4. THE CORE OF SCHOOL PEDAGOGY

Finnish Teachers’ Views on the Educational Purposefulness of Their Teaching

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the core of school pedagogy both theoretically and empirically. The main concepts in research into teaching are introduced with some discussion on their traditional background. The differences in the terminology used in German and Anglo-American literature is acknowledged and their influence on Finnish research on teaching is discussed. Educational purposefulness is identified as an important motivational factor behind the teaching-studying-learning process. Empirical data from Finnish teachers and student teachers are presented as examples of their views on the educational purposefulness of their teaching. In the secondary school context teachers need skills to teach their subject matter in ways that would open up its educational meaning. Finnish teachers’ views on the educational purposefulness of their teaching are divided into two categories: general purposes in teaching and subject matter specific purposes in teaching.

Keywords: school pedagogy; educational purposefulness; secondary school teachers; teaching

INTRODUCTION

In many European countries, for example in Finland, the goal of education is to support the development of the whole person, rather than merely the cognitive domain (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014). This kind of education acknowledges the importance of social and affective domains in students’ development, including their emotional and spiritual concerns. In this chapter we discuss how didactics, the science and art of teaching, can promote this educational goal, and what kinds of views Finnish secondary teachers of different subjects have of the educational purposefulness of their teaching.

First, we will define some central concepts in the research on teaching and discuss the different terminology used in this field in Europe and in the United States. The two main concepts discussed here include didactics (Hopmann, 2007; Kansanen, 2002) and pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986, 1987). Second, we will discuss the nature of educational purposefulness from philosophical (Watermann,
1993), developmental (Damon, 2008), and didactical (Hopmann, 2007) points of views and show its importance in the totality of the teaching-studying-learning process (Kansanen, 1999).

Third, we will present some examples of Finnish secondary school teachers’ and student teachers’ views on the educational purposefulness of their teaching. Based on the empirical data we will discuss the general purposes in teaching that are mutual to teachers of different subjects and subject-matter specific purposes in teaching that are related to the subjects taught. Finally, we will identify the core of school pedagogy by reflecting on the empirical data against the theoretical concepts and discussions about research into teaching. The results show a strong value-base on holistic pedagogy among Finnish teachers that is in accord with the educational goals in the national curriculum.

MAIN CONCEPTS IN RESEARCH ON TEACHING

Didactics

The modern understanding of “Didactics” (die Didaktik) is an invention of nineteenth-century teacher education in Germany and in Nordic countries including Finland (Hopmann, 2007, 110; Kansanen, 2002, 430–431). In the Anglo-American literature the concept of didactics is not usually used with the same meaning as in our tradition. Kansanen warns against the negative connotations this term might imply to Anglo-American colleagues and suggest using some other terms in translating this concept into English (Kansanen, 2009b, 29–30). The Anglo-American terms that may have the closest meanings to the European didactics include the concepts of “pedagogy”, “teaching-studying-learning process” or “the science and art of teaching”.

Hopmann and Riquarts (1995) recommend using the term “didaktik” instead of didactics as a translation of the German Didaktik in the English language texts. They have made an effort to create a concept without the negative connotations of didactics while retaining a term that is close enough to the original in order to indicate the real nature of the term. Kansanen has followed their recommendation in his writings and used “didaktik” with a small letter (Kansanen, 2009b, 30). In the title of this chapter we have acknowledged this discussion on translating didactics into English and use the broadest concept available, school pedagogy, that is understood in similar ways by both European and Anglo-American readers. This term reflects the holistic and context-dependent nature of teaching in Finnish schools.

One important aspect of the German Didaktik that our didactics is based on is that it has both descriptive and normative faces. Values play an important role in German didactic models and they also guide the teacher in the teaching-studying-learning process. This has influenced the Finnish tradition in teaching mainly through the curriculum. The mutual value base of teaching is defined in the national curriculum and teachers of different subjects need to conform to the values in the curriculum.