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# **Neoliberalism, the curriculum development process and manifestations of creativity**

**Juha T Hakala, Kari Uusikylä & Esa-Matti Järvinen**

## **Abstract**

There is a manifest tendency for national education policy to follow global economic trends. In many western industrialized countries this relationship has intensified or strengthened within the last decades. The strengthening of this relationship has been seen, among other things, as evidence of the growing power of neoliberal ideology. The background reference for this article is the emergence of a neoliberal education policy ideology in the two creativity related strategies implemented by the Finnish government during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The main focus of the study was the concept of creativity, for it has appeared to be the prevailing trend within the Finnish basic education renovation program from 2010 to 2014. The sample (n=1163) of research was composed of expert teachers, artists and university level educated engineers. The results from the study revealed the demanding influence of the concept of creativity on curriculum planning. Perspectives on the significance or importance of creativity and creative education vary a lot, and, for instance, are influenced by the respondent's professional background. The results obtained from the study also provide the basis to reflect on the functionality of national democracy within the context of the educational policy decision making process.

**Keywords:** creativity, creative education, curriculum reform, neoliberalism, basic education

## **Finland and neoliberal educational policy**

One major influence on neoliberalism is considered to be Austro-British economist Friedrich August von Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (1945). In the book, Hayek envisions an economic scenario in which increasingly freer markets gradually become powerful self-regulating agencies, which stifle the functions and operations of individuals, communities and companies. Hayek points out that although modern society has laws and regulations to control economic activities, continuous changes in the dynamics of demand and supply, as well as competition can bring about unpredictable situations. Everyone strives, one succeeds and one fails, he proclaimed (Hayek, 1945)

For some, Hayek's predictive analysis was vindicated a few decades later when neoliberalism began to make inroads into European and American social systems, initially slowly but by the '70s and '80s it had begun to exert influence on the political structures and functions of Western democracies. Gradually these developments began to have an influence in the planning and administration of educational systems, and after the 1970s oil crisis the influence of neoliberalism began to be seen in European educational policies (for example Britain's). Because the main focus of neoliberalism was on promoting efficient markets, traditional educational values, such as altruism and solidarity began to take a back seat. Though it remained unspoken, economic rationality was becoming the key concept for social development. According to this ideology, efficiency was not only limited to economic affairs but also to the field of education. The purpose of education, according to the proponents of neoliberalism, is to impart skills required in working life. Neoliberal advocates began to talk of competences (Hilpelä 2004, 62). The most radical interpretation of neoliberalism considers human beings as objects - parts of a production chain, a target for the market and a customer. This "new person" was, according to this market ideology, an enthusiastic advocate of competition who performed to excel (performativity) and was imbued with the spirit of entrepreneurship.

The encroachment of neoliberalism into European educational policies was not accepted without criticism. There were very vocal critics as there were passionate supporters, and the tensions were brought to the fore during the '80s and '90s between researchers, teachers and public officials (for example, Husén 1994, 1996). However, despite the criticism, neoliberalism seems to have found its way into Nordic educational systems more quickly than those of Continental Europe (Rinne 2004, 153). As in other countries, in Finland the benefits of a compulsory educational system began to be questioned, with attempts to make schools cater to individual needs. With schools having been identified as parts of the national economic system, their products became "human capital" (Kalalahti & Varjo 2012, 48; Ahonen 2002, 177 - 180). By the middle of the 1990s, the neoliberal virtues, such as efficiency, competitiveness and result orientation had become a feature of Finnish educational policy.

This development reached a peak during the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century. The changes were so marked that local researchers began to talk of an educational policy for the third republic (Simola 2004; Varjo 2005). There was also talk of a results oriented educational policy (Lampinen 2003), and in the mold of the United States economist, Philip G. Cerny (1994) educational policy for a competitive state (Varjo 2007). The common

ideological denominator in all these terms was the conviction that educational policy should promote economic productivity and that the individual was the key to competitive development within both organizational and national economic systems. Significantly different from earlier developments was that, more than ever, educational objectives began to be viewed and analyzed in the context of other policy parameters, such as economic policy.

In retrospect, one of the most significant periods in Finnish educational policy was the early 1990s when the country was mired in deep recession. The economic crisis between 1990 and 1993 and the subsequent nationwide youth unemployment ushered in a period during which educational policy issues such as special talent, ability and school profiling began to be talked about (Rinne 2004, 154 - 155). For years, competitiveness and performance had dominated university or higher education practice and philosophy, but now they began to be reflected in the day to day functions of primary school education. Comprehensive schools began to publicly talk about the pursuit of excellence. Relations between schools and business intensified. Schools began to organize regular visits to companies and business enterprises run by young people were established, with the hope that they would nurture creative ideas and innovations.

### **Creative discourse as part of national education policy**

The beginning of the new millennium marked a period during which the structural role of the political establishment in regulating educational policy changed. The structural changes became more difficult to detect. This was also perceptible in Finland. We have chosen this article as a starting point for two separate but related strategies in which we intend to demonstrate the nature of this interactive relationship. From these strategies emerge the “creative discourse” that has become a part of Finnish economic policy discussion, which gained momentum during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and has finally emerged as innovation rhetoric. During the early part of the period that we describe here, “the creative discourse” propounded by the political establishment was not directly focused on school performance and practice (cf. Ministry of Education and Culture 2004, 2005, 2006). For the purpose of our analysis, the most significant period was the elementary school curriculum planning work, which began during the last decades of the last century, and consolidated the creativity rhetoric. The rhetoric was cloaked in different guises and triggered new hopes and demands targeted towards school performance and

practice. The following example illustrates how neoliberal policies are increasingly consolidating their grip on Finnish school performance and practice.

From the analytical perspective of our article, the most important development occurred in summer 2003 when the then Finnish Prime Minister, Matti Vanhanen's centre right government incorporated a creative strategy into its cultural policy program. The Finnish government derived and justified the creative strategy from national and international developments. Largely as a result of the rapid rise of Nokia, the giant mobile phone manufacturing company, by the end of the 1990s Finland was being branded as an innovative success story (Wilenius 2006, 43 - 44; vrt. Castells & Himanen 2002). Also popular at the time was the work of the American urban economics academic, Professor Richard Florida, who carried out research on the role of creativity in socioeconomic development (in particular 2002; see also 2005). Other creative and innovative reports and publications (Paija 2001; Benner 2003; Florida & Tinagli 2004) also served to highlight Finland as a member of the "creative nations" club. The Finnish government strove hard to maintain this status.

When Finland decided to prepare its creative strategy, the world economy was buoyant, and backed up by several years of vibrant growth, and there was a lot of hope and optimism for the future (Oakley 2006, 257 - 259). Apart from the West, the economies of some Asian countries such as South Korea, India and China had also grown fast as a result of innovation, which had emerged from creative thinking. Creative education at university and higher level education institutions was, therefore, seen as an indispensable ingredient for economic growth. (Tiberghien 2007). In brief, although the national creative strategy was, somehow, regarded as a modest development for a small country, it was, however, seen as a vital component of the country's economic prospects (Cronberg 2012). The creative strategy process was implemented as a multidisciplinary expert undertaking, and completed in 2006. The project's final report concluded that by 2020 "Finnish society will value and encourage creative ways of doing things, and obstacles to creativity should be dismantled." Education was mentioned in the strategy, but the actual references to school life were still tenuous. The dominant belief at the time was that creative education was applicable to elementary art and other creative subjects. The strategy, during this period, was aimed at the general development of elementary education and its "development atmosphere."

From the point of view of our article, more interesting was the next phase of the creative strategy process in which the Finnish educational system became closely connected with competitiveness discourse. The creative strategy outlined in Prime Minister Matti

Vanhanen's first term of office continued into the second, now rebranded as the innovative strategy which was formulated by a group of experts in 2007. The group completed its work in 2008. The new strategy was implemented by the Science and Technology Policy Council of Finland, and underlined by its conviction that "successful innovations are the cornerstone of national achievement." Based on this conviction, the experts contended that Finland's future prosperity depended on quality teaching, research and development work, and could only be sustained by "a broad innovation friendly learning environment" (Ministry of Education and Culture 2009, 4, 12). The rapid change in rhetoric from creativity to product development-related innovation is observable in the fact that in the 47-page innovation strategy, the word *innovation* appears 254 times compared to Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen's first administration creative strategy final report, where the word appears 25 times.

## **A discussion of creative education**

Meanwhile the country began to prepare for a broad based nationwide curriculum renewal. The curriculum in operation at that time had been prepared in 2004, and in 2009 it was decided to launch a new initiative to prepare a new one. According to the Finnish National Board of Education, the new curriculum had to be ready by the beginning of the school year, in August 2016. At the same time, it was decided to reform the system used to calculate the distribution of teaching hours per subject within the elementary school to comply with the sociopolitical changes. A special "distribution of teaching hours" work group was set up for this purpose and submitted its recommendations in spring 2010.

From the point of view of this article, one of the interesting observations, and at the same time, a feature of neoliberalism education policy was the presentation of the new curriculum as part of a nationwide democratic consultation project. Ordinary Finns, experts and interest groups were all given equal opportunity to comment on the new curriculum and the distribution of teaching hours system, either in writing or orally, in specially arranged hearings. The first one of these hearings was in 2009. The views of children and the youths were also sought during this exercise, and the expert findings and recommendations were presented to the Finnish Children's Parliament, an internet-based advocacy forum for 9-13 year olds. The Finnish National Board of Education also conducted an internet survey for students in junior high school (grades 7-9) as well as students in high schools and vocational

institutions. Altogether, 60 000 students participated in the survey. The youths' and children's hearings complemented the findings from the Youth Barometer project which was conducted in 2009, and revealed that schools were not doing enough to foster youth creativity and art pursuits.

The findings and recommendations of the "distribution of teaching hours" and curriculum expert work groups on creativity were in line with the views of the youths and children. Almost all the creativity related expert statements called for the strengthening of skill and art subjects, but there were different perspectives with reference to creativity. For instance, visual arts teachers would have wanted to place visual arts education somewhere between emotional education training and creativity, and also emphasize the right of youths and children to personal self-expression. In order for this to be realized, the position of visual arts had to be strengthened. Music professionals pointed out that music education develops the learner's creativity, sense of community, tolerance and identity in a unique manner. For their part, the Academic Engineers and Architects in Finland (TEK) interest group noted that a creative atmosphere "creates the basis for critical thinking and problem solving skills."

At this stage it began to look as though thoughts about creativity and how best to support creativity in schools were at least to some extent linked to the professional background of the participants. Two polar positions could be clearly discerned. On the one hand were the art representatives whose work involved creativity on a daily basis. For them, creativity was not only the basis for their work but also a source of balanced health development and welfare. On the other hand were the engineers, who had received their education from technical universities and regarded creativity as an indispensable component of productive innovation. School teachers lay somewhere between the views of artists and academic engineers (cf. Starko 2005). Overall, the views of education professionals tended to focus on the overall development of the learning environment rather than on some subjects or skill, such as problem solving. For them, "an environment favorable to creativity" had a different interpretation although creativity and creative atmosphere were considered important.

Incorporating the views of a wide range of national groups into the curriculum is not an easy process, and a crisis emerged in December 2010 when the recommendations of "the distribution of teaching hours" work group failed to gain approval from the government. The Ministry of Education and Culture promptly assembled a new work group to push the process forward. The recommendations of this new workgroup, which had been formed in early 2011, were presented to the various stakeholders in spring 2012. Hearings were conducted again,

following similar procedures as before, and all views and opinions were considered. Finally, after exhaustive consultations, the government proclaimed an elementary school decree (28.6.2012) on the teaching objectives contained in the recommendations of the "distribution of teaching hours" work group (Government Decree 422/2012). From the point of view of creativity, the "distribution of teaching hours" decree revealed that more lesson hours had to be devoted to the promotion of art and practical subjects. At the moment of writing this article, the Finnish elementary school curriculum was in the process of being circulated among the various stakeholders. The new curriculum is scheduled to be in operation by August 2016, and only then will it be possible to analyze how the concept of creative education has been presented.

## **Research objectives**

The aim of this research project is directly linked to the unprecedented national discussion surrounding the development of a curriculum for Finnish basic education. Bringing together the various recommendations of two separate "lesson hours" work groups, one curriculum development group, and the views of hundreds of interest groups and tens of thousands of ordinary citizens is a demanding process. And it becomes even more demanding when the education and profession of the different actors differ so much from each other. Our overriding assumption in this study is that the benefits of discussing the curriculum are limited unless all the actors have a common understanding of the subject in question. We examine the validity of our assumption through the concept of creativity. We have chosen creativity because it is an important and current topic in Finland, and also because of its impact on curriculum development. Our assumption is that creativity cannot be a vital element of neoliberal education policy unless the concept is, to some extent, understood without serious contradictions (Burnard 2011, 140 - 149). We do not claim that creativity is the most vital research concept, but given the historical development of Finnish politics and the numerous discussions in recent years, it is an academically fruitful subject to examine. We also justify our choice of research subject matter by pointing out that, in recent years, similar studies have been carried out in various countries (for example. Banaji et al., 2010, Lucas, B., G. Claxton & E. Spencer 2013).

In this article, we define creativity as an aspect of mental aptitude or endowment. Although many modern researchers refrain from giving a narrow definition of creativity (compare



Plucker & Makel 2010, 48), they nevertheless agree that creativity is the ability to identify or recognize new contextual perspectives. Creativity is the ability to create and develop unique or uncommon ideas, new perspectives and ways to do things (Treffinger et al., 2004; Sternberg & Kaufman 2010). We hold the same views and opinions as some of the creativity researchers: That creativity can emerge from many facets of life. The hallmarks of a creative person are defined as the ability to maximize the opportunities and possibilities offered in life, flexibility, fairness, ability to take risks, search for freedom and the breaking of boundaries. To this can also be added concepts, such as exploration and experimentation, self-expression, originality, verbal fluency, vivid imagination, an eye for aesthetical phenomenon, ability to think symbolically, flexible decision making and the ability to deal with new phenomena (Brookhart 2010, 128 - 129). The creative individual is also capable of detecting chaos from the ordered environment (10-12; Cohen 2006; cf. Maisuria 2005; cf. Navarro & Arrieta 2010).

In this article we intend to examine the concept of creativity with regard to curriculum development work from discussion with three professional, expert groups: 1) elementary school teachers, 2) artists (writers, visual artists, musicians), and 3) university level educated academic engineers. In our article, we do not, for instance, pay much attention to how much each of the above-mentioned components of creativity are mentioned in our subjects' view or opinion, but, rather, on how they differ from each other. The research subjects for our study have not, necessarily, been involved in the curriculum development process but they represent the views or opinions of expert or interest groups to which they belong, such as trade unions or other associations. Through them we can explore views and opinions regarding, for example, the work of the two separate "lesson hours" work groups.

We have chosen teachers as our research subjects because they are responsible for implementing the curriculum on a daily basis, and our assumption is that they are in a very good position to define creativity and how creative education can be implemented at school. On the other hand, creativity is the professional foundation for the work of writers, visual artists and professional musicians. Academic engineers are university level educated technical experts whose work often involves research, product development and innovation. Like the teachers and artists, they, too, are qualified to provide views and comments on creativity.

In short, the research question is: To what extent do the expert views of creativity differ from each other? Simultaneously, we also examine on which of the dimensions of creativity emerging from the curriculum renewal work the chosen experts have different views and

opinions. The results will provide the basis for answering the question: To what extent can a curriculum development process subjected to a wide democratic discussion and involvement assume the elements of a “national curriculum development process?” Or, is it anyway, possible to assume that all the professional and ordinary people involved in the national democratic process have the same mental concept of creativity, creative education or in general school development? The results will, we hope, assist us in determining whether an implemented education policy is really based on genuine democratic participation or on neoliberal education policy veiled as democracy.

### **Research implementation, validity and credibility**

The research study was conducted through online questionnaires in spring 2014. The questionnaires contained 37 Likert -style attitude responses. Thirteen (13) of the responses sought to define the concept of creativity. For example: “Many are just not aware, but creativity is everywhere.” The attitude responses about creative individuals and creative actions or performances were eight (8). For example: “Creativity needs an open and free environment to flourish.” The last batch of attitude responses focused on elementary schooling and creativity, and contained sixteen (16) attitude responses. For example: “Our school system stifles creativity.” The research questionnaires for teachers were sent directly to schools via email with a link to the attitude responses. Questionnaires were also sent to trade unions and other interest groups, and also posted on social media forums, particularly Facebook.

The main problem with online questionnaires is information security, i.e. research subject confidentiality and privacy protection. To guarantee maximum confidentiality, the response questionnaires were directly sent to the personal address of the respondent. In addition, each response group was given exactly one month to fill in the questionnaires, and after that the link was closed. Because the aim was to acquire the most appropriate and truthful information, individual respondents’ results were not analyzed separately, but, rather, as part of a whole batch of responses. This, as well as the confidentiality of the subject’s response, was pointed out to the respondent, right at the beginning of the exercise. The problem with net-based questionnaires is that they can only be answered by people with access to the internet, email and social media platforms. The assumption was that the respondent professional groups (teachers, artists and engineers) have access to all these applications.

However, whether questionnaires are sent by post or email there is always a tendency that it is people who, for one reason or another, are truly interested in the subject in question who are likely to respond. This tends to skew the results, and to eliminate this hundreds of respondents were chosen. The final result was a total of 1163 respondents (563 artists, 403 teachers and 354 academic engineers).

The response results were subjected to tests of significance to determine the validity of claims from the sample. The frequency distribution of the data was assigned an absolute and a relative value. Data scatter was measured in the traditional way by utilizing the mathematical concepts of the mean, scatter and skew. The distributional skew of the data was subjected to the chi-square ( $\chi^2$ -test). Expert group comparison was compared via the mean value test [analysis of variance analysis (ANOVA)] method.

## **Research results**

The research results confirm the hypothesis that the three expert groups chosen for the analysis have different views and opinions, not only about creativity but also about creative education. In examining the results we concentrated on differences that were statistically meaningful or significant ( $p=.000$ ), and although some differences were not statistically significant, they were nevertheless meaningful for our research purposes.

### *Is creativity everywhere?*

Teachers who participated in the study were of the same opinion as artists and engineers that: "Creative is everywhere, but many are not aware of it." Compared to the two other groups, the difference of the mean value from the response given by the teachers was quite significant at ( $p<.01$ ). All the research participants were of the same opinion that: "We are all endowed with creative abilities." And, once again, teachers were more positive than the two other groups in endorsing this statement. Engineers, on the other hand, were more guarded in affirming this assertion about hidden creative abilities ( $p=.000$ ). Artists, more than teachers and engineers, were more firmly convinced that: "Every child is born creative but loses it as he/she grows up." ( $p=.000$ ). Teachers and engineers, on the other hand, were more guarded in their responses to this statement. However, despite this variation, there were no significant differences in the views and opinions of teachers and engineers.

### *Creative education to boost innovation?*

Based on the above mentioned results, teachers, compared to the other two groups, are more optimistic about creative education. This optimism could be the result of them being constantly exposed to children and youths' creative potential, and an ability to recognize gifted individuals. On the other hand, there is a palpable sense of suspicion bordering on cynicism from the response given by engineers. Could this be the result of the long period of recession and downturn, which has buffeted the Finnish economy, and, in particular, the industrial sector? It should be mentioned that during the years preceding this study, tens of thousands of high skilled technological jobs had disappeared from the national economy. The conventional wisdom at the time was that creativity would spur industrial innovation, but this belief has gradually begun to fade. This suspicion is particularly strong among the university level educated technological professionals and is, to some extent, also observable among artists. Artists, of course, do believe that at birth we are all endowed with creative abilities but they are reluctant to admit or contemplate that creativity disappears with age.

The same creativity - innovation discussion also touches on the survey statement, "We Finns have not been able to adequately exploit our creative potential." The views and opinions of engineers and artists diverged widely on this statement, with the latter group much more suspicious than the former ( $p=.000$ ). According to the artists, Finns have not been able to adequately exploit the potential benefits from creativity. This assessment can be viewed as a thinly veiled criticism of basic education - Finland has got to do more to promote creativity, otherwise the nation will lose the cherished "creative nation" label bestowed by western economists.

### *Is creativity valued?*

The views and opinions of both groups differed widely on the statement: "It is claimed that creativity is valued but in practice this isn't so." Artists unanimously agreed with this statement, hardly a surprising assessment given the fact that they have long complained about the value of creativity "liturgy." According to the artists, in public, creativity is spoken of in glowing positive terms because this is how it should be done, but in practice nothing concrete is being done to promote creativity and creative pursuits. This criticism can be viewed as a reflection of the general critical trend in other countries where artists have to eke

a living from their work. This is particularly so for creative professionals who, for instance, have no permanent or regular teaching positions in appropriate educational establishments. There is also intense competition for art grants and the attendant benefits in Finland. And, of course, traditionally, artists' creative work has always also been regarded as some form of social criticism.

### *Busy life and creativity*

The research results also reveal something that is worrying a lot of people - the hectic lifestyle that has become a constant feature of modern society, despite the easy availability of time saving information technology devices and applications. Creative professionals are, in particular, concerned by the stifling effects which the hustle and bustle of this ever busy lifestyle has on creativity. Undoubtedly, this and the pessimistic assessment of economic life has convinced artists, teachers and engineers that: "the modern busy lifestyle is an obstacle to promoting and implementing creativity." The views and opinions of artists on this statement differed considerably from the other two groups ( $p=.000$ ). This is hardly surprising given that artists unlike, for instance, teachers for whom creativity may just be a "good thing," are directly affected by society's attitude towards creativity. For artists creativity is a necessity - a source of livelihood and a route to realizing self-esteem. And unlike teachers and engineers, artists did not readily concede that: "Creativity is still considered to be the domain of artists." Teachers were more inclined to agree with this statement than artists and engineers ( $p<.01$ ).

### *Pressure to be creative and productive*

The claim: "Modern creativity discussion is too dominated by the economic growth perspective," elicited strong divergent responses from both groups ( $p=.000$ ). The most critical group was the artists who are often, unlike teachers and engineers, opposed to linking the creativity discussion with economic interests. The artists' response also reveals this group's cynicism towards the "creativity is valuable" rhetoric, which in Finland at the moment, seems to have remained as mere talk. The results also reflect the current cuts in public spending, of which schools have been a part, with public funds being increasingly channeled to sectors that have economic potential. Once again, the views and opinions of teachers fall somewhere between those of the artists and the engineers, although all three groups agreed with the assertion that: "In working life there is growing pressure to be more productive than creative." Artists were more in accordance with this statement than

teachers and engineers, and the difference between the views and opinions of artists and engineers was quite statistically significant ( $p=.000$ )

#### *Features of a creative mindset and environment*

However, despite the differences in the views and opinions of all three groups, teachers, artists and engineers were concerned about the establishment of a favorable environment for creativity, and unanimously concurred with the statement: "Creativity needs an open and free environment to flourish." Furthermore, artists, more than teachers and engineers, thought that creativity required more than just an open and free environment to flourish. They were also of the opinion that creativity required a certain degree of uncertainty. This difference was reflected in the statement: "Risk avoidance (for instance in business) stifles creativity." Artists concurred much more with this claim than teachers ( $p=.000$ ). And unlike teachers and engineers, they were much more inclined to the belief that "a creative person should mess things up." The difference between artists and engineers on this score was quite statistically significant ( $p<.01$ ). Similarly, artists were, much more than teachers and engineers, inclined to abandon the comfort zone in order to promote creativity, and readily concurred with the statement: "Creativity means abandoning the comfort zone." The difference between artists and the other two groups on this score was quite statistically significant ( $p<.01$ )

#### *Internet, youth and creativity*

The research study was also aimed at defining creativity within the context of cultural change by, for instance, asserting that: "Net creativity is part of our culture." The results reveal that an information technology based society is regarded as part of modern culture. All the respondents agreed with the claim, but, surprisingly, artists, more than engineers, regarded net creativity as a component of modern culture ( $p=.000$ ) The creative potential of young people coming into the labor market is appreciated by the respondents, with, of course, some notable differences on how the issue is perceived. In this regard, artists, more than teachers and engineers, disputed the claim that: "People over 35 are more creative than their young counterparts." ( $p<.01$ ). All the respondents concurred with the claim that: "Instead of looking for answers, new questions should be asked, instead." But, again, there were some differences in how this issue was perceived. Teachers and artists were more in agreement with this statement than the academic engineers ( $p=.000$ ). What could be the most likely explanation

for these differences, in particular, with reference to engineers? That they are more used to solving definable, limited problems in, for instance, product development work?

### **Conclusion - creativity discussion muddled by economic stagnation.**

When in 2003 the Finnish government decided to develop a creative strategy, the political rhetoric of creativity was comprehensive and, at the same time, in tandem with the current economic developments. However, after a few years the economic situation changed and the government had to grapple with the financial crisis wreaking havoc on many western economies, and there was a tangible fear that it would balloon into a recession. In this climate, the Finnish government's cultural policy rhetoric changed, with the word "creativity" being supplanted with the more economic sounding "innovation." The government began to implement an innovation strategy, which it was hoped would promote industry and business. The economic developments outlined above affected the results obtained in this study, and is discernible in how the three professional groups viewed the concept of creativity.

In interpreting the results from the study, it should be borne in mind that creative education comprises a small part of the Finnish elementary school curriculum. However, despite this, the political pronouncements and the national discussion arising from the curriculum development process indicate that creativity is considered important. Finns consider creativity as an elementary education objective, and want to brand their country as a creative nation. This is validated by the results from this study in which, in general, the views and opinions on creativity tend to be quite strong. Guarded, reserved and unsure views and opinions are scarce in this study. For university level educated engineers in industrial production, creativity was synonymous with product development. For them, creativity is an important national attribute if it promotes economic innovation. The "soft" side of creativity was represented by artists who viewed it as a wholesome human welfare enriching process. The views and opinions of teachers were situated somewhere between these two extremes.

The research survey also revealed that teachers are, by the nature of their profession, "incorrigible" optimists. They are able to see something positive and beautiful from the noise and clamour, mediocrity and working with "clients" who have very short attention spans. From the results obtained from this study, it would appear that teachers consider the creative sparks emerging from this process empowering and gratifying. University level educated engineers and artists are, in this respect, rather reserved. In particular, the views and

opinions of artists about creativity are more critical than those expressed by teachers or engineers and border on cynicism, particularly with reference to working life. They are particularly disappointed by the fact that working life demands more quantity and accomplishment than quality, originality in thinking and creativity. This is also revealed in the responses of engineers', although it is expressed in more subdued tones. From this study, the views and opinions of artists revealed that they see a serious discrepancy between the political pronouncements to promote creativity and what is actually being done to achieve this object. In their view, the favorable conditions for promoting and nurturing creativity in Finland have been taken away. To some extent, all the respondents are of the opinion that the favorable conditions for promoting and nurturing creativity, as well as managing the welfare and security of one's self and those close to us, have been eroded and compromised by busy work schedules.

The results of this study also refer to the intergeneration change and adaptation of creative culture. Technology, particularly the internet and social media, are both regarded as devices and systems supportive to the creative process. Artists were more supportive of this view than teachers and engineers. According to the Dutch researcher Gert Biesta (2006), one of the enduring themes in the tradition of western education is the technological expectations, which, in this case, can be viewed at two levels: first, as the rapid "technicalization" ("ipadization") of schools with new information technology devices. Secondly, as he alludes to (Biesta, 2006, 73 – 74), education, in itself, is regarded as a tool or device to achieve certain preset objectives, such as economic ones. This means that, more and more, basic education is not just about acquiring knowledge and skills in the traditional sense, but also includes those skills aimed at reinforcing certain economic advantages, such as the development of creativity as a component of the problem-solving technical solution. From an educational point of view, this is a promising development, which could also mean the improvement of the school environment through the promotion of new, efficient teaching methods. The risk, however, is that all education related inconveniences, problems, contradictions and development related views and opinions could be interpreted as being detrimental to a "smooth flowing production process" The criticism expressed by artists serves as a timely warning when confronting these inconveniences.

All in all, the research results partly confirm and reinforce the main attributes of neoliberal educational policy, which, in everyday parlance, are so powerfully manifested in techno-economic terminology and dialogue. According to this ideology, education is



viewed as one of the pillars of international competitiveness, and its objectives and goals are to highlight issues that promote and strengthen competitiveness. The aim of education is therefore to produce “competence equipped,” innovative, enterprising workers to run and service business and industry. For the education system to be economically efficient, the curriculum has to promote competitiveness. Both the results from this research survey and the preceding nationwide curriculum discussion in Finland indicate that creativity or innovation is, undoubtedly, still considered to be the main objective of education.

This analysis also serves to highlight another dimension of the discussion in which education is seen as a tool or mechanism for efficient economic development, or in the Finnish context, as a positive antidote to years of sluggish economic performance. According to Jürgen Habermas, one logical result of the neoliberal philosophy worldview could be the emergence of fatalism, a downright fatalistic attitude towards the future, which, in the extreme, provides fertile ground for the “there is no alternative” attitude (Habermas 2006, 12). At the same time while governments are actively involved in establishing national education policies they are also, ironically, losing power and control over their educational systems. This significant development is due to the increasing powerful positions of global economic institutions and multinational organizations, or, in some cases, the power of some individuals. Education researchers base these developments on trends observable from the 1990s when they noticed that national education systems were increasingly beginning to resemble each other (for example, Rinne 2004, 153; Varjo 2007, 6). According to some critics, the consequences of this development could be a situation in which the traditional role of education as a social change agent disappears (compare Usher & Edwards 1994).

Because the curriculum development process is a broad based democratic exercise, it is observable that managing the original concept becomes difficult. Creativity, as a concept, gains new angles and dimensions. The problem in education planning derives from the fact that the concept of creativity is difficult to define because creativity itself is considered to be a rather vague and blurry concept. The same muddled confusion emerges from the discussion on creative education, where the definition and scope of the process depends on the individual’s professional perspective. In the end, perhaps, it is only teachers who have an idea of what creative education is and how it should be taught at school. The end result is the refrain: (“Creativity is a valuable human attribute,”) - a term that, sadly, does not offer much to advance either educational planning or implementation. Critics of the neoliberal education policy say that this is how the democratic process beholden to market

forces operates - the people have spoken and the peoples' voice has been heard (compare Ball 1998, 2001, 2004).

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