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## A model of Innovation Schools: Estonian case-study

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### Abstract

A model of *Innovation Schools* was developed to strengthen systematic collaboration between schools and universities as teacher educators. It adopts a teacher education paradigm of the clinician-professional model in order to initiate and disseminate educational innovation and respond to changes in society. The model specifies four dimensions of collaboration between a network of schools and universities: traineeship, professional development, team teaching, research and development. After one full school year of piloting in one practice school, it can be concluded that the synergy between these dimensions may lead to innovation. Therefore, a continuation with large-scale implementation of the model is needed.

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*Keywords:* educational innovation; collaboration; student teacher traineeship; teacher educators; model for teacher education

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### 1. Introduction

Several European or OECD level documents and research papers have recently initiated a debate on the quality of teacher educators and teachers (Korthagen, 2004; MacBeath, 2012; OECD, 2013; Onderwijsraad, 2013; Schleicher, 2011; Snoek, Swennen, & van der Klink, 2011). In 2013, OECD organized the International Summit on the Teaching Profession (<http://www.teachersummit2013.org/>) in order to support the sharing of experiences of several countries that have demonstrated success in their educational systems according to PISA studies (<http://www.oecd.org/pisa/>). There is an on-going discussion whether too little attention is paid to teachers' professional development or professionalism in a context where society, education, and schools are changing (Grossman & McDonald, 2008; Korthagen, 2001, 2004; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Andreas Schleicher (2011) discusses several challenges in this context, making teaching an attractive career choice and improving our initial teacher education, teachers' continuous professional development, appraisal system, and evaluation according to

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the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These improvements are especially difficult to make considering the teacher shortages in several countries, like the Netherlands, United Kingdom, and Estonia as well. In the context of ensuring high-quality initial teacher education, three general principles are presented that should guide preparation of new models for teacher education (Schleicher, 2011):

- Education systems benefit from clear and concise profiles of what is expected from the teachers.
- The teacher education model should invest less in academic preparation and more in preparing professionals in school settings, with an appropriate balance between theory and practice.
- Flexibility for new routes of initial teacher education is important and necessary.

In the context of the conclusions made by Schleicher (2011), we focused on the first two principles by looking for the clear needs of 21<sup>st</sup>-century teachers and an effective format of collaboration between schools and teacher education institutions. A large-scale international project on 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills (skills, knowledge, and expertise students should master to succeed in work and life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century) provides a necessary basis for teacher education. According to the outcomes of this project (<http://www.p21.org/>), we should expect that new teachers should be able to guide students toward these skills. Therefore, the aim of teacher education should be related to these skills as well. 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills embrace the following: a) core subjects and 21<sup>st</sup>-century topics; b) learning and innovation skills; c) information, media, and technology skills; and d) life and career skills. The related list of milestones for students can be easily adapted to teacher educators who should act in their teaching work as examples for their students (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2009). According to this document, new teachers should be critical thinkers, problem solvers, good communicators and collaborators, literate in information technology, flexible and adaptable, innovative and creative, globally competent, and environmentally literate.

Considering the rapid changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, certain skills should be focused on in teacher education. Several authors, for example, have reported that reflection is a process that has clear benefits in teacher education. Reflection is defined as a cognitive process for learning through individual analysis of experiences and collaboration with others (Benamar, 2004; Mezirow, 1991; Moon, 2004; Schön, 1983; Sööt & Leijen, 2012). In teacher education, the definition introduced by Husu, Toom, and Patrikainen (2008) can be applied: Reflection is a process of self-examination and self-evaluation that teachers should engage in regularly in order to interpret and improve their professional practices. Based on the definitions and related studies, reflection is more successful if teachers form a community where they can evaluate, critique, and discuss their experiences with student teachers with different experiences and pedagogical content knowledge (Benamar, 2004; Dewey, 1933; Leijen, Valtna, Leijen, & Pedaste, 2012; Procee, 2006). These activities should be engaged in continually through the teacher education process, and reflection skills should be learned by both student teachers and teacher educators.

A new model of teacher education is needed to develop these skills and abilities organically in collaboration with teacher education institutions and schools. The traditional model that is widely applied in Estonia sets the full responsibility of teacher education on universities. Schools play only a minor role, one that is often restricted to a short traineeship session in the last year of the five-year program. A shared responsibility and dispersed student teacher traineeship in schools would be a possible starting point for initial revisions of teacher education for 21<sup>st</sup>-century teachers. However, teacher education institutions and schools are not prepared for their changing roles. Therefore, a new model for building a collaboration network of schools and teacher education institutions is needed.

The goals of this network should not be only to ensure the quality of teacher education, but also to develop and test new methodologies for collaboration and professional development. In general, the goal of the new network can be defined as providing educational innovation, which has been seen as a key to new technologies and scientific discoveries. It is “a multi-stage process whereby organizations transform ideas into new/improved products, service or processes, in order to advance, compete and differentiate themselves successfully in their marketplace” (Baregheh, Rowley, & Sambrook, 2009, p. 1334). In conclusion, the network of *Innovation Schools*

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