**Organisation of teaching practice and the aspects of professional qualification**

Teaching practice is one of the most essential elements in preparing future teachers. Teaching practice for students preparing to teach at basic and secondary schools is arranged in compliance with the Framework requirements, speciality subject-related curricula, practice guidelines provided by different faculties, and teaching practice in teacher training programs at the University of Tartu.

Teaching practice in the curricula amounts to a total of 10 to 14 CP: in the subject plan for observation and teaching practice (2 CP) and teaching practice (8-12 CP) at the MA level.

To organize and perform the observation and teaching practice successfully, special guidelines that state its content and scope have been drawn up. The aim of the practice is to obtain a holistic understanding of study and educational process in educational establishments, acquire the skills for observing teachers’ and pupils’ activities and also develop the skills for outcome analysis.

**Organisation of practice:**

According to their timetable, students pay visits to different schools of general education, observing classes in their own speciality as well as others in different grades. Later the observed classes are discussed with the teacher. Every observant determines the field he/she focuses on, afterwards he/she compiles a written overview on it in the log-book (observation data, analyses of observed activities, written paper on the chosen field of problems).

**Outcomes and suggestions:**

In the feedback questionnaire performed in the spring of 2007, the average grade given for observation practice was 3.3 (on 5-grade scale). The submitted comments as well as discussions with students brought out that the students wish to reduce the amount of time spent on observation and would be interested in trying to perform in some classes themselves.

The university has become aware of the increased need to integrate practice with BA level pedagogical subjects.

One of the difficulties is finding practice time suitable for everybody since students have different study plans in the different faculties corresponding to their specialties, which makes finding common free time extremely difficult.

**Teaching practice**

Dividing teaching practice into separate parts contributes to the individualization of studies and better understanding of one’s readiness for the job (part of the practice can be relegated to later periods, in the meantime choosing electives or optional subjects to complement one’s subject-related preparation). As a rule, teaching practice takes place in basic schools, Tartu University’s long-time collaboration partners in organizing practice. Thus, the supervisors are experts in their field, good at teaching and they have experience in supervising and counseling students. Students also have the possibility to request the possibility of completing the practice in a specific institution or under a specific supervisor. This possibility is granted in case the school is ready to accept the trainee and willing to provide the needed supervisor.

**The organisation of practice:**

Teaching practice is regulated by the guidelines that are well known to the supervising teachers as well as students. Its format is being constantly improved. Before teaching practice starts, a preliminary workshop takes place. The students will learn more about their obligations, tasks and rights, in addition to those which have already been fixed in the guidelines. The students will be assigned to their basic schools and will have supervising teachers in every subject. In addition to subject classes, the students have also the responsibilities of the homeroom teacher. The practice
bases for social pedagogy are different and it is possible to have practice outside schools, such as in alternative educational establishments, e.g. prison for juvenile delinquents. In the course of practice, the students collect material and finally produce their portfolio which describes all the activities of the practice period: notes about the observed classes together with analysis, summaries of classes taught by the students accompanied by the supervising teacher’s evaluation, activities in the role of class-teacher, self-reflection, and feedback from school. For summing up, a special final seminar takes place, providing the students with the possibility to express their ideas about the organization of practice, review what was done, what was successful and what was not, and also mention the drawbacks. In 2006/2007 there was also a kind of interim workshop gladly used by the students for exchanging ideas; a common understanding about the need for such interim workshops, perhaps even more of them, was prevalent.

Outcomes and suggestions:
All the students who passed teaching practice were pleased with the results. Feedback provided very good evaluations, the average grade being 4.6. It must also be pointed out that the attitude towards young teachers at schools was good and they were well supervised, helped and supported. Feedback from educational establishments gave positive assessments to students specializing as basic school teachers of several subjects, pointing out their good subject knowledge in geography, natural history and biology, social pedagogy, use of multiple working methods and good communication skills with pupils as well as with members of pedagogical staff. The students who had passed the module of Social Pedagogy, expressed at the workshop and in several conversations especially great satisfaction with their practice and studies, saying that they obtained a lot of confidence and were now more convinced that they wanted to work at school.

One of the problems the students emphasized was that they felt insecure when acting as homeroom teachers. Consequently this is something that should be paid more attention to. It is extremely essential that the students were serious about their work, strict towards themselves and pupils, feeling responsible for their action. Basic practice was considered successful but also difficult: since one had to deal with several subjects, there was little time for in-depth studies, one had to communicate with a number of supervising teachers, and the material base and possibilities of base schools were different. Basic practice would definitely profit from having observation practice at the BA level and establishing closer contact and collaboration between different faculties. It would also be necessary to consider how many simultaneous subjects the student could be responsible for without the requirements on his or her becoming excessive.

In this academic year, the students undergoing teaching practice have the possibility in the pilot phase to keep an observation practice blog for the purpose of developing personal and group-based analyzing skills (see http://eportfoolio.opetaja.ee).

In addition, the project “Quality Development in Teaching practice”, co-financed by the EU Structural Funds, the purpose of which is to harmonize the principles (including evaluation of teaching practice) of teacher training at the University of Tartu, distinguishing between different kinds of practice; create up-to-date textbooks and supporting study materials (including those obtained from the Internet) for both sides involved in teaching practice. A counselling and training system for practice supervisors as persons rendering support to students, also for counsellors and mentors, will be implemented. All this will undoubtedly contribute to intensification of development activities related to teaching practice.

References:
2. E-portfolio in Estonia http://eportfoolio.opetaja.ee