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# The Finnish school system: Coherence, flexibility and individual support in curriculum and pedagogical practices

## History

Until the 1960's Finland had a traditional German type tracked system in basic education. The educational reform on that time concentrated on changing a two-track system to a comprehensive school, a school common for all students. The main argument for the reform was growing societal and regional inequality in access to academic education. In the two-track system the students at the end of grade four in primary (elementary) school elected to continue to either an academic stream consisting of 8 further grades leading to Matriculation and university entrance or a civic stream of 3–5 grades, which led to employment or vocational schools. (Linnakylä 2004.) The goal of the new system was for Finland to become internationally economically competitive by producing a better-educated population, while at the same time improving the equality of educational opportunities (Tuovinen 2008). The Finnish comprehensive school was implemented throughout Finland in the 1970s. The model for the new basic education was introduced from Sweden only with some adaptations for the Finnish context. However, until the mid 1980s students were divided into different levels in mathematics, science and most foreign languages. The streaming was abolished altogether in 1985. (Välijärvi et al. 2007)

## The comprehensive school reflecting Finnish education policy

In the 1970 Comprehensive School Curriculum, the ideas of pluralism, pragmatism, and equity were stressed. At the early stages of the comprehensive school, the implementation of equity was assessed as equal access to education. More recently it has been seen also as equal opportunities for good learning within the school. Nowadays, all students work together in heterogeneous groups, and support for students with special needs is closely integrated in regular classes. (Linnakylä & Välijärvi 2005; Välijärvi 2018.) Heterogeneous grouping seems to favour lower achieving students, in particular, but at the same time the Finnish system has managed to keep the level of the most talented students as one of highest among the high performing countries. (OECD 2010, 2019a).

In Finland, student's family background affects the selection of school in basic education much less than in most other countries. All children go to similar comprehensive school and in most cases to the nearest one, although since the 1990s parents have been granted a free choice of the school (Basic Education Act 1998). Even at the lower secondary level 80 per cent of the students go to the school nearest to their residence (OECD 2016). In the light of PISA results, the influence of family background on the outcomes of the students has traditionally been less marked in Finland than in other countries on average. However, the latest international comparisons show that the impact of the parents' socio-economic status on a child's achievement is growing, and nowadays reaches the average level of OECD-countries (OECD 2010, 2019; Mullis et al. 2020.)

One of the most important aims of the education policy within the last 50 years has been to guarantee high quality instruction all over the country. The international studies indicate that Finland has been successful in achieving this target. The between school vari-

ation in Finland is smaller than in any other country. School's economic, social and cultural status has only a very little effect on the outcomes. (Väljärvi & Malin 2002; OECD 2019a). For example, in Japan, Germany, Italy, Korea the status of a school is a crucial factor explaining the variation between schools (OECD 2010). The differences between city and rural schools or between different regions are in most cases insignificant.

The Finnish education system doesn't consider competition as an important driving force for raising the quality and developing the system. That's why there are no nationwide tests comparing individual schools and students during or at the end of comprehensive school. The results in core subjects are monitored with national surveys where schools and students (6-8 per cent of an age cohort) are selected randomly. In addition to the national surveys every education provider is obliged to evaluate its own education system on regular basis and publish the main findings of the evaluations for public review. (Basic Education Act 1998.) Instead of competition the Finnish way to organize compulsory basic education and assure the quality are based on trust on teachers and schools, and investments in teacher education. Because of the small differences between schools and the low level of competition the Finnish parents are not so much interested in selecting a school for their children as parents in many other countries. They can be quite convinced that the quality of teaching is high in any school. However, in big cities also the Finnish parents are becoming more aware of their right to choose a school. At the same time, most of these cities are working hard to assure equal instructional quality over all their schools e. g. with so-called positive discrimination. This means giving more resources for school which are struggling with demanding circumstances, and, because of that, are not able to reach as high results as other schools. (Väljärvi et al. 2007.)

### **The structure and investments**

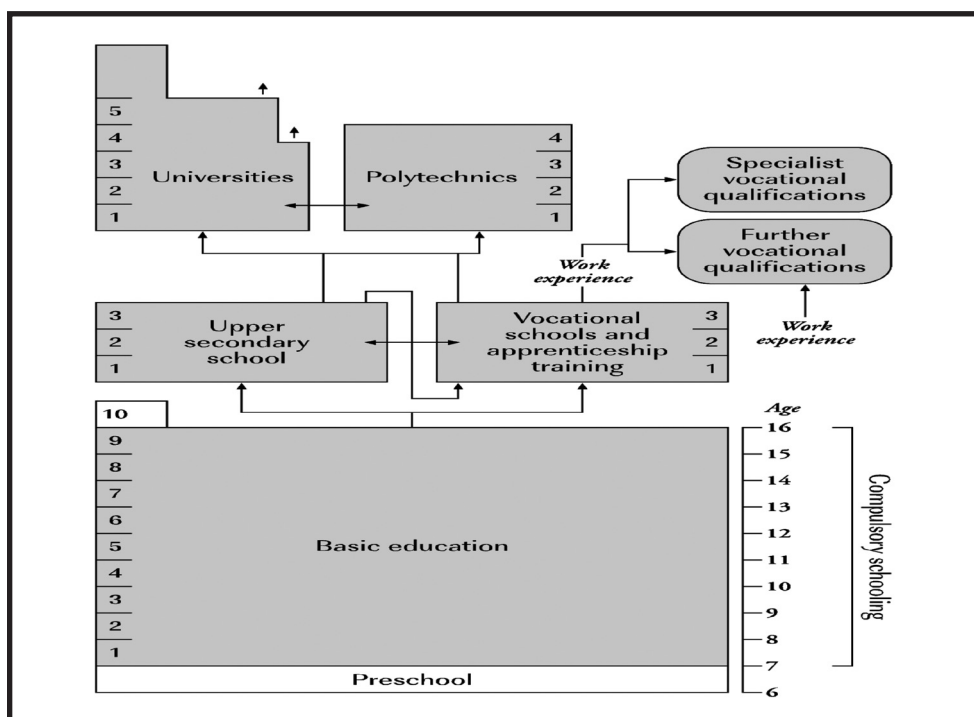
There are two official languages in Finland: Finnish is spoken by 87.3 and Swedish by 5.2 per cent of the population. Both language groups have a right to education and training in their own mother tongue. In addition, the indigenous Saami language has a similar official status in the northern part of the country. The size of the non-Finnish/Swedish speaking population is increasing rapidly but still is rather small. It is obvious that the special needs of the students with immigrant background need more political attention, and resources for Finnish/Swedish language teaching, in particular. Nowadays they are falling behind the native students more than in any other OECD-country (OECD 2019a).

Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for primary and secondary education in Finland. Finnish National Agency of Education, a national agency on the sector of education, is responsible for implementation of the education policy e. g. by providing the national core curriculum. At local level, the municipalities are responsible for running the schools. The municipalities as well as (semi)private education providers receive state subsidies for running the schools. Both providers are obliged to provide a local curriculum within the framework decided in the national core curriculum. Traditionally a lot of efforts have been made to provide all population groups and regions of the country with equal opportunities to learn. Nowadays this is becoming a challenging task when a birth rate has declined dramatically, and families are leaving countryside to big cities.

Decision-making power within a municipality rests with the elected municipal council. The Council appoints the municipal executive board and several advisory boards. Each municipality has at least one board looking after education. Each school can and usually does have a managing board where teachers, non-teaching staff, students and parents are represented. The main tasks of the managing board are developing the work of the school and promoting cooperation inside the school and between the school, parents and the local community.

Each comprehensive school has a principal of its own. In some cases, same person may act as a principal for two or even more schools. This usually takes place because of economic reasons and is not considered desirable from pedagogical point of view. Only a qualified teacher can be recruited for a principal. Albeit no specific training is demanded as compulsory for the job many new principals acquire such a training at some university.

Regular education system is financed almost entirely by public funds. Nearly all educational institutions are owned by municipalities (primary and secondary level institutions and polytechnics) or the state (universities). Only 1.5 per cent of the primary and lower secondary students go to (semi)private schools. The funding of the private sector is almost totally dependent on public funding. The comprehensive school and education leading to a qualification has traditionally been free of charge to students. Free education covers also the instruction in higher education. Students receive free tuition, free instructional materials, warm school meals, health and dental care and, if necessary, transport and accommodation at the primary and lower secondary level. Free education covers also the instruction in upper secondary and higher education. (Andere 2008.)



**Figure 1.** The Finnish education system.

Children generally start school in the year they turn seven. Before the comprehensive school, children have to participate in one-year pre-school education. This pre-primary class has been compulsory only since 2014. The government is planning to extend pre-school education to start two years before the basic education. Nowadays a student has to go to school until he/she turns 16 or has finished basic education (comprehensive school). However, the Parliament just approved a new education act that raises the school leaving age until 18 years. The aim of this reform is that in future all students should take at least a secondary level (academic or vocational) qualification.

Nowadays the Finnish education system consists of comprehensive school (primary and lower-secondary), post-comprehensive general and vocational education (upper secondary level), higher education and adult education (tertiary level). The officially expressed goal for the future is to streamline the system and develop it in accordance with the principle of lifelong learning and to make it internationally compatible. Usually, for the first six years of comprehensive school the children are taught by a class teacher (elementary school), during the last three years by specialised subject teachers (lower secondary school). However, there is a growing number of so-called unified schools where elementary and lower secondary levels have been merged into one unified school. All comprehensive school students have the same core subjects and similar syllabuses within these subjects. However, about 10 per cent of the classroom hours are reserved in most schools for elective optional studies freely chosen by the student and his/her parents on grades 7 to 9 (Figure 2).

<b>International Society for Music Education Commission</b>		
<b>Time allocation in compulsory education (grades 1 to 9)</b>		
	<i>Lessons (ú 45 min)</i>	<i>%</i>
Mother tongue and literature	1596	18,75
Second national language	228	2,68
Foreign language	684	8,03
Mathematics	1216	14,29
Science and environmental studies	1178	13,84
Religious education or ethics	380	4,46
History and social science	456	5,36
<b>Non-academic subjects</b>	<b>2354</b>	<b>27,68</b>
Music	304	
Visual art	342	
Crafts	418	
Home economics	114	
Physical education	760	
Elective studies	418	
Guidance counselling	76	0,89
Elective subjects	342	4,02
Minimum amount of lessons	8512	
(Second foreign language)	456)	

**Figure 2.** Subjects and time allocation in comprehensive school.

In Finland students' time investments in education are lower than in most other countries. They use very little time for education outside the compulsory classroom hours compared, for instance, to their schoolmates in East-Asian countries. Private tutoring or any other kind of private based support systems are almost unknown in Finland, and in other Nordic countries, too. Students and their parents want clearly separate students' school time and their free time. This also means that they want to own their holidays totally for themselves, not for school. According to their self-reports Finnish ninth graders spend around 36 hours per week for classroom hours, homework and other school related activities. Among the over 70 countries participating in Pisa research programme this is the smallest amount. Correspondingly, the OECD average is around 35 hours, and e. g. in many Asian countries, students report that on average they spend more than 50 hours per week for different kind of school activities. (OECD 2016.)

After comprehensive school, students can choose between general and vocational upper secondary education. Traditionally 55-60% of students have opted for general (academic) upper secondary education. However, the popularity of vocational studies has increased, and the proportion continuing at academic track has declined to 50 %. Like few comprehensive schools, some of the upper secondary schools also specialize in a particular subject; currently there are 50 specialized schools, mainly in sports and arts. General upper secondary education comprises a minimum of 75 courses (each comprising 38 class hours), 45–49 of which are compulsory. The curriculum has been designed to extend over three years, but because there are no specific year classes pupils may graduate in a longer or shorter time than this.

Upper secondary school ends in a national matriculation examination. The examination consists of at least five tests; one of them, the test in the candidate's mother tongue, is compulsory for all candidates. The candidate then chooses three other compulsory tests from among the following four tests: the test in the second national language, a foreign language test, the mathematics test, and one test in the general studies battery of tests (sciences and humanities). As part of his or her examination, the candidate may additionally include one or more optional tests.

In Finland initial vocational education and training has traditionally been mainly institution-based. Lately, however, many measures are being taken to add to the share of work-based learning in vocational education. Young people increasingly study for qualifications in apprenticeship training. In addition, longer periods of on-the-job learning will be included in institutional training programmes. Secondary level vocational programmes take typically three years to complete; of this time a minimum of six months, and many cases more is devoted to practical on-the job training.

### **Heterogeneous grouping of students**

The philosophy of the compulsory comprehensive school stresses equality of students. In practice this means that all students, including students with learning problems and the most talented students, work together in heterogeneous groups. By the age 16, practically all students (99.7 per cent) have completed the comprehensive school, which gives them eligibility for further studies at the secondary level. Around 98 per cent of students pass the comprehensive school in nine years. The pedagogy of the comprehensive school differs considerably from the pedagogy applied in systems characterised by explicit tracking and streaming. Heterogeneous groups necessitate highly educated teachers, genuine experts in pedagogy. Heterogeneous grouping, as shown by studies conducted in the 1970s and 1980s, when the comprehensive school was still under construction, and confirmed more recently by the PISA data, appears to be of the greatest benefit to the weakest students. The performance of the best students, in contrast, seems to remain virtually the same irrespective of how the groups are formed (OECD 2016). In heeding the heterogeneity of students also the size of the teaching groups is a critical issue. On the lower secondary (grades 7 to 9) the average size of the group in core subjects (mathematics, science, mother tongue, foreign languages) is small, typically 18–20 students. Among the countries participating in Pisa programme this has always been the smallest. In primary classes (grades 1 to 6) the teaching groups are slightly bigger, 20–22 students on average, and in academic upper secondary school considerably higher.

Special education has always played an important role in catering for students who have problems with following regular teaching. Special needs education is usually closely integrated into mainstream teaching, which is more and more inclusive by nature. Nowadays, only 1.5 % of students are studying in the special schools for disabled children. On the

primary level, where class teachers have the main responsibility for instruction, special education mostly centres on reading and writing skills along with mathematics skills. On the lower secondary level a student with problems in (a) particular subject(s) typically has the opportunity of studying once or twice a week in a small group of 2-5 students or even individually with a special teacher. The special teacher may, alternatively, also attend regular classes working together with subject teachers. A student's right to special needs education is stipulated in the Finnish school laws (Linnakylä 2004; National Core Curriculum 2016).

Every student also has a right to student counselling. Schools are to provide students with guidance in study skills, choice of options (e. g. elective courses) and planning of post- compulsory studies. At grade levels 7 to 9, every school has a student counsellor, who provides individual guidance to those who need or want it. Student counsellors are usually subject teachers who have taken extra studies (half a year in minimum) in guidance and counselling. The common initial teacher education helps student counsellors to work efficiently together with other teachers even in cases where a student has severe social or pedagogical problems in her/his studies.

### Teachers and teacher education

Teachers' professional status has stayed high in Finland. Although the salaries of Finnish teachers are internationally only average (OECD 2020), young people find teacher's occupation a quite attractive option. Thus, the students seeking to teacher training usually make up an outstanding, highly motivated and selected group; for instance, in classroom teacher programmes only about 15% of the candidates are admitted (Luukkainen 2000; Niemi et al. 2019). Teacher training attracts especially multi-talented students who are good not only in academic subjects but also in arts, music and physical education. Concerning secondary education (grades 7 to 9) that is run mostly by subject teachers the overall situation is not as good, however: there is a growing shortage of teachers in mathematics, science and English, for example.

Historically, teacher education in Finland has taken shape gradually and separately for each school type and even for each individual type of teaching assignment. However, the idea about academic training for all teachers has a long tradition. The new Decree was issued in 1978 and led to the creation of degree programmes for class teachers, comprehensive and upper secondary school subject teachers, as well as programmes for special needs teachers and student counsellors, which could be characterised as postgraduate studies.

Nowadays, students in early childhood teacher programmes complete the Bachelor of Education degree consisting of 120 credits. The degree may be completed in three academic years. The training of class teachers emphasises the theoretical and methodological contents of multidisciplinary educational science and the subjects taught at school and their practical applications. The objective is to link teaching and study to scientific research so that students would become capable of independently analysing and solving educational problems and of developing their work through research (Silander & Välijärvi 2013; Niemi et al. 2019). The main subject in class teacher training is education. It will provide the theoretical foundation for dealing with teaching duties. The scope of the Masters' degree in education is 300 credits<sup>1</sup> (usually 4–5 years of studies at the minimum) and students with the degree are eligible for postgraduate studies in education.

Minimum amount of lessons to be taught by a teacher in a week:	
<i>Class teacher</i> (primary school)	24
<i>Subject teachers (secondary schools):</i>	
Mother tongue and literature	18
• Foreign languages	20
• Mathematics, physics, chemistry, art, music	21
• Biology, geography, religion, ethics, history and social studies, health educ., home economics	23
• Physical education, guidance	24
• Special education teacher	22-24

**Figure 3.** Teaching duties.

Subject teacher training includes studies in one or two teaching subjects and teacher's pedagogical studies as part of the Masters' degree. Studies in a teaching subject mean studies that promote the command of the subject as required by teaching work. Teaching subject studies consist of advanced studies in one subject, with a minimum scope of 85 credits, and subject studies in a possible second subject, with a minimum scope of 60 credits. The training is divided into two tracks; the faculties of education are responsible for some training, while another part of the training is carried out in co-operation between teacher education departments and different subject departments. Students apply directly for subject teacher training (such as training for subject teachers in mathematics, physics and chemistry, or history, religion etc.). In addition, it is also possible to graduate as a subject teacher by taking teacher's pedagogical studies separately upon completion of a university degree. (Silander & Välijärvi 2013.)

However, nowadays subject teachers may get qualification to teach also grades 1-6, but this presupposes about 6 months of extra studies in pedagogy. Correspondingly, class teachers can earn subject teacher's qualification in a subject by taking approximately 6 months extra studies in that subject. When teacher's professional development is defined as a process continuing throughout the work career, integration between pre-service and in-service education becomes a crucial issue. Today, the responsibility for teacher's pre-service education rests with the universities, whereas their role regarding in-service training is but a small one. In-service training for teachers is provided by many private as well as publicly funded organisations. Also, teachers' own associations provide plenty of such training services. In general, the provision for in-service training is poorly coordinated and the quality of services varies to a great extent. (Silander & Välijärvi 2013; Niemi et al. 2019.)

Many surveys indicate that there are considerable differences in the amounts of continuing education and training received both in regional terms and between different teacher groups. During the period that Luukkainen (2000) studied (years 1996-1998), some teachers (3.5%) were not provided with any education. One fifth of teachers (22%) received five days of education during that time frame. The average number of days of participation in continuing education or in-service training was 32.5 days during the three-year period under investigation. The latest studies (e. g. OECD 2019b) indicate that the situation has not changed much during the last 20 years.



One of the key questions for Finnish teacher education in the future is how to integrate pre-service and in-service training more effectively to support teacher's professional development throughout their work careers. Another important point relates to support for newly graduated teachers entering the working life. Research has shown that this induction phase, as it is called, includes many problems.

In recent years teachers' in-service training has become an important policy issue. Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture has allocated a lot of money for projects to develop new innovative models for teachers' in-service training (the OSAAVA programme). This means around 60 per cent growth in the yearly investments for teachers' career development. By these funds the Ministry has supported especially such new forms of training that promote longer-term programmes, educational effectiveness and linking with teachers' pre-service training. Other key areas for this new funding include both mutual collaboration between schools and networking with the local community.

The Ministry has also appointed the Teacher Education Forum to review and reform the presents teacher education programmes at the Finnish universities. The Forum gathers around 100 experts from universities, education providers, teacher unions, schools and non-governmental organizations to brainstorm and develop the future modes of teacher education. The Forum arranges seminars and workshops with teachers, parents and students trying to find consensus about the main qualifications needed for the work of tomorrow's teachers. The Forum has also launched many new research projects to create new models for teachers' professional development.

## Standards and evaluation

In the Finnish model of evaluation, the main idea is to support and help schools to enhance themselves, not to control them. Interaction between the bottom-up and top-down evaluation has been emphasised (Salonen-Hakomäki et al. 2016). On the other hand, it is equally important to monitor, at the national level, the development in terms of between-school differences to enable timely intervention to prevent possible deterioration of equal educational opportunities. In 1999, uniform evaluation criteria were prepared for each compulsory subject. These criteria serve as recommendations defining the skill and knowledge levels that the student should master at the end of the comprehensive school. In the year 2020, these criteria were reformed and clarified to advance the uniformity of assessment practices over all schools.

Under the educational legislation, educational institutions are obligated to evaluate their own operations and their effects. The aim of self-evaluation is to help individuals at institutions to form an integrated idea of the operations and to make the activities transparent to external interest groups. Knowledge of one's own situation helps in facing the challenges coming from the surrounding environment. Even though the dimensions and criteria for self-evaluation have been defined, their significance in practice has been questionable. They surely have functioned in making schoolwork visible and served as a development tool, but self-evaluations, as such, have not yet yielded an adequate basis of reliable and valid data for educational indicators (Linnakylä 2004; Tikkanen 2020).

It is not overstated to say that quality assurance in Finnish education system is largely based on trust. We believe that academically educated teachers are the best experts to design their teaching in practice, within the fairly loose frame of national curricula. We also trust that they do their best in the classroom to promote learning. This may sound quite idealistic, but in view of the results of the recent international studies, at least, the teachers have deserved this trust. It is also important to keep in mind that in terms of educational investment Finland has clearly made a choice different from most other countries. Instead

of external valuation, Finland has invested heavily on teacher education. It seems that these investments have yielded good results and kept up the high esteem and popularity of the profession.

Rigorous standards have often been seen in Finland as restricting teachers' innovative thinking and pedagogical freedom. To set standards for educational practices and student outcomes is a task quite different from, say, setting standards for industrial products or services. To educational goals there are always many parallel routes which can be equally effective, and the effectiveness depends largely on the context in which teachers and schools do their work. The standards are seen as aids and tools that schools and teachers may use at their discretion. Teachers' academic education prepares them quite well for applying the standards creatively in adjusting their own teaching. Teacher education provided by different universities is also consistent to such extent that teachers' conceptions about good learning and teaching would be highly coherent even without any set standards, although then textbooks would easily form the guiding standard for many teachers. (Silander & Välijärvi 2013.)

### **Research and school development in Finland**

In Finland the dialogue between research, administration and schools is basically frank and open. This is promoted by organising joint seminars and expert groups, for example. Under the Finnish National Board of Education there is a council for administration and research. The University of Jyväskylä arranges an annual forum where especially researchers, school principals and administrative staff can meet. Particularly in the 1980s and still in the early 1990s all major national development projects included research activities. The progress of development projects was evaluated on a regular basis in joint workshops, where the researchers presented their results. The economic recession in the mid-1990s cut off the resources for this kind of systematic interaction between research and school development. In the 1990s, the responsibility for development work for curricula and teaching was shifted increasingly to the schools and local authorities. Hence, also the linkage between research and school development projects had to be negotiated primarily at the local level. In the biggest cities, such as Helsinki, Turku, Tampere, Oulu, and Jyväskylä, research expertise is still used widely in practical school development activities and results assessment. This work takes place mostly in collaboration with local universities. Particular themes include, for instance, promoting the pedagogical use of ICT at schools, accounting for students' individual needs in teaching, and designing teaching arrangements that activate the students. However, the projects are often rather small in scale and poorly resourced. A challenge here is how to disseminate the experiences. For this purpose, there are electronic data banks available, in which the development results can be recorded and displayed to everybody interested.

Also, some larger-scale projects, which often involve international cooperation, have become possible mainly owing to EU funding. This kind of research-based development schemes have been used particularly actively in the field of vocational education and training, focusing on a range of themes such as learning-on-the-job, recognition of prior learning, and revision of assessment practices. Research has traditionally played an important role in the design of national curricula in Finland. In the 1960s and 1970s curricula were designed and teacher education reformed under the direct supervision of professors. Although researchers' role has later become less pivotal in this respect, their expertise has been used in many ways. For example, university researchers and teacher educators specialised in learning and teaching of specific school subjects are always represented in the ministerial working groups responsible for curricular revisions.

Although school development belongs now largely to the local level, the Ministry of Education and Culture is financing also national development projects in fields considered important for education policy. In these projects universities usually play a central role. In recent years the themes have included, for example, prevention of bullying, enhancing the pedagogical use of ICT, the use of mentoring in the induction training for newly qualified teachers, and promoting student involvement in the work of school communities. Of course, also in Finland a considerable part of school research is of a critical nature and may criticise politicians' and school authorities' decisions quite plainly. Critical research is important for the development of the education system, and it generates innovative thinking for systemic reforms. Different research paradigms and alternative ways to produce research-based knowledge complement each other.

The previous government set up in 2016 The Comprehensive School Forum to bring together teachers, researchers, unions and companies, municipalities, policy maker, parents and students to develop and reform the Finnish comprehensive for the challenges of the coming 30–50 years. The Forum was obliged to formulate a vision and common goals for the future school and to define measures for achieving these. The Forum has specified 10 critical topics where to proceed to gain these targets:

1. Clear values for the future comprehensive school
2. Collaborative school culture
3. Support for teachers' professional development
4. Individualized learning paths
5. Strong basic skills to pave future competencies
6. Wellbeing of students and teachers
7. Enhancing leadership on school, regional and national level
8. Research-based school development and teacher education
9. Assessment supporting learning and equity
10. Sufficient, stable and predictable resources for education institutions

The present government is continuing this process and has appointed a new Forum. It has also launched a new project, a Right to Learn Programme (<https://minedu.fi/en/qualityprogramme>), to promote these same targets in early childhood and basic education. As for the latest national curriculum reform, it also supports the same political and pedagogical aspirations. By integrating schoolwork and 'real life' more closely, the new National Core Curriculum struggles for enhancing meaningfulness and joy of learning. A student should be more an active learner, and not so much an object of teaching. Generic competencies, instead of fragmented knowledge, and deep learning are much in focus, but also students' identity development and wellbeing of students. The new Core Curriculum underlines the importance of school as a community that fulfils the principles of sustainable way of living. To be successful in achieving these goals the basic values, objectives and main content areas were reshaped. Inquiry-based learning by integrating separate subject to coherent multidisciplinary modules is important pedagogical tool to promote students' transversal competences.

### **Conclusion: Equality and equity as the main goals**

In the 1990s the Finnish educational policy geared more strongly towards decentralisation, individuality and freedom of choice. Since 1992 textbooks are no longer examined and approved by the national authorities. At the same time also the national school inspection system was disbanded. Consequently, schools started to write their own syllabi that were based on the national framework curriculum but constructed in collaboration with teach-

ers, students and parents of the school. At present, education policy has taken some steps backwards towards more centralised school administration. However, still teachers' pedagogical freedom is rather large, schools are not controlled with nationwide tests, and Finland has not brought back school inspectors like, for instance, Sweden did. This guarantees quite a large autonomy for schools and local authorities to organize their daily schoolwork.

The legislation relative to the state subsidies was amended and the new provisions took effect at the beginning of 1993. State education subsidies, which up till then had been based on expenditure and educational tasks, were replaced with state subsidies that no longer are earmarked in advance, i.e., designated to a particular field of municipal duties. The municipalities can thus freely decide how to allocate the appropriations received. (Laukkanen 2008). This has changed the structure, administration and functioning of local education systems. The number of schools has declined rapidly, the average size of schools has grown, and schools have become more dependent on local resources. Consequently, variation in organizing compulsory education has increased and the issues of educational equity and equality have become, once again, burning in Finnish public debate. ■

## Note

[1] In the new curriculum "a credit" corresponds to about 25–28 hours of student work.

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