serious attention of today's teacher educators. Yet, these ideas were implemented in the conditions of Soviet centralism and totalitarianism, where ideas or programs of activities approved by the Communist authorities were considered as indisputable. In the conditions of a liberal democracy the decision-making processes have become more complicated, and sometimes even effective solutions, like guidelines for student teachers' school practice that were once imposed by totalitarian authorities, are categorized as not deserving of any attention, even though practice-based studies in teacher education are increasingly catching the attention of researchers worldwide<sup>11</sup>. Similarly, the re-establishment of some of the well-functioning institutions, like the integrated and harmonized programs of pedagogical studies (of course, with updated content and student

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<sup>11</sup> Teachers' practice-based learning has recently become a central issue of international teacher education research (see for example, Eilam and Poyas 2006, Korthagen and Vasalos 2005, Lee 2005, Meijer et al. 2002, So and Watkins 2005, Wilson 2006, etc.). This is a good chance to view the once existing programs in a new light and to base the content and organisation of teacher education school practice on a research-based foundation by joining the international research community.

teachers' school practice) calls for much greater efforts and good will on the part of teacher educators than was forthcoming under the conditions of totalitarian rule.

Probably the biggest mistake committed in the transition from a long governing totalitarianism to democracy is the blind denial of the past. Whether we want to recognize it or not, the Estonian educators' understanding of ideology, principles and content of teacher education programs and organization was, and still is, influenced by the Soviet legacy. Therefore, it is critical to identify which parts of this inheritance we have to excise and which parts of it we should preserve. Our historical case study provides evidence that uncovering the repetitive or recurring patterns in the principles, organization and content of a higher educational institution's teacher education program, even if, as in Estonia, it operated for decades under the conditions of ideological totalitarianism, is helpful for understanding the present and for planning the future of its teacher education programs. For example, the compulsory internship for newly qualified subject teachers was first officially introduced in the 1930s in Estonia, and then reintroduced in the 1960s and again in the 1980s during the Soviet period. A survey of schools employing Tartu University graduates as interns was even carried out in the 1980s (Bork 1986). At that time this component of teacher education had been ignored for almost ten years, before it was "reinvented" by some teacher educators as an absolutely new idea. However, this kind of amnesia is characteristic not only of Estonian teacher educators but of many other countries as well. For instance, the recent EURYDICE report on teacher education creates the impression that the first country that officially introduced supporting measures for new entrants to the teaching profession was Cyprus in 1976 (2002: 95). Yet, the idea itself was certainly not new to American or European teacher educators many decades earlier. Studying the recorded history of teacher education at particular institutions of higher education or in entire countries might therefore often be helpful for avoiding the reinvention of the wheel.

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