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Learning to be a teacher in Catalonia and Finland: commonalities and differences

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Abstract

Learning to be a teacher in Catalonia and Finland: commonalities and differences

The teaching practicum is a fundamental and indispensable part of initial teacher training. It is an opportunity for student teacher to connect theory and practice and to demonstrate their professional competencies. There is a broad international consensus as to the educational importance of school-based internships for future teachers. This article explores the specific approaches to the teaching practicum in Finland and Catalonia, focusing on similarities and differences between the two models. The article covers essential topics such as the structure of the practicum, the schools that host student interns, the development of the inquiry competence during the practicum, the experiences and activities to which students are exposed, supervision and mentoring during the process, and the assessment of this period. Ultimately, this article seeks to open a debate and to promote reflection on key aspects that might prompt a reconsideration and lead to improvements in the training of future teachers.

Keywords: practicum, future teachers, mentors, inquiry

Resum

Aprendre a ser mestres a Catalunya i Finlàndia: aspectes comuns i diferenciadors

El pràcticum suposa un element fonamental i insubstituïble en la formació inicial dels mestres, permetent-los relacionar teoria i pràctica i evidenciar competències professionals. En l'àmbit internacional, existeix un acord

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de la importància de les pràctiques en els centres escolars com a període formatiu. En aquest article expliquem el seu enfocament en el context finlandès i català, focalitzant en aquells elements diferenciadors i aquells que són comuns. Es tracten temes crucials, com l'estructura del pràcticum, les escoles formadores, la competència indagadora durant el pràcticum, les experiències i activitats formatives a l'escola, la supervisió i mentoria durant el procés, així com l'avaluació d'aquest període formatiu. Finalment, es pretén obrir un debat i promoure la reflexió sobre aspectes claus que poden ajudar a repensar i introduir millores en la formació dels futurs docents.

Paraules clau: pràcticum, futurs mestres, mentors, indagació.

Introduction

This article explores the central role played by the teaching practicum in initial teacher training, and it compares the models in place in two different settings, Finland and Catalonia, both of which are characterized by their strong commitment to quality education. It goes without saying each of these two contexts has its own peculiarities, but the purpose of this study is to delve into how, in these different settings, the practicum strives to meet the challenge of training future teachers with inquiring orientation towards teachers work, who will be able to analyze and transform education.

The teaching practicum is a fundamental and indispensable part of initial teacher training, as it affords future teachers the opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge of the profession as they immerse themselves in the everyday life of schools. In this way, they build bridges between theory and educational practice as it occurs in real-world contexts. The practicum is an introduction to the profession, a unique opportunity to learn essential practical skills for the teacher profession and a chance for future teachers to form more informed opinions (AQU, 2009). Indeed, the practicum is among the educational spaces with the greatest impact on the development of professional competences (Mauri et al., 2019), the construction of one's professional identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Korthagen, 2004; Zhang, 2016) and the ability to handle the emotions that emerge in the teaching profession.

During their internships, students have the chance to set their theoretical knowledge against what happens in the real-world context of their intervention. They are able to test out their own conceptions of the meaning of learning and teaching and of the factors and conditions that influence them (Giralt-Romeu et al., 2020; Heikonen et al., 2017; Saariaho et al., 2016). This is their first chance to think and act as professionals (Ahonen et al., 2015). Some studies have highlighted the important role of teaching internships in the development of competences related to regulation and inquiry within teaching practice (Saariaho et al., 2016). This development of inquiry skills be accomplished through the analysis of the critical incidents that occur during the practicum (Canelo & Liesa, 2020; Toom et al., 2015) or it can be achieved via a systematic analysis of the practicum as a whole, based on cycles of inquiry (Badia et al., 2022; Contreras et al., 2024; Flores, 2018).

There is a good deal of consensus that universities and schools should educate future teachers in ways that help them develop well-grounded educational practices (Cain, 2019).

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To this end, according to Baan et al. (2019), teachers in training should learn to carry out three types of inquiry: systematic reflection, use of research in decision-making, and development of cycles of inquiry. They should be able to do these things both at the classroom and school-wide levels. Systematic reflection allows prospective teachers to gain a deeper understanding of themselves as future professionals. This reflection can be based on information and tools such as observations, test results, and student feedback, all of which they can use to inform reflection on their teaching (LaBoskey & Richert, 2015). The use of research can take several forms. First, teachers can apply the results of research to improve their teaching effectiveness (Wiseman, 2010). Secondly, they can adapt the results of research to their own local contexts (Cordingley, 2008; Badia et al., 2021). Finally, teachers can undertake studies and conduct research themselves, engaging in the complete research cycle, whether they are analyzing problems that emerge in their own teaching, classrooms or schools, or whether they are trying out and assessing possible improvements (Zwart et al., 2015). There is evidence that when teachers actively participate in classroom inquiry processes, they are better able to deal with complexity and more adept at facing educational challenges (Vieira et al., 2021).

While internships undoubtedly offer clear benefits when it comes to teachers' professional training, the practicum period is not without difficulties or challenges. Most of these issues can in fact be turned into key learning experiences if they are dealt with via a process of reflection and discussion, preferably with the guidance of an experienced mentor or supervisor (Giralt-Romeu et al., 2021). Some of the most common difficulties have to do with the tensions that appear when there are inconsistencies between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge (Bendsten et al., 2019; Cian et al., 2017), with insecurity or concerns about insufficient mastery of the content being taught, with the management of student behaviors in the classroom (Sariaaho et al., 2016) and with experiences of uncertainty or frustration, especially when events force teaching interns to depart from their plans (Heikonen et al., 2017). Finally, another difficulty specific to the practicum has to do with interaction with mentors, especially when it comes to feedback and assessment (Canelo & Liesa, 2020).

In order to shape effective teachers and to ensure that they develop the professional competencies they will need to successfully meet the challenges of their training period, it is important to provide student teachers with supervision from both their university-based supervisors and the mentors at their placement schools (Manderstedt et al., 2023; Mtika et al., 2014). Meanwhile, the feedback prospective teachers get during the practicum is one of the most effective ways to support and guide their learning process (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Spooner-Lane, 2017). Indeed, future teachers place special value on mentoring sessions where they receive help and guidance from their mentors, who are able to offer the kind of professional perspective that makes what students learn in their internships more meaningful (Mena et al., 2017). In prior studies, student teachers have said they value mentors who are accessible and compassionate and who offer positive support (Hennissen et al., 2011). Although it is not very common in some contexts, "triad" style mentorship programs, which

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involve the university supervisor, the school-based mentor and the student teacher, can have an especially significant impact on teachers' professional development (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Mauri et al., 2019; Zeichner, 2010). It should be noted, however, that these different figures play different roles when it comes to planning objectives and strategies, and they sometimes differ in their expertise and ability to offer feedback (Giralt-Romeu et al., forthcoming).

As indicated above, the aim of this article is to describe and compare how the practicum is organized and carried out in Finland and Catalonia in order to identify areas for reflection. These observations and the resulting analysis might point the way toward necessary improvements that will help ensure that our future teachers are better able to think and act in an informed manner based on scientific evidence. We are convinced that this is the only way to prepare these teachers to successfully lead processes of improvement and change in education in the coming decades.

Data have been collected in both contexts from school administrators, undergraduate students and practicum coordinators, as well as from official documents associated with university teacher training programs.

The analysis of the similarities and differences between the systems will focus on teacher training and the structure of the practicum, the different functions and approaches of schools where future teachers do their internship training, the role of the inquiry competence in the practicum, experiences and training activities in schools, supervision and mentorship during the practicum period, and the assessment of the practicum. A better understanding of the similarities and differences between these models might guide us toward improvements in the practicum as a space for teacher training.

Teacher training and the structure of the practicum

In Finland, university teacher training programs take five years. Students first complete a Bachelor's degree in Education (three years, 180 ETCs), but, in order to receive qualification to work as teachers, they must then complete a Master's degree (two years, 120 ETCs).

Teaching students do internships at two different points during their initial training, the first between the second and third years of their Bachelor's programs (12 ETCs), and the second as part of their Master's degrees (the fourth or fifth years of teacher training, 8 ETCs). Student teachers need to complete certain theoretical courses defined in the curriculum before proceeding to the practicum studies. In both cases, students are able to choose when to do their internship training.

In Finland, teaching interns are placed in two different kinds of schools, namely, teacher training schools and municipal schools. This section provides some details about these two kinds of schools. The main difference between them is that training schools are affiliated directly with universities, and one of their main tasks is to train teachers during their initial practicum periods. The main goal of the initial teaching internship in the primary school

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teacher education is to familiarize student teachers with the basic instructional skills and how to teach different subjects. To this end, they are tasked with planning sessions, teaching classes individually or in pairs, preparing different kinds of teaching materials, assessing pupils' learning and learning about different approaches to teaching (through classroom observation).

Students generally spend their second internship period at a municipal school, as the capacity of the training schools in the country is limited and the priority is for students to do their initial internship there. During the second internship, the main goal is for students to be exposed to the everyday work of teachers in all its facets. In other words, while the first period focuses more on planning and timing sessions and activities so that students can get their first taste of professional activity, the second period is about practicing the wholeness of teacher's work, taking the full responsibility, and planning out and enacting entire days of lessons. In this second internship, teaching trainees also spend more time with other teachers and special education professionals, and they begin to have contact with students' families.

Meanwhile, in Catalonia, teacher training programs last four years (a total of 240 ETCs). The teaching practicum accounts for at least 50 credits. Students who want to continue their studies can enroll in Master's programs of one or two years in length (60 or 90 ETCs) in order to specialize in a given area.

The main goal of the teaching internship is for students to become familiar with the teaching profession in a setting where they can develop the ability to think and act autonomously and where they acquire critical thinking and teamwork skills (AQU, 2009). Beyond these broad goals, each internship period is adapted to the specific situation of the student, as the initial periods tend to focus on classroom observation while the later internships are more about designing and implementing classroom interventions. The time distribution of the internship periods can vary. All students do an internship during the fourth and final year of their degrees, but, in some programs, they are also placed in schools during their second and third years.

Teacher training schools: functions and approaches to teacher education

Teacher trainees in Finland intern at two different kinds of schools, teacher training schools and regular municipality schools, that belong to the field school network coordinated by the Faculty of Education. As we observed above, the chief difference between these two kinds of schools resides in the fact that one of the main objectives of the former is to educate future teachers (as the name suggests). These schools are affiliated with universities, and the school-based teacher-mentors there are specially trained to work with future teachers. The regular municipality schools belong to the field school network, that the Faculty of Education coordinates. These schools are regular schools operating in the surrounding cities, who have been willing to establish a collaboration relationship with the Faculty of Education, invest on

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teacher education and education of future teachers by providing the possibility to do the internship in the school under the supervision of a teacher at the school. Both the principal of the school and several teachers have decided to enact this collaboration. Faculty of Education provides training for the teachers supervising student teachers in their classrooms. When choosing the school for the teaching practice, student teachers familiarize themselves with the profile and characteristics of the school, and they can present a wish regarding the school.

Many teachers in teacher training schools have doctoral degrees and some of them are even members of research groups that conduct studies under the auspices of both universities and teacher training schools. Finland boasts a total of ten teacher training schools that are affiliated with university schools of Education throughout the country. Two of them are in Helsinki.

All teaching students have to complete one of their internship periods in one of these schools. The institutions have four main objectives: to offer quality education, to contribute to research through teachers' participation in research groups, to facilitate teachers' continuous training by ensuring ongoing professional development, and to train future teachers during their internships. Additionally, given that the teacher-mentors are familiar with classroom-based inquiry, these schools seek to foster research abilities in future teachers. All of these goals are reinforced at the annual gatherings where members of these institutions share their findings based on their educational practices and reflect together. Teachers at these institutions also receive support to carry out classroom-based research. For example, they are often given paid leave to work on academic articles or doctoral theses.

On the other hand, municipal schools (which are not formally affiliated with universities and instead are part of the Ministry of Education) are more similar to the kinds of schools where future teachers train in Catalonia. Offering quality education is among the central functions of these schools, but the training of future teachers is not explicitly established as one of their goals. Nonetheless, these schools do host teaching interns, and universities provide the school-based mentors there with training courses to guarantee the quality of the mentoring of future teachers.

In an interview, a Finnish undergraduate teaching student reported that she and her colleagues value having the opportunity to be placed in these two kinds of schools, as they are able to learn about two different realities within their country's education system.

The mentors in teacher training schools and municipal schools are committed to work in line with the teacher education curriculum, in which the intended learning outcomes, focuses of the practicum, amounts of the enacted and observed lessons, feedback, assessment, and all other details of the teaching practice periods are defined. In addition to this, there is no single or unified set of standards or criteria to assess the supervisory work of school-based mentors. However, these mentors hold regular meetings with their colleagues to offer mutual feedback, discuss their supervision of future teachers and seek out ways to improve.

In Catalonia, schools that host and train future teachers have to meet a series of requirements set out and regularly updated by the Education Department. In order to participate, educational centers have to draft a proposal for a school-wide internship plan.

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School must explicitly commit to taking on a role as an internship center with the approval of the faculty and the school council, and they must present a motivation letter. Schools are selected to host teaching interns in accordance with a procedure that is periodically updated by the Department of Education. Applications from schools are assessed by a selection committee of educational experts under the management by the local education authorities responsible for each area or school district. In order to be selected, schools must: a) meet the criteria of the new internship model; b) show that they are committed to innovation, teamwork, student-centered methodologies, competency-based approaches, effective support and guidance for students, and involvement in the community; c) have an internship plan whose objectives align with the overall goals of the Department's internship program as a whole; d) show that the actions set out in the school internship proposal are feasible; e) display collaboration with other schools, entities, companies or institutions; f) show a good level of faculty involvement in the internship program; and g) represent a good balance in terms of geographical distribution and type of institution.

Mentors are recommended to have at least three years of professional experience and to have experience coordinating projects at the schools. Mentors should also have professional specializations that are suited to the teaching interns that are assigned to them. Each school nominates an intern coordinator who is responsible for selecting teachers to be mentors.

Teaching interns are placed at different schools in each of their internship periods in order to gain experience at different types of institutions, including both public schools and publicly funded private schools and schools in varying kinds of social and educational settings.

Periodically, participating schools are assessed to determine whether they continue to meet the broad goals set out for the Catalan teaching internship program. Of special concern are issues such as how schools welcome, support and communicate with interns, the extent to which interns are able to participate in the life of the school, the interaction among school-based mentors, university-based supervisors and interns, the mentorship of interns, and the pedagogical exchange among the school, the university and the intern.

Inquiry competency during the practicum

One of the big questions facing teacher training programs today is how to train future teacher-researchers who are committed to helping to transform education by working to improve their own teaching practices.

In Finland, supporting the development of student teachers' professional agency and pedagogical thinking and the inquiry competence are the main focal points of initial teacher education (Kansanen, et al. 2000; Kansanen, 2005; Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2006; Jyrhämä & Maaranen, 2012). Student teachers learn about educational research and research methods in their studies, but they also learn to make connections between the research and practice of teaching and learning during the theoretical studies. The educational theories and concept are

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concretized in a variety of ways with practical cases and examples. When student teachers enter the teaching practicum, they are encouraged to utilize their research knowledge while they plan and enact their teaching, and reflect on and justify the pedagogical decisions regarding their actions and choices. Research literature is utilized in the teaching practice supervision, discussions and feedback sessions, and the supervising teachers concretely do this. This means that one of the fundamental objectives of the teaching practicum is for future teachers to learn to make informed decisions that are grounded in research.

In Catalonia, the teaching practicum is also designed to foster teacher-researchers. Indeed, at the heart of the practicum program is a commitment to ensuring that future teachers acquire four competences that are related to the inquiry process. First, teaching interns learn to connect real-world challenges and problems that emerge at schools with academic literature. Second, they design educational interventions and gather evidence of improvement and learning. Third, they analyze evidence and draw conclusions. Fourth, and finally, they draft reports on their inquiries (Giralt-Romeu, 2021). Indeed, the official documents that regulate teaching also refer to certain elements of the profession that are directly related to research and innovation, defined here as the processes that allow teachers to reflect on their own practices, to diagnose problems or needs, to propose plans for improvement, and to work together to document and report on experiences and resulting knowledge (AQU, 2009).

Despite the official importance attached to research, studies like the one by Giralt-Romeu et al. (2021) found that future teachers often do not prioritize carrying out inquiry and that they tend to have trouble envisioning the role of teacher-inquirer as part of their professional practice. Despite these challenges in the Catalan context, more recently there has been growing interest in incorporating inquiry processes into the training of future teachers. Recent studies such as those by Contreras et al. (2024) and Liesa and Mayoral (2019) have explored this topic in greater depth. These researchers have offered valuable contributions and guidelines on how to implement this inquiry-based approach to teacher training at the university level. These studies have emphasized the need to teach the inquiry competence, and they have offered a series of strategies to help universities develop an inquiry-based practicum**[1]**. In short, as long as changes continue to occur and challenges to multiply in the education system, there will be an accompanying need to meet them via more innovative, research-based approaches.

School-based training experiences and activities

In Finland, student teachers are responsible for teaching all the classes during the teaching practice for which the classroom mentor is responsible (Maaranen & Stenberg, 2017). Student teachers do their teaching practice in pairs, and they are supervised together. The internship placement activities and experiences are done in blocks of about five to eight weeks in length. Over these periods, the students alternate between co-teaching sessions

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conducted with other teaching interns and the mentor and individual sessions, where only the one student intern and the mentor are responsible for teaching. While one member of a pair of interns teaches his or her individual lessons alongside the mentor, the "partner" intern (the other practicum student) has the opportunity to observe other classrooms and spaces at the school. By way of illustration, the table below shows a typical five-week practicum plan.

Week	Experiences and activities
One	Classroom observation, both of the overall context and the lessons taught by the classroom teacher of reference (mentor), to gain an understanding of the functioning of the classroom and to have a model for teaching practice. Teaching students have a guide that tells them what aspects to observe. Based on this information, they draft a lesson plan, which details what students in their class will learn and specifies the structure and timing of each session. Students share and review these plans with their school-based mentors and then introduce any necessary changes and adjustments.
Two	Co-teaching. After planning session together, the pairs of practicum partners take turns to teach the material in joint sessions.
Three and four	As during the second week, student teachers continue to implement the plans they have prepared. During these two weeks, they also take turns teaching solo sessions with the mentor. In other words, if one of member of the pair performs his or her classroom intervention during the third week, during the fourth week he or she will perform observations in other classrooms. The other partner performs the sequence in reverse (third week, observation, and fourth week, classroom intervention).
Five	The fifth week is the final week to implement the planned intervention. The teaching interns finish the practicum period with co-teaching.

Table 1. Organization in weeks, experiences and activities of the practicum in Finland.

The practice of pairing teachers in the classroom to share the responsibility for planning and teaching classes and for assessing students has been done in Finland for a long time. It has attracted growing interest in recent years and has become increasingly common in a broad range of contexts (Rytivaara & Kershner 2012). Indeed, this kind of collaboration

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between teachers has been characterized as one of the fundamental ways in which schools can respond to the new demands of the 21st century (Miquel & Durán, 2017).

In Catalonia, the kinds of experiences and activities to which teaching students are exposed during the practicum depend to a large extent on the specificities of each university and practicum school. However, there are some elements that are common to the syllabi for the practicum courses at all the Catalan universities' Primary Education programs. For example, these classes are characterized by small-group seminar spaces at the university and by the completion of an internship period in the classroom. The goal in both of these contexts is to help students develop the professional competences they will need to be successful. Also common to all these programs is the task of documenting the teaching and learning process by collecting evidence and reflecting on sessions in the classroom, both the sessions that the student teachers observe and those that they plan and teach themselves. Depending on the university, the repository for this documentation is called a learning folder, learning evidence, internship diary, etc. Additionally, all of these universities emphasize training students in teamwork. This includes collaborating with university classmates (who are sometimes placed at the same school), with other professionals at the practicum school, and with the school's students themselves. Nonetheless, the syllabi do not explicitly say that students must carry out co-teaching during their internships, even though recent studies indicate that teachers tend to be more positive about co-teaching and more willing to adopt this approach if they have had the opportunity to collaborate with classmates during their internship periods (Duran et al., 2019). It would seem, then, that, unlike in Finland, co-teaching is not one of the core learning experiences for teaching practicum students in Catalonia. It should be noted, however, that due to the large degree of latitude that individual Catalan university programs have to organize internship programs and shape the learning experiences and activities of their students, it is possible that in certain contexts there is a greater focus on co-teaching. Additionally, given the growing interest in the topic, it may be the case that some Catalan teacher training institutions are considering implementing the practice in the near future.

Supervision and mentorship during the practicum period

As mentioned above, future teachers are supervised and guided during their training by both their university tutors and their school-based mentors.

In Finland, the main responsibility of the supervision of teaching practice is on school mentors, and they have active role as the most important supervisors. The school mentors follow the curriculum of teacher education, and especially the aims, practices and assessment in their mentoring work. Their main role is the everyday supervision of the student teachers with whom they work on a daily basis. In both types of school in the country, the students meet frequently with their mentors to discuss the preparation of the plans for the whole teaching practice, discuss the details of the lesson plans, what has happened in the classroom and to plan future classes. In other words, the mentor supports student teachers' planning and

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preparation, provides feedback of the lesson plans, as well as shares the context of the school and the specific class and supervising the intern's teaching practice. In addition, the university-based supervisors participate in the supervision of student teachers.

In Catalonia, the role of the school mentor tends to overlap more with that of the university supervisor. However, the functions of the mentor are very similar to those of Finnish school mentors, including giving future teachers an insight into the context of the class and the school, working with student teachers to plan their intervention, giving students the opportunity to contribute to regular classroom sessions, supervising their professional development, and offering them continuous and formative feedback.

Meanwhile, university-based supervisors in Finland act as students' "second" supervisors. Their role is more theory-based and more general and abstract than that of school mentors. The main responsibility of university-based supervisors is to help students to reflect on their experiences during their teaching practice and on the construction of their professional identities. They accomplish this by providing students with feedback of the plans and lessons taught as well as offering them reading materials and organizing debates and discussions. In other words, their focus is on aspects related to promoting students' identities as teachers and their metacognitive abilities. In Catalonia, university supervisors take on similar responsibilities, but, in general, they tend to play a more hands-on role during students' internship placements. For example, teaching students tend to plan their classroom interventions at the university (generally within practicum seminars), and only later do they share these plans with their school-based mentors in order to adjust them and make the necessary modifications.

In both contexts, there are meetings between the university supervisor and the school-based mentor to follow the progress of the student during the internship period. Additionally, there are sometimes joint mentoring sessions, called triads, where the three parties involved (the student, the school-based mentor and the university-based supervisor) meet to exchange experiences, ideas and feedback and to discuss significant topics related to the student's professional development.

Assessment of the practicum

As of over two decades ago, the practicum period in Finland is no longer assessed via a numerical grade as is the case in Catalonia. Instead, Finnish practicum students receive a grade of pass or fail. However, in Finland, as in Catalonia, teaching interns must meet the learning objectives and criteria set for the teaching practice periods. These are clarified in detail in the teacher education curriculum. They are elaborated explicitly with the student teachers in the beginning as well as throughout the practicum. All the feedback that they receive during the teaching practice is aligned with the learning objectives for the teaching practice. The school-based mentor, university-based supervisor and student teacher together make constant evaluation of the student teacher's learning and progress during the teaching

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practice. Most of the student teachers pass the teaching practice well, and progress in their studies.

In Finland, those students who are struggling to meet the minimum requirements for the internship period are exceptional, and there are only few of them per year. They are allowed to extend the period for an additional week (depending on the reason for the challenges) in order to complete the activities or to acquire skills for which they may need some extra time. If, after this additional time, they are unable to meet the requirements, or if the reason they have received a failing grade is considered sufficiently severe (insufficient teaching skills, insufficient actions and skills levels, challenges related to being in a teacher's role) the students have to retake the practicum course, as is the case in Catalonia. In both contexts, the most frequent issues that students experience in the practicum have to do with difficulties in understanding the structure and context of the placement school, attitude problems, and struggles to demonstrate the basic competencies they will need to be a teacher.

The assessment data gathered are similar in the two different contexts. For example, in Finland, students have to write a reflective protfolio on their internships with the goal of recording their reflections on the teaching and learning process. Students receive individualized instruction on the writing of this report, and it is discussed throughout the teaching practice in several occasions. In the portfolio, student teachers reflect on how they achieved the learning goals set for the teaching practice, their progress during the teaching practice, and taking into account all the activities, planning, enacting the lessons, pupil assessment, collaboration with peer students and the mentoring teacher etc. they have carried out. The drafting of the document is closely supervised by the school-based mentor. In addition, data are gathered on teaching interns' performance in the classroom, how they plan classes and lead lessons, how they learn to assess the members of the class at the placement school, how much the students in the class learn, and how well the interns cooperate with their colleagues. The evaluation is done in line with the learning goals set for the teaching practice, in constant discussions and feedback sessions during the teaching practice, and at the end based on the practicum portfolio and final discussion.

Similarly, in Catalonia, assessment of the practicum is generally based on a combination of direct observation at the placement school, reports from the mentor and supervisor, and written assignments wherein students reflect on their experiences. Additionally, in some cases, interviews or oral presentations are used to assess students' theoretical knowledge and their ability to put what they have learned into practice.

In both Finland and Catalonia, the final assessment is determined jointly by the school-based mentor and the university-based supervisor.

Conclusion

This text has explored the prominent role played by the practicum in both Finland and Catalonia. In both settings, it is an essential, meaningful experience that enriches future

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teachers' theoretical training, offering them an opportunity to apply their knowledge in real-world settings. In light of the similarities and differences outlined above, it is worth asking how we can take advantage of the strengths of both models in order both to enrich the training of future teachers and to create more space for innovative and effective teaching practices in these different educational contexts.

In organizational terms, in both contexts the practicum period is clearly structured and has well-defined objectives set out to guide the learning processes of future teachers. In addition, time is set aside for reflection in order to enable students to look beyond their everyday practices and to think more deeply about how they are constructing their own identities as teachers. There are some organization differences, though. In Finland the teacher training process is spread out over five years and internship periods occur at two different moments and at two types of schools (training schools and municipal schools), while in Catalonia a university teaching program lasts four years, but there is a strong emphasis on the internship placements during the final year.

Both the Finnish and the Catalan systems recognize the importance of giving future teachers the chance to carry out teaching practice at real-world educational institutions. There is a clear belief in both settings that the placement schools should be committed to quality education and that future teachers should be able to gain a variety of different experiences. Despite these similarities, here, too, there are some differences between the models. For example, Finnish training schools are closely linked to the country's universities and place a priority on research and professional development, while practicum schools in Catalonia are chosen and assessed by the Department of Education according to criteria based on innovation and collaboration. In Catalonia, it might be worth considering the creation of schools that are explicitly devoted to the training of future professionals. This could be a way to combine the strengths of both systems and to contribute to improving the education of future teachers and to boosting educational excellence.

Meanwhile, in Catalonia, there is often debate about whether the in-service teachers at our schools really have the training and preparation they need to mentor future teachers. There are doubts as to whether these active teachers have access to the resources and knowledge they need. This issue is closely linked to concerns with regard to the professionalization of teaching mentors. Teachers often feel that mentoring practicum students requires additional time and effort, extra work for which they receive little recognition beyond a certificate. Unlike their counterparts at training schools in Finland, Catalan mentors are not compensated economically or with reductions in teaching hours. Thus, it would be desirable to open a debate about how to recognize and reward school-based mentors' work. Currently, these mentors do receive certificates of participation in the mentorship program, and this certification can give them an advantage in the merit-based points system that determines job placement and other personnel decisions in the Catalan system. Mentors also have priority when it comes to participating in projects and in collaborative initiatives involving the Education Department and other institutions. However, it would be beneficial to go a step further and make more of an effort to guarantee that

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mentors have the tools, time and recognition they need to train future teachers without it representing an excessive burden that goes above and beyond their everyday teaching responsibilities.

In both contexts studied here, a priority is placed on bridging theory and classroom practice, and there is a focus on carrying out planning, instruction and assessment under the guidance of a mentor. However, Finland is distinct in that co-teaching is a more prominent component of the practicum. This allows students to share responsibilities and to learn collaboratively. This stands in contrast to Catalonia. While it is true that in the Catalan teaching practicum there is a focus on teamwork and collaboration among professionals, co-teaching is not considered a core element of students' learning experiences. This difference points to a need to reflect on how best to incorporate innovative approaches like co-teaching into teacher training to further enrich education programs and adapt them to the changing demands of the 21st century. The question, though, is whether Catalonia is truly ready to expand its teaching internship model to include co-teaching. Doing so would mean revisiting the predominant models in use in Catalan schools today, where there is still a shortage of human resources and where some teachers are still reluctant to work collaboratively or to be observed by their peers as they teach. Despite all of this, more and more schools are trying out collaborative models in the classroom and are encouraging teachers to offer one another feedback based on systematic classroom observation. Along similar lines, it is also worth pondering what prior competences should be promoted within teaching degree programs. University teaching programs should guarantee that future teachers are able to work collaboratively, think and reflect critically, and communicate effectively, all of which will help them to offer their classmates and colleagues feedback on possible co-teaching sessions. This is surely only a partial list of the competencies that would facilitate co-teaching and help guarantee learning.

In Finland and Catalonia, the tasks of supervising and mentoring teaching interns involve different combinations of roles played by universities and schools. In both settings, there is a recognition of the importance of active supervision and of offering both practical and theoretical support to help ensure the professional development of future teachers. However, while in Finland school-based mentors play a more prominent role in everyday practical supervision, in Catalonia the role is more evenly shared by mentors and university supervisors. This difference raises questions about how best to optimize collaboration between universities and schools in order to achieve well-balanced, comprehensive, effective supervision that promotes students' professional growth. This observation also invites reflection on the importance of adapting supervisory models to the specific needs and contexts of each educational system to ensure quality teacher education. As we rethink the role that each of the different supervisors (university supervisors and school mentors) should play, in our context we could consider giving school mentors more responsibility, given that these mentors spend the most time in the classroom with prospective teachers. Defining these different roles and responsibilities more clearly might improve the quality of future teacher training. It is clear that there should be more of an emphasis on joint meetings and

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collaborative mentoring in order to achieve a more equal relationship and a more effective exchange of knowledge between universities and schools. This closer collaboration would make it be easier to build bridges between these institutions and to strengthen the connections between theory and practice in teacher training.

Finally, the methods used to assess the internship in Finland and Catalonia are similar in terms of how they define objectives and set minimum criteria, as well as in the instruments they use to collect evidence. Both settings strive for a holistic approach to assessment that takes into account both students' practical, real-world classroom performance and their ability to reflect in more theoretical terms. However, the two systems differ in their approach to grading, as Finland uses more of a qualitative assessment style, with grades of pass or fail, while Catalonia assesses students using numerical grades. This difference raises questions about how differing assessment approaches might affect the training and professional development outcomes of prospective teachers, and how assessment could be improved in ways that contribute to continuous student learning.

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