

CHAPTER 5

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AN INSPIRING SCHOOL DAY:

AN EFFORT TO TRANSFORM RESEARCH FINDINGS INTO POLICY

Title of the book: Improving the Quality of Childhood in Europe · Volume 6

Editors: Michiel Matthes, Lea Pulkkinen, Belinda Heys, Christopher Clouder, Luis Manuel Pinto

Published by: Alliance for Childhood European Network Foundation, Brussels, Belgium · ISBN: 9789082290912

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SUMMARY

This paper is a description of a report that the author prepared in the winter of 2015 at the request of the Minister of Education in the previous government of Finland. The purpose of the report was to collect information based on research and effective practices on the impacts on student well-being of a flexible school day and to make development proposals concerning an appropriate structure for a school day that would encompass lessons, club activities, and morning and afternoon activities. The report found indications of strong pressures to modify the school day. Research results concerning the significance to student well-being of activities organized at school outside the actual lessons were unreservedly positive from the perspective of academic success, the students' personal development and the community. The report was completed before the election of the present Parliament in the spring of 2015; it proposed an action plan for the new government. The key proposal was that one hour of freely selected and voluntary club activities should be included in the school day of each student. The present Minister of Education is aiming to include more cultural activities and physical exercise into the school day.

1 INTRODUCTION AND KEY PROPOSALS

'An inspiring school day' refers to the title of a report¹ that I prepared at the request of Krista Kiuru, the Minister of Education of the former government of Finland (Pulkkinen, 2015). The request included two tasks (1) to write a report containing information on the impacts of a flexible school day on students' well-being, based on research and effective practices; and (2) to make development proposals concerning an appropriate structure for a flexible school day that would also encompass extramural morning and afternoon activities.

The concept of a flexible school day refers to the 2013 initiative of the National Board of Education to encourage schools to arrange out of school time activities flexibly during the school day (whenever no formal lessons were taking place): in the morning, in the afternoon, and at midday. For the title of the report, I preferred the concept of an 'inspiring school day' to 'a flexible school day' as it is a less technical and more content-related concept. An inspiring school day has the potential to offer to students close and encouraging human relationships and diverse activities that stimulate enthusiasm for learning and a willingness to take part in building their own futures.

School starts in Finland in the autumn of the year when the child becomes seven years old. The 9-year compulsory education in the comprehensive basic school² lasts until the age of 16. School days in Finland do not have regular start and end times, but the length of school days depends on the number of 45 minute lessons (plus a 15 minute break after each lesson) that teachers give in a certain day. Particularly pupils in grades 1-4 who have 19 to 23 lessons per week (there are five school days in a week) have much shorter school days than their parents' workdays. Most Finnish mothers and fathers work full-time, and short school days leave many children without adult supervision for several hours daily. School days sometimes start later than 8 a.m. which

means that children have to leave for school alone in the morning when their parents have already left for work.

The lack of adult supervision of children in Finland has been a much debated topic for twenty years. The author initially contributed to this discussion by conducting an experimental study from 2002-2005 on an integrated school day in which extracurricular activities³ including club activities and children's care in the morning and afternoon were organized (Pulkkinen, 2012). An important stage was reached when morning and afternoon activities became available for first and second graders in 2004, but children in all grades also need club activities at school. It has been difficult to find a solution to the problem of how the school day is structured that would satisfy the needs of children and requirements of the different political parties and the Trade Union of Education.

Key proposals contained in the report are (Pulkkinen, 2015, English abstract):

- One hour freely selected and voluntary club activities should be included in each student's school day. These activities would be organized not only by school personnel but also by art and cultural specialists, libraries, crafts associations, sport and youth organisations, and other partners. The municipality's cultural services would have the task of drawing up a list of local actors (individuals and initiatives) interested in organizing club activities and working together with the schools.
- In consultation with students and parents, a diverse range of club activities will be developed that may include both instructor-led clubs for pursuing various hobbies or student-centred workshop activities. These activities would be flexibly scheduled to take place during the school day (at times when formal lessons are not taking place), taking student well-being and equal access to club activities for all students into consideration.
- Updating the current regulations concerning morning and afternoon activities in the comprehensive school and linking them to the rearrangement of club activities.
- Lessons as part of the school day would start at 9 o'clock.
- The action plan of the next government should provide for the drafting of statutes and an investigation into the costs with the aim of making the offering of club activities an established practice, and integrating morning and afternoon activities with the club activities. It needs to be made clear that one hour of club activities a day does not meet the needs of younger students and students in need of particular support provided by the safe presence of an adult in the mornings and the afternoons. The reform aims to encourage cooperation between the various operational sectors of the Ministry of Education and Culture, so that in addition to resources allocated to general education, the criteria for granting assistance from government funds for cultural, youth and sports activities would serve the efforts to provide more club activities for children at school.

2 THE IMPACTS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS OF OUT OF SCHOOL TIME ACTIVITIES OFFERED AT SCHOOL

The key proposals that I presented in the report were based on (1) research results concerning the impact of out of school time activities on children's well-being and development, (2) effective practices, (3) international trends,

and (4) other pressures to bring about changes to the learning environment at school. They are summarized below.

2.1 Research conducted and theoretical frameworks

2.1.1 Extracurricular activities and after-school programmes

A literature review on the significance of out of school time activities for students revealed that most studies on this topic have been conducted in the United States and in other Anglo-Saxon countries where extracurricular activities at school have a long tradition. Most studies have focused on students in lower or upper secondary school (from age 12 onwards), more rarely on students in primary school (below 12 years of age). Out of school time activities include so called extracurricular activities and after-school and community programmes. The term “out of school time activities” is used here to cover extracurricular activities and after-school programmes.

Extracurricular (EC) activities are held at school but they are not part of the academic curriculum. They may exist at all levels of education from school up to college and university education. They are voluntary, social, and philanthropic rather than scholastic activities offered or supported by the faculty, and are often organized and directed by students. EC-activities range from music, theatre, visual arts, photography and sports to entrepreneurship, writing workshops, and newspaper editing. Extracurricular activities provide the opportunity to experiment in activities that may represent a career interest or lead to a career, and to excel in out of school time activities if school work is difficult for a student. Through diverse activities, students can improve their organizational skills, develop social skills, and increase their creativity.

Studies on extracurricular activities have focused on their possible protective effects against risk behaviours such as the use of alcohol and drugs, and antisocial behaviour; educational attainment such as school dropout, school success, and the continuation of studies after the compulsory school; and promotion of positive development such as self-esteem, emotional well-being, and peer relationships. A review of these studies can be found in an article by Farb and Majatsko (2012). It covers 52 studies conducted in 2005-2009. A review of earlier findings with regards to after-school programmes can be found in a book edited by Mahoney et al. (2005).

After-school and community programmes (ASP) are activities that take place on school days in the afternoons, in the evenings or at weekends, and aim to help parents with childcare while they are at work (Little, Wimer, & Weiss, 2008). Thus the motivation for participating in these activities originated from working parents who wanted their children to be supervised. It is believed that children who are unsupervised are at risk of falling into undesirable activities such as delinquency, drug-use or teenage sex. There is research evidence from the United States that during afternoon hours from 15h00 to 18h00 youth are at risk of participating in undesirable activities. Many adolescent students are without adult supervision for more than four hours each day. If the total number of hours per week exceeds 30 the risk is significantly higher than if it is less than 30. For younger children lower criteria for various risks have been set; even ten hours per week without adequate

supervision increases a developmental risk, for instance, for depression and substance abuse (Richardson et al., 1993). With regards to the development and implementation of ASP activities the best ways of expanding students' opportunities to participate in activities that would support their learning and development from preschool to high school were discussed among practitioners and policy makers in the USA (Little et al., 2008).

ASP programmes have been developed for the following three reasons: taking care of school-aged children, encouragement of positive development, particularly in terms of school achievement, and offering extracurricular activities at school. The basic goals of the programmes are to provide safety, support positive development, and offer support for learning. There is a great variety of activities available in ASP-programmes such as tutoring and mentoring of learning, arts activities (music, theatre, visual arts), technology, natural sciences, and civic education in various forms. These activities are arranged after lessons, and they last 2-3 hours daily, from 15h00 to 18h00. The activities may take place at school, in a museum, a library, a park, a church, a community space for young people, and in health-related and other organizations. Scouts and 4H-activities also belong to ASP-activities.

Studies on after-school and community programmes from 1998-2008 have been reviewed in a report by Little et al. (2008). People have had high expectations with regards to the positive effects of the ASP activities on school achievement, but it was found out that the ASP programmes with a couple of hours of extra activities daily do not automatically increase test scores, particularly, when they are targeted at children living in difficult conditions. The results, based on meta-analyses of tens of studies concur with the results of studies on extracurricular activities, and confirm that participation in these activities is beneficial for the students on a more general level. Positive outcomes include more positive attitudes toward the school, regular school attendance, less behavioural problems at school, less substance use, improvement of self-esteem, and better health habits. The content and quality of a programme affect the outcomes.

2.1.2 Finnish experiments

Information on the impacts of out of school-time activities on students, school personnel, and parents was also received from Finnish experiments and practices. Research was connected, particularly, to the integrated school day (ISD) experiment conducted from 2002-2005 (Pulkkinen, 2012). The term ISD refers to a school day in which out of school time activities and children's care were organized at school before and after lessons, and sometimes between lessons as a part of a "siesta" at midday. School days mostly start in Finland at 8 in the morning, but not regularly, and they do not end at a regular time. The lunch break is normally short in Finnish schools, about 20 minutes. When the lunch break is longer, it allows more quiet time in which to eat lunch and gives students time for a rest and some recreation before lessons start again. A longer lunch break lengthens the school day and reduces the time that children spend on their own, but it also lengthens the teachers' working days. (Teachers are paid on the basis of the number of hours they spend teaching lessons). The way that the state (and the trade union) defines teachers' working hours puts a strain on the efforts being made to reform the school day.

Within the ISD programme, students could stay at school under adult supervision. These adults were sometimes teachers who were paid extra for this work, but mostly these adults were not teachers. For instance, the part-time jobs of classroom assistants were lengthened to being full-time. Much supervision was also arranged by people who were recruited to supervise the children's activities and hobbies. Out of school time activities were available for all pupils from the first to the ninth grade. Activities that involved music, art, and manual skills were most beneficial for children in terms of social skills, skills for work, and achievements (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012, 2014; Metsäpelto, Pulkkinen, & Tolvanen, 2010).

More recent experiments in Finland concerned the flexible school day project; the Schools on the Move project in which physical activities have been increased during the school day during breaks and at other times; and the cooperation of arts education at school with arts education in cultural and civic organizations such as Children's Cultural Centres. All these experiments have been positively received by students and parents and they have increased children's access to recreation and provided them with a wider range of opportunities in which to develop their skills.

2.1.3 Theoretical approaches

Expectations about the positive effects of out of school time activities on students have mainly been based on the following three theoretical approaches: the bioecological model of human development; the positive youth development approach; and school engagement.

2.1.3.1 The bioecological model of human development

The bioecological model of human development is a well-known theory that recognizes the effects of different systems on human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The four original systems included in the model, as modified by Bronfenbrenner (1989), plus the fifth system which he added to the original model, are as follows (pp. 201, 226-228).

- The *microsystem* is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical and material features, and containing other persons with distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality, and systems of belief.
- The *mesosystem* which comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person (e.g., the relations between home and school, school and the workplace, etc.). In other words, a mesosystem is a system of microsystems.
- The *exosystem* which encompasses the linkage and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not ordinarily contain the developing person, but in which events occur that influence processes within the immediate setting that does contain that person (e.g., for a child, the relation between the home and the parent's workplace; for a parent, the relation between their child's school and the neighborhood in which the family lives).
- The *macrosystem* consists of the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or other broader social context, with particular reference to the developmentally instigative

- belief systems, resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life course options, and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in each of the systems. The macrosystem may be thought of as a societal blueprint for a particular culture, subculture, or other broader social context.
- The *chronosystem* is focused on developmental changes triggered by life events or experiences. These experiences may have their origins either in the external environment (e.g., the birth of a sibling, entering school, going through a divorce), or within the organism (e.g., puberty, having a severe illness). The critical feature of such events is that they alter the existing relation between person and his/her environment, thus creating a dynamic that may instigate developmental change.

There are four principal components in the model: the *process* that leads to human development; the *person* whose characteristics affect the power of the process; and the *contexts* and *time* periods, in which the processes take place.

The proximal processes, which are enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment such as comforting a child; child-child activities; learning new skills; caring for others; and performing complex tasks, are most important for the development of a person. For development to occur (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 798):

- a person must engage in an activity
- the activity must take place on a fairly regular basis over an extended period of time
- the processes must become more extensive and complex to provide for the future realization of evolving potentials
- there must be key people with whom the developing person interacts: such as parents, siblings, peers, teachers, mentors, close friends, or coworkers.

When this model is applied to out of school time activities, it is essential that the quality of the activity is good; that participation in the activity is regular and lasts for a sufficient length of time; that the complexity and demands of the activity increase; and that there is reciprocity in the interaction between the child and the people who are important to him or her.

2.1.3.2 The positive youth development approach

The positive youth development approach includes six core principles (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006, p. 896):

- All youth have the inherent capacity for positive growth and development.
- Positive development is possible when youth have relationships and contexts that support their development.
- The promotion of positive development is advanced by the participation in multiple and rich relationships and contexts.
- Support, empowerment, and engagement are important developmental assets.
- Community is a critical system providing resources for positive youth development.
- Youth are major actors in their own development and they have significant personal resources which enable them to create the kinds of relationships, contexts, and communities that enable positive youth development.

These principles highlight the significance of youth participation in community and their role as actors in their own and others' positive development. This approach is based on research findings that show that already in middle

childhood (ages 7 to 12) children are active in making choices according to their preferences, and that the intensity of their participation in activities depends on the opportunities that home, school, and the larger community offer to children. Physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development take place in the context of warm and nurturing human relationships that strengthen a sense of belonging; offer guidance from adults; and build physically and psychologically safe settings for life and the supervised activities in which the children are engaging.

A central construct in the positive youth development approach is the framework of developmental *assets*. It is a theory-based model linking features of ecologies (external assets) with personal skills and capacities (internal assets). They form “building blocks” that prevent high risk behaviours and enhance developmental success (Benson et al., 2006). External assets include, for instance, family support, positive family communication, a caring school climate, adult role models, and high expectations of parents and teachers for the young person to do well. Internal assets include, for instance, school engagement, bonding at school, taking responsibility, interpersonal competence, self-esteem, and having a positive view of one’s own future. Out of school time activities can be seen as a developmental asset that, in combination with other assets, promotes positive development.

2.1.3.3 School engagement

A third approach to the effects of out of school time activities on children is focused on the construct of school engagement. School engagement is considered to be crucial for achieving positive academic outcomes and preventing dropping out (Fredricks et al., 2004; Li & Lerner, 2011). Different components in school engagement have been distinguished (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 60):

- Behavioural engagement that includes involvement in academic and social or extracurricular activities, and positive conduct at school. A frequently used measure of this is low levels of unexcused absenteeism and teacher-rated engagement.
- Emotional engagement includes positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, and school. Emotional engagement creates ties to an institution and influences the child’s willingness to do his or her school work.
- Cognitive engagement is based on the idea of investment; it includes thoughtfulness and willingness to work on comprehending complex matters and mastering difficult skills.

School engagement means commitment and investment and there may be qualitative difference in the degree of engagement with regards to each component. Behavioural, emotional and cognitive components of engagement interact in activities, attitudes, and goals, and the intensity of the engagement varies. Fredricks et al. (2004, p. 87) reviewed available evidence and concluded that “Engagement is associated with positive academic outcomes, including achievement and persistence in school; and it is higher in classrooms with supportive teachers and peers, challenging and authentic tasks, opportunities for choice, and sufficient structure.”

Later studies have both confirmed and have contributed a greater level of detail to these conclusions. For instance, Fischer and Theis (2014) have found that three features of school-based extracurricular activities influence school attachment: the student-staff relationship; the student's experience of competence when the tasks are challenging; and the experience of autonomy when students have the opportunity to make a choice. They do not directly affect school achievement, but they affect school achievement indirectly through increasing school attachment. The complexity of the relationship between school engagement and school achievement was also shown by Motti-Stefani, Masten, and Asendorpf (2015). They found that academic achievement influenced later school engagement more strongly than school engagement influenced academic achievement both for immigrant and non-immigrant students. Lower behavioural school engagement of immigrant students compared to their non-immigrant classmates was associated with immigrants' low academic achievement. The implications of this are that interventions are needed to promote academic achievement in order to prevent disengagement in immigrant students, because disengagement may be due to protecting oneself from academic failure. A combination of extracurricular activities and support for academic learning are needed to foster school engagement and achievement.

2.2 Outcomes of out of school time activities at school and factors affecting them

Research results concerning the significance of out of school time activities for students have been unreservedly positive from the perspective of academic success, the students' personal development, and the community. The results of tens of studies on the basic factors that contribute to positive outcomes are summarized below (Pulkkinen, 2015, pp. 33-34):

School engagement

- Has an extensive influence on the well-being of students; it can be seen in students' school engagement and more positive attitudes toward school and education
- Increases interest in learning and the continuation of education

Knowledge and skills

- Improves school success; (mathematical skills have been particularly studied)
- Develops skills in activities that students choose and consider important
- Develops skills for work such as concentration, doing homework, and regular school attendance

Personal characteristics and well-being

- Strengthens personal characteristics such as optimism, self-esteem, and emotional well-being; the latter refers to lower levels of depression and social anxiety
- Promotes health and physical fitness
- Social relationships and adjustment
- Improves peer relationships, capacity for relationships, and civic skills
- Improves adjustment to school and society by reducing risky behaviours such as the use of alcohol and delinquency

Factors that contribute to positive outcomes can be summarized as follows:

Quantitative factors

- The number of hours of participation in out of school activities of up to 15 hours per week; (more than 15 hours per week reduces family interaction)
- Participation in multiple activities has a more positive effect on wellbeing than an intensive participation in a single activity; positive effects increase up to five different activities, after which the increase in the number of activities has no additional value
- Positive influences of participation in activities become visible when the participation is long-lasting, i.e. measured in years
- Participation in activities should be started in middle childhood (ages 7 to 12), because the learning of skills needed for activities takes time; a new hobby is seldom started during adolescence due to the person's lack of the basic skills required for the hobby.

Content factors

- Participation in the arts (music, visual art, drama, and crafts) is consistently associated with school success, wellbeing, and good social relationships
- Participation in voluntary work has special significance for social development, and more generally, for the development of responsibility
- Sports offered at school are associated with positive development. However, in general the effects of participation in sports depend upon the culture within the sports clubs; for instance, an increase in drinking alcohol has often been reported

Personnel

- The quality and good planning of activities and the competence of personnel who organizes and supervises these activities are crucial
- When planning activities the students' interests, needs, developmental stage, and time schedules need to be elicited and taken into account.
- Cooperation between the school, families, and other organizations at which students' activities are offered facilitates participation and its positive effects

Interaction

- Participation with friends and the possibility of forming new friendships inspires children and young people to participate in activities
- A good relationship with the supervisor is a key criterion for the student enjoying the activity and continuing to participate in it
- The experience of being cared for, empathy, and the student's individual needs being considered affect whether or not he or she will continue to participate in an activity.

2.3 International trends

2.3.1 A view of the child

Development in many European countries has resulted in seeing the role of the school in society in a new light during the 2000s. International comparisons in school achievements and lower results than expected in the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) have, at least partly, affected changes

in school, but there have also been more general pressures for changes to be made. These pressures have stemmed from changes in family life now that both parents work outside the home. In school reforms that take the whole system of home, school, and work into consideration, goals have been set to secure children's well-being; to strengthen school engagement, and through it, school achievement; and to increase the holistic, many-sided development of children in the school environment. Immigration has increased multiculturalism and created new kinds of risk groups among children.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) provides rationales for reforms. Among others, it assures "to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child" (Art. 12); that "children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible" (Art. 18); that "education of the child is directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential" (Art. 29), and the recognition of "the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts" (Art. 31). Furthermore, the latter Article states that "States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity."

In the recommendation of the European Commission report (EU, 2013) titled "Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage," early intervention and prevention are seen as "essential for developing more effective and efficient policies." It highlights children's right to participate and encourages schools, community actors and the responsibility of local authorities to create better after-school activities and facilities for all children, regardless of their parents' work situation and background. The recommendation states (p. 9):

"Support the participation of all children in play, recreation, sport and cultural activities. Acknowledge the influence children have over their own well-being and their resilience in overcoming adverse situations, in particular by providing opportunities to participate in informal learning activities that take place outside the home and after regular school hours."

An international trend is also to pay increasing attention to the well-being of children through realizing each child's unique potential through development in relation to self, others and the environment, and a need for a good quality childhood (e.g., Kickbusch, 2012; Matthes, Pulkkinen, Pinto, & Clouder, 2014).

2.3.2 Changes in school

The school day structure has been developed in many European countries so that it includes out of school time activities. Two examples are presented here. In British schools extracurricular activities outside of normal school hours have a long tradition. More recently, experiments have been made to integrate extracurricular activities with other services for children and families and in this way a network of so-called 'extended services' is created (Dyson & Kerr, 2014). Schools that receive funding from the state have been required "to provide

access to a substantial level of additional provision” (p. 78). An attempt was made to develop a coherent and integrated set of children’s services in place of the previous fragmentary provision. It was recognized that all professionals involved with children and their families should work together and therefore the social care and education functions of local authorities were combined.

Outcomes of the experiments have been wide and complex. The most significant positive impacts were seen in the most disadvantaged students. On the other hand, there was also evidence that “extended services brought about a change in school ethos – specifically, in how students saw themselves in school and how they related to the school staff” (Dyson & Kerr, 2014, p. 86). The change of the ethos was attributable to the extracurricular activities in school. Other factors that affected the change of the ethos were the number of supportive adults in the schools and the emphasis that was placed on students being allowed to make their own decisions.

In Germany, the change from half-day to all-day schools during this millennium is considered one of the most important reforms in recent years. Experiences with the Finnish ISD experiment were also taken into consideration during this process (Pulkkinen & Piirtimaa, 2005, 2008). In 2011, more than 50% of all German schools were all-day schools (Fussangel & Dizinger, 2014). National funding was available to schools, by application, to assist with this change; for instance, for building additional rooms for afternoon extracurricular activities. It was recognized that in modern societies, “it is not only specialized knowledge that students need to have; extracurricular and social competencies have become more and more important in the job market” (p. 117). Furthermore, the roles of the family and schools in the process of socialization have changed and the importance of schools as the place where children grow up has increased due to the increasing rate of both parents working. All-day schools help to encompass the parents’ work and family life.

A study on the stresses that teachers perceived while working in all-day schools or half-day schools showed that high stress concerning instructional processes in the classroom, preparation of lessons, and equipment and other general school conditions was most significantly explained by two individual variables, low self-efficacy and low cooperation with other teachers. Also high number of working hours out of school like lesson preparation and corrections contributed to the perceived stress. Self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one’s own capabilities to organize the activities required. Teachers with high self-efficacy perceived less stress. Working in all-day school did not explain teachers’ perceived level of stress (Fussangel & Dizinger, 2014).

All-day arrangements have implications for teachers’ workloads and how they organize the work. Extracurricular activities require additional staff, and teachers need to adapt their work to the new circumstances. Teachers have also to work longer hours on the school premises and perform non-teaching work at school if there are extracurricular activities between lessons.

2.3.3 Variation in the definition of teachers’ working time

There is a great variation in European countries in how teachers’ working time is defined. A. Hautamäki (2015) distinguished several categories in

how teachers working time is defined. The following three concepts are used: overall hours worked per week; teaching time per week; and presence at school per week.

- Overall hours (40 h/week; 1659 h/year) – The Netherlands
- Overall hours (35 h/week; 1607 h/year) and teaching time (15-26 h/week) – Austria, France and several East European countries
- Overall hours (40 h/week; 1767 h/year) and presence at school (31 h/week) – Sweden
- Overall hours (35 h/week; 1365 h/year); teaching time (23 h/week), and presence at school (28 h/week) - Germany, Norway, Scotland, Spain
- Time monitored by school (1265 h/year); from this time the time that the teacher has to be present at school (1235 h/year) – England, Wales, North Ireland
- Teaching time (16-24 h/week) plus 3 hours per week for joint planning – Finland, Italy

Finland belongs to the minority group of European countries where teachers' working time is limited to teaching plus some administrative work. Weekly teaching time varies depending on the grade level from 16 to 24 hours (45 minutes teaching, plus a 15 minute break following each lesson). Some extra payment arrangements are in place to cover meetings with parents. The percentage of students who reported being happy at school was lower in Finland and Italy than in the countries where teachers' working time has been defined by overall working hours (OECD, 2013, p. 21). Finnish students feel a sense of loneliness and a lack of belonging at school more than the average in the OECD countries (Väljörvi, 2015). Students complain that teachers do not have enough time for each of the students individually; teachers are supportive in academic matters but do not meet students' emotional needs.

3 PRESSURES AND OBSTACLES TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATIONAL OFFERING IN FINLAND, AND PROMISES FOR THE FUTURE

3.1 Pressures to change

The report (Pulkkinen, 2015) found evidence of strong pressures to modify the school day in Finland. These pressures stem from various sources:

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child stresses a child's right to be heard (to express their views and have them taken seriously) and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities.
- The European Commission has recommended investing in children and supporting the participation of all children in play, recreation, sport and cultural activities.
- The trend in other European countries where the ethos of the school has changed or is being changed towards a new kind of integration of the school with the realities of present day society
- The previous Finnish Government Programme (2011) included the objectives to provide an opportunity for students to pursue hobbies as part of the school day.
- Decreasing trends in the level of school achievements since 2001 (Hautamäki, J. et al., 2013).

- The enthusiasm with which more wide-spread club activities and experiments on modifying the structure of the school day have been received by the schools and parents, and the willingness of partners to participate in organizing club activities.
- The reformed national core curriculum for the comprehensive basic school that will be in force from the autumn term of 2016. Its fundamental value is that every pupil is unique and has the right to high-quality education. It states that *Comprehensive basic education is founded on the inherent value of childhood. Every child is unique and valuable as he or she is. Every child has a right to evolve to his or her full measure as a human being and member of society. In this process the child needs encouragement and individualized support and an experience that he or she is listened to at school, that his or her opinions are valued, and that his or her learning and well-being are important. What is important is the experience that he or she can build together with other people the positive functioning and well-being of his or her community.* (OPH, 2015, p. 15, italics and translation by the author.)

The core curriculum is defined in Finland as a national level document, which is the outcome of a broad national discussion of different stakeholders. The previous national core curriculum was prepared in 2004. The values behind the Finnish core curriculum for basic education 2014 are “human rights, equality, democracy, natural diversity, preservation of environmental viability, endorsement of multiculturalism, individualism (both in terms of responsibility and as part of a community), and respect for rights and freedoms. The roots of the values originate from both Western classical and new humanism, and are incorporated into subject matter and everyday activities in schools” (Vahtivuori-Hänninen, Halinen, Niemi, Lavonen, & Lipponen, 2014, p. 23).

3.2 Obstacles to change

In 2004, school legislation was changed as a result of which state-supported afternoon activities were available for first and second grade pupils (Pulkkinen, 2012). Nevertheless, all communities do not arrange enough activity to meet the demand. Furthermore, parents have to pay for part of the costs of these activities, and therefore, many children who need these activities have no access to them. Afternoon activities are run by various organizations and they are often arranged outside the school premises and are not integrated with the children’s school work. In principle, there could also be morning activities on offer, but these are rarely arranged. School legislation should be revised and morning and afternoon activities should be integrated into the school day, with a larger reform to produce an inspiring school day for all.

The outcomes of the ISD programme (2002-2005) confirmed the need for the integration of activities at school. The programme was monitored by the then Minister of Education with the conclusion that a reform in the school day structure was needed. This can be seen in the report of the Ministry of Education (2005): the ISD model was recommended as the first among the reforms needed to improve well-being at school. However, after the election of the new Parliament in 2007, and the subsequent formation of the new government, the new Minister of Education was of a different opinion, and preparations for the reform were halted.

It is a challenge to transform research findings into policy and practice. Researchers may offer evidence-based results to decision makers, but cannot control the implementation of the innovations. In technological innovations, the path from research into practice is more direct, as long as the innovation is backed up by technical and economic reasons. In social innovations, resistance to change is high for various reasons, due to the fact that such innovations often require people to change their ways of thinking and behaving. If an innovation is targeted at improving children's well-being, it may be difficult to accept the best interests of the child, particularly, if it requires adults to move out of their comfort zone.

There is no strong parent organization in Finland that would monitor the need for and realization of school reforms from the child's and the family's perspectives. Finland has an Ombudsman for Children whose task it is to oversee the consideration of children's rights, and the Ombudsman has made remarks about the need for the reform of the structure of the school day. However, these remarks can easily be ignored, because there are no sanctions if they are not considered. Well-organized activity of people who want to speak for children is needed to affect political decision making.

3.3 Promises for the future

With regard to the proposal that I prepared at the request of the Minister of Education in the former Government (2011-2015), parts of the proposal are now being implemented by Sanni Grahn-Laasonen, the Minister of Education and Culture in the new Government (2015-). The Government's plan for the implementation of the key projects and reforms of the Government's strategic programme includes two programmes under the Ministry of Education and Culture that are relevant for the present proposals (Government, 2015):

- *Access to basic art education and children's culture, which is currently not available to all in every part of the country, will be improved (p. 19).*
- *The 'Schools on the Move' project will be expanded across the country to ensure one hour of physical activity each day (p. 18).*

As the first step, a survey of all Finnish students in all nine grades of the comprehensive school (about 500,000 students) is being digitally conducted. In this survey, students' preferences and wishes for cultural and physical activities on the school premises are being solicited as well as their present club activities at school and elsewhere, and their opinions of the practical arrangement of club activities. The second step is that the results of the survey will be used for organizing activities during the academic year 2016-2017. The survey will give unique information about the whole country. It follows the statements in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that stress a child's right to be heard and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities. The third step, hopefully, leads to legislative changes towards the inspiring school day.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 I am thankful for the support of the group of facilitators who I invited to discuss the request by Minister Krista Kiuru for this report, and who kindly gave me good advice and encouragement for the work. The following persons belonged to this group of facilitators: Maria Kaisa Aula, former Ombudsman for Children; Jutta Urpilainen, Member of the Finnish Parliament and former Minister of Finances; Sinuhe Wallinheimo, Member of the Finnish Parliament; Tiina Kavilo, Senior Advisor at the Ministry of Education and Culture; and Riitta Rajala, Special Advisor at the Finnish National Board of Education. I am also thankful to more than twenty other people from different organizations who I interviewed on this topic and who gave me relevant material for the report. I am particularly grateful to Iina Berden, Special Government Advisor at the Ministry of Education and Culture for her long-standing enthusiasm and support for this work, and her current efforts to transform the proposals of the report into policy and practice.
- 2 Comprehensive basic school in Finland is 9-year municipal school for all students regardless of their domicile, socio-economic background, or interests. It includes primary level (grades 1 to 6; ages 7 to 12) and lower secondary level (grades 7 to 9; ages 13 to 16). The revolutionary reform in which existing grammar school, civic school, and primary schools were merged into a comprehensive 9-year municipal school was implemented in Finland in 1972-1979 (Sahlberg, 2010).

- 3 Due to the small number of lessons in the current school day, children may need 4-5 hours of extracurricular activities per day. Part of that time is called “morning and afternoon activities” which includes playing inside and outside, having snacks, and doing homework under adult supervision. Club activities are more organized around certain interests such as music or physical exercise, and each child should be given an opportunity to attend some club activities.