Chapter 3
Most Far-Reaching Lessons from Studies, Reforms and Reports Concerning Education Systems and the Teaching Profession Worldwide

Abstract The human species being essentially perfectible and educable, the primacy of education is a recurrent theme in the classic sources of pedagogic thought. It has been endowed with the status of a human right, and *key* is a word often used to indicate the paramountcy of the right to education. Nevertheless, while it is largely recognized that education is the great "social equalizer" and that achieving both educational "excellence" and "equity" is one of the most critical problems of our times, education systems are not keeping up with increasingly multicultural and rapidly changing societies. They need radical reforms. A reform is not radical enough if it does not grasp the roots of what is failing. In addition, it must be systemic and holistic, taking into account the interaction of education with the whole society since human rights are essentially indivisible and interdependent. Although teachers are the real genius of the everyday alchemy of education quality, two terms are frequently used with respect to the status of the teaching profession worldwide: "decline" and (lack of) "recognition". The minimum that may be said is that it is uncared for: it is uncared for when Governments do not care for it and it does not care for itself. The quality of the teaching profession is neither cheap nor evaluable in snapshot, but what is at stake in education is priceless. Finland's education system is example of a human rights approach to education quality, driven by a highly qualified and ranked teaching profession. It epitomizes the compatibility between equity and quality, inclusiveness and competitiveness, thus making more evident, by contrast, how miserable neoliberal education politics is.

Keywords Primacy of education · Education systems · Teaching profession · Reforms · Finland

There are significant lines of international convergence and consensus.

> Comparisons between countries are valuable for a number of reasons. First, they broaden the view of what is possible. Too often, policymakers remain stuck with conventional ideas, bound by precedents in their own context, and are unable to see options that might be available and successful. By providing policymakers with an expanded view of the policy choices that might be available, comparisons can expand the toolbox. Second, international comparisons show how ideas work in practice at the system level. By exploring other

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> systems in depth, policymakers can see what the implementation challenges are, how other nations dealt with them, and what remains to be solved. Such explorations can help enable policymakers put in place new policies with a clearer eye. (Darling-Hammond and Rothman 2011, p. 1)

The Report of *The 2011 International Summit on the Teaching Profession* reads too:

> Summit participants agreed that there was enormous value in learning from international comparisons on this subject. Such comparisons help us get outside our own contexts and established patterns of thinking; show where some of the successes and failures have been; and broaden our views of possible options and trade-offs. They help us to think anew, to encourage innovation, and to design new approaches informed by the world's best practices. (Asia Society 2011, p. 26)

The following highlights the main findings arising from the aforementioned international and national reports and studies.

3.1 Education Drives Individual, Social as Well as Universal Destinies, but the School Is not up to Its Contemporary Mission

The human species being essentially perfectible and educable, the primacy of education is a recurrent theme in the classic sources of pedagogic thought. Education has often been considered guilty of the evils of societies and also, paradoxically, prized as the main resource to correct them as well. As Kant (1803) taught, "with education is involved the great secret of the perfection of human nature" (p. 7).

The primacy of education was often evoked during the *travaux préparatoires* (elaboration) of the main international standards of International Human Rights Law, which recognize the relative priority of the right to education. Such a priority has been rediscovered by the International Community during the last decade of the twentieth century, and the right to education has been put on the International Agenda, as numerous high-level conferences, declarations, programs of action and other initiatives testify.

In reality, without overlooking the principle of the indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights, three human rights appear as having real priority, in deep dialectical interaction: the right to life, the right to education and the right to development. The right to education may be considered as the most fundamental for a *human* life, that is a life with dignity, liberty, equality, creativity and responsibility. It is largely recognized as the very engine of development in its individual and collective—e.g. cultural, political, economic and ecological—dimensions. It is the most powerful resource for the survival and perfecting of the human species.

Therefore, *key* is a word often used in the texts of the United Nations' bodies and high representatives to indicate the paramountcy of the right to education. For instance, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education (Katarina Tomaševski) stressed in one of her annual reports: "Education is increasingly defined as the key to development and the right to education as the key to the enjoyment of many other

human rights" (E/CN.4/2001/52, para. 79).[1] In another Report, she observed that consequences of denying the right to education "cannot be retroactively remedied" (E/CN.4/2004/45, para. 8).[2]

Education is, therefore, no more envisaged as only a domestic familial, political and instrumental matter, but also as an international and ethical issue. If the link between education, economy and work has been the most socially and individually important (and remains the most visible), the right to education is principally a source of human worth and dignity, cultural and individual identity, and enlightened and active citizenship, without forgetting its power for social mobility and equalization. "From the human rights viewpoint, education is thus an end in itself rather than merely a means for achieving other ends", as Tomaševski underlined (E/CN.4/1999/49, para. 13).[3]

As a consequence: "Success requires a clear vision and belief in the centrality of education for students and the nation" (OECD 2011b, p. 173) that should be "a long-term vision and a shared dream" (Asia Society 2012, p. 24), and a school up to its human and civilizational mission.

Notwithstanding, as notes the Report of the New York 2011 Summit on the Teaching Profession: "At a time when the society had changed, the economy had changed, and the understanding of learning had changed, only schools had remained static" (Asia Society 2011, p. 9).[4] The Report of the New York 2012 Summit reads too: "Throughout the Summit was a palpable sense of urgency that the aims and processes of schooling in the twenty-first century need to be fundamentally different from those in the twentieth century". In effect: "In the twentieth century, education centered on teaching a relatively fixed core of content. This 'knowledge transmission' model of education is no longer adequate" (Asia Society 2012, p. 6). Paraphrasing what was said by a participant in the Summit, the school of the twenty-first century should not keep functioning following the logic of the nineteenth century and with teachers keeping in the twentieth.

> A major tension in education systems today, in fact, is the distance between the rhetoric of twenty-first century skills and the reality of schooling. In particular, as a representative of Norway pointed out, we say we value twenty-first century skills but only test basic skills. Some countries say that they want to develop creative, confident students who are adept in a range of areas, but they only test basic reading and math skills. […]
> Bold steps will be needed to close the gap between what we measure and what we value or we risk driving education systems in the wrong direction. (pp. 9, 23)

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[1] www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/0/8774217173a3fde0c1256a10002ecb42/$FILE/G0110177.pdf.

[2] www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/e06a5300f90fa0238025668700518ca4/05af86414ce903c9c1256e3000357284/$FILE/G0410332.pdf.

[3] www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/TestFrame/6a76ced2c8c9efc780256738003abbc8?Opendocument.

[4] This Summit "was the first to bring together ministers of education and teachers' union leaders from many countries to the same table" (p. 3). A second took place in New York in 2012; the third met in Amsterdam in 2013; the fourth in Wellington, New Zealand, in 2014; the fifth is scheduled to take place in Banff, Alberta (Canada), in 2015.

In effect, as "public examinations are the baton that conducts the entire orchestra […] unless these change, nothing else will change" (Barber et al. 2012, p. 58).

In short, while it is largely recognized that education is the great "social equalizer" and that achieving both educational "excellence" and "equity" is one of the most critical problems of our times, education systems are not keeping up with increasingly multicultural and rapidly changing societies. School does not do all that it should do, and often does badly most of what it does.

3.2 Education Systems Need Radical and Holistic Reforms Addressing Both Their Tangible and Intangible Dimensions

The McKinsey and Company Report *How the World's Best-performing School Systems come out on Top*[5] remarks: "Education reform is top of the agenda of almost every country in the world", but "the performance of many school systems has barely improved in decades" (Barber and Mourshed 2007, Executive Summary). For instance, in England, "a report published by the National Foundation for Education Research in 1996 demonstrated that between 1948 and 1996, despite 50 years of reform, there had been no measurable improvement in standards of literacy and numeracy in English schools" (p. 10).

Regarding the teaching profession, a French Report notices that much of its findings on the status of the teaching profession in France are the same as those already found by other past Commissions, since the Commission chaired by Alexandre Ribot (1899), through the Louis Joxe Commission (1972), until the Claude Thélot Commission (2004): bureaucracy, Taylorism, uniformity, lack of spaces and other working conditions, *malaise* [uneasiness], etc. (Pochard 2008, pp. 12, 13, 52).

Referring to the USA, LeCompte (2009) wrote: "One of the principal problems facing United States' education in the early 2000s is that a complete mismatch exists between the diagnosis of educational problems and the remedies proposed" (p. 45). That is why an American study concluded: "The one thing that is indispensable is a new system" (National Center on Education and the Economy 2007, p. 9). Indeed, the education systems worldwide, in general, are still waiting for the radical reform needed to break the vicious circle of their deadlocks. In this respect, an OECD Report (2011b) points out:

[5] This Report accounts for research carried out in 25 school systems in Asia, Europe, North America and the Middle East, between May 2006 and March 2007. The schools visited were selected to represent the world's top ten best-performing school systems, according to the results of the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment), launched in 1997 by OECD to assess the educational systems, but it also included others that are improving rapidly, some of them in developing countries (Bahrain, Brazil, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates), which are adopting successful approaches.

> [‘R]eform’ is not equivalent to improvement. ‘Improvement’ means doing what the system has been doing all along, but more and better. ‘Reform’ involves paradigm shifts. In other words, the notion of a *reform* entails an awareness that further development of education is not only a matter of remedying perceived shortcomings; it is an understanding that more fundamental issues exist where education has to catch up with changes in society. Without such an understanding, any ‘improvement’ of the system and practices only reinforces what might have gone wrong. (p. 106)

A reform is not radical enough if it does not grasp the roots of what is failing. In addition, it must be systemic and holistic, taking into account the interaction of education with the whole society. Human rights are indivisible and interdependent. “Bring on the whole-system revolution!” (Barber et al. 2012, p. 64).

The variables of education systems’ success include the education budget and decentralization. As far as budget is concerned: “OECD analyses show that the level of financial expenditures in a system is not closely related to its quality or equity. It is how the resources are used to address key challenges that make a difference” (Asia Society 2014, p. 5). In effect:

> [A]fter a certain threshold of expenditure, the way resources are spent is more important than the total amount spent. […] Excellence and equity in student performance are less related to a country’s income or expenditure on education than to how those educational resources are allocated, and to the policies, practices and learning environments that determine the conditions in which students work. (OECD 2014, pp. 27, 101)

Decentralization may occur in a variety of ways: delegation of authority for curriculum and assessment, and/or for resources and personnel as well, and/or increasing innovation and competition among schools for increasing parents’ choice. Another OECD Report (2011b) notes: “Decentralisation is the overwhelming focus for the current literature on education planning and governance, but the subject may deserve a more nuanced look” (p. 107).

> PISA shows that school systems that grant more autonomy to schools to define and elaborate their curricula and assessments tend to perform better than systems that don’t grant such autonomy […]. In contrast, greater responsibility in managing resources appears to be unrelated to a school system’s overall performance (OECD 2013a, Table IV.1.4).
> The positive relationship between schools’ autonomy in defining and elaborating curricula and assessment policies and student performance that is observed at the level of the school system can play out differently within countries. […] The degree of school autonomy is also related to the socio-economic status and demographic background of students and schools and various other school characteristics, such as whether the school is public or private. […]
> The relationship between school autonomy and performance also appears to be affected by whether there is a culture of collaboration between teachers and principals in managing a school. (OECD 2014, pp. 48, 52)

In addition: “Giving teachers more autonomy can be counterproductive if the quality and education of the teachers are inadequate” (p. 6).

Decentralization and schools’ autonomy are, therefore, a double-edged sword. A balance between central and local responsibilities is most likely to suit the requirements for the right to education.

Last but not least, the education system interacts with other social systems. As an OECD Report (2014) reads:

> Across OECD countries, almost one in five students does not reach a basic minimum level of skills to function in society, and roughly the same proportion of students drops out of school before completing their secondary education.
> […]
> In terms of fairness, PISA shows that socio-economic disadvantage is closely related to many of the student and school characteristics that are associated with performance. Although poor performance in school does not automatically stem from disadvantage, the socio-economic status of students and schools does appear to exert a powerful influence on learning outcomes […]. Because advantaged families are better able to reinforce and enhance the effects of schools, because students from advantaged families may attend higher-quality schools, or because schools are simply better-equipped to nurture and develop young people from advantaged backgrounds, in many countries, schools tend to reproduce existing patterns of socio-economic advantage, rather than create a more equitable distribution of learning opportunities and outcomes. (pp. 12, 19)

According to the same report:

> Investing in equity in education and in reducing dropout pays off. […] While such estimates are never wholly certain, they do suggest that the benefits of improving individuals' cognitive skills dwarf any conceivable cost of improvement.
> Improving students' performance in school can also encourage healthier lifestyles and participation in democratic institutions and other civil society initiatives and organisations – all of which reduces the cost to society. The Survey of Adult Skills, conducted by the OECD in 2012, shows that skills are positively associated with self-reported good health, political interest and interpersonal trust (OECD 2013a). Crime and other illegal activities may decrease, since better-educated people tend to be less involved in criminality (OECD 2010b). Indeed many economic and social problems, such as teenage pregnancy and unhealthy habits, are linked to low levels of educational attainment and skills (Cunha and Heckman 2007; Heckman 2008).
> Strengthening equity in education, and investing in the early years, also yield high returns. Starting strong in education makes it easier to acquire skills and knowledge later on. For children from disadvantaged backgrounds, access to early education not only contributes to equity, but is, in the long run, economically efficient as well. (p. 19)

In short: "To succeed, reform efforts cannot tackle just one small piece of the puzzle but must instead be part of a comprehensive approach" (Asia Society 2011, p. 26). Otherwise, "the system wins every time".

> What these findings tell policy makers is that while there are several features that are shared among high-performing systems, among systems with greater equity, or among high-performing schools, no one policy or practice spells success.
> What is important is a cohesive and systematic approach, as education policies and practices, resources invested in education, the learning environment, socio-economic status, demographics and education outcomes are all interrelated. (OECD 2014, p. 105)

In any case, another "broad conclusion is that of those variables which are potentially open to policy influence, factors to do with teachers and teaching are the most important influences on student learning. In particular, the broad consensus is that 'teacher quality' is the single most important school variable influencing student achievement" (OECD 2005, pp. 26, 27).

3.3 Teachers Are the Genius of the Everyday Alchemy of Education Quality, but the Teaching Profession Is Declining

Following the McKinsey and Company Report: “The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” (Barber and Mourshed 2007, p. 40). The 2010 OECD Ministers of Education meeting aforementioned[6] concluded: “Teachers are the key [… but] respect for the profession may be falling”. Because of that: “We saw the need to raise the status and esteem of teachers”.

Two terms are frequently used with respect to the status of the teaching profession worldwide: *decline* and (lack of) *recognition*. For example:

- A report of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia (1998) affirmed: “The status of teachers in Australia is declining. This was the view expressed almost universally to the Committee by teachers, students, academics, professional associations, parent organisations and bureaucrats. It is a view supported by the general literature on the subject and by specific research findings” (p. 29). According to the OECD (2005) study: “There are a number of countries where teaching is held in high regard as a career”, but it is widespread “the view that teaching is a profession in long-term decline” (p. 39).[7] Following Christine Blower, General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), in England and Wales:

> Morale in the teaching profession is at dangerously low levels. This is reflected starkly in the results of an NUT-commissioned YouGov survey that was published at the turn of 2013. This saw more than half (55 %) of teachers describe their morale as low or very low, an increase of 13 % since teachers were asked the same question in April 2012. The later survey also found 69 % of teachers reporting a decline in their morale since the last general election. (in Leslie 2013, p. 70)

- If the decline of the teaching profession is not steady in every country, more widespread is the feeling of lack of recognition of its professionals. According to John MacBeath (2012): “Wherever teachers have been questioned about their priorities and satisfiers, in South America, Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe or North America, they cite the importance of recognition and respect for the challenges they rise to on a daily basis” (p. 12). The abovementioned French Report remarks: “Teachers met by the Commission spontaneously express a demand for recognition more than ambitions concerning career” (Pochard 2008, p. 166).

The minimum that may be said is that the teaching profession is uncared for: it is uncared for when Governments do not care for it, and it does not care for itself.

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[6] www.oecd.org/dataoecd/53/16/46335575.pdf.

[7] This OECD study, titled *Teachers matter: Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers*, accounts for the results of a major survey conducted by its Directorate for Education, over the years 2002–2004, in collaboration with 25 countries in all continents but Africa. It is about the recruitment, preparation, career and working conditions of school teachers.

- Governments do not care for the teaching profession when the neoliberal managerial ideology prevails, according to which to be professional is to perform whatever commands zealously and proudly, as mere "deliverers of the curriculum" (OECD 2011a, p. 5). In the USA, for example, "teachers have tended to accept the intensification of their work" as a signal of their increasing professionalism, which may be used ideologically to legitimate just its contrary (Ginsburg and Megahed 2009, p. 542). It amounts to a deprofessionalization of the teaching profession, which is treated as a "craft", providing for its further control and instrumentalization. As Dean Holmes said to his students in Harvard in 1930, a nation whose teachers "perform, in general, little and mechanic tasks, strictly controlled, coming directly from manuals and following strictly instructions, is close to put its future under the rule of second class spirits" (cit. in Bourdoncle 1993, p. 113).
- The profession does not care for itself when teachers are not the best advocates of their cause if they neglect, as a Report of the Joint ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers (UNESCO 1966)[8] reads, "to promote their own status and professionalism", thus allowing "a community perception to develop that their main preoccupation has been with their own salaries and benefits". When teachers are mainly concerned with their economic–labour interests, and not enough with the values, dignity and prestige of the profession, their professional conscience, attitudes and conduct are likely to fail. A symptom of that is the broad lack of awareness of the importance of Professional Ethics in education, as well as teachers' lack of appetite for a self-governing body.

Lawrence Saha and Anthony Dworkin (2009) concluded: "The conditions of teachers and teaching have become common across national boundaries so that uniformity rather than diversity dominates the practices" (p. 10). In fact, as Lorin Anderson (2004) observed: "Even in industrialized nations, deteriorating working conditions and low salaries are discouraging people from entering the teaching profession" (p. 19). The overall status of the teaching profession is summarized in Sect. 2.2.1.

Some colours of this portrait are reflected in the first paragraph of the Executive Summary of a fresh OECD survey—*TALIS 2013 Results*[9]:

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[8] www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—ed_dialogue/—sector/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_162259.pdf.

[9] www.oecd.org/edu/school/TALIS-2013-Executive-Summary.pdf
TALIS is so described in *A Teachers' Guide to TALIS 2013*:

> The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) is a large scale international survey that focuses on the working conditions of teachers and the learning environment in schools. TALIS, a collaboration among participating countries and economies, the OECD, an international research consortium, social partners and the European Commission, aims to provide valid, timely and comparable information to help countries review and define policies for developing a high-quality teaching workforce.TALIS examines the ways in which teachers' work is recognized, appraised and rewarded, and assesses teachers' participation in professional development activities. The study provides insights into

> Our view of teachers is coloured by our own experience as students. This firsthand – and often dated – knowledge is augmented by the portrayal of teachers and their working conditions in the media. Thus, in many countries, the traditional view of teaching is one in which teachers work alone in classrooms, behind closed doors, often with larger numbers of students than they can realistically handle. In some countries, teaching is seen as a job without real career prospects that young people enter if they cannot get into a better one. The fact that pay tends to be lower than that of other college graduates is compensated for by the fact that teachers often enjoy more holiday time and are seen as working fewer hours than their colleagues in other fields.

The same survey includes the following findings:

- While more than nine out of ten (91 %) teachers are satisfied with their jobs and nearly eight in ten (78 %) would choose the teaching profession again, less than one in three teachers believe teaching is a valued profession in society.
- Sixty-eight percentage of teachers are women, except in Japan, and the average age is 43, with Singapore having the youngest teachers and Italy the oldest.
- The average class size is 24 students, and of an average total of 38 h of work, per week, teachers spend an average of:
  - Nineteen-hour teaching, ranging from 15 h in Norway to 27 h in Chile;
  - Seven hours in preparing lessons;
  - Five hours marking/grading;
  - Two hours on school management, working with parents and extracurricular activities.
- In about half the countries, one in four teachers said they spend at least 30 % of class time handling classroom disruptions and administrative tasks.
- The areas where most teachers said they needed more training are teaching students with special needs (22 %), followed by information and communication technology skills (19 %).
- According to most teachers, formal appraisals have little impact on career advancement or financial recognition, around half of them reporting feeling that most appraisals are carried out merely as administrative task.

(Footnote 9 continued)

teachers' beliefs about and attitudes towards teaching, the pedagogical practices that they adopt, and the factors related to teachers' sense of self-efficacy and job satisfaction. TALIS also examines the roles of school leaders and the support they give their teachers.

The first cycle of TALIS was conducted in 2008 and surveyed teachers and school leaders of lower secondary education in 24 countries. In 2013, 34 countries and economies participated in TALIS. (www.oecd.org/edu/school/TALIS-Teachers-Guide.pdf)

More than 100,000 teachers and school leaders at lower secondary level (for students aged 11–16) took part in the OECD survey, but it should be noted that TALIS cannot be seen as a "global 'selfie' by teachers", to the extent that from Central & South America only Mexico, Chile and Brazil participated, and none country from Africa.

3.4 Selecting, Educating and Evaluating Teachers in Light of Their Responsibilities, and Treating and Trusting Them as Professionals, Is Crucial to Quality Education

The first and broadly shared conclusion of the 2014 International Summit on the Teaching Profession was: “It is impossible to overestimate the importance of high-quality teachers to excellence and equity. Previous Summits had illustrated that the highest performing systems take a comprehensive approach to attracting, training, and retaining talented people in the profession” (Asia Society 2014, p. 27).

Regarding selection, an OECD Report (2014) observes:

> Successful enterprises often report that personnel selection is the most important set of decisions that they make. In the case of teaching, the evidence suggests that all too often the selection process follows rules about qualifications and seniority that bear little relationship to the qualities needed to be an effective teacher. (p. 37)

Furthermore, too many teachers are poorly prepared. An OECD Report published in (1990) noted “the mediocrity of pedagogic education” (p. 89). More than two decades later, an European Commission *Document* (2012) reads: “Teacher surveys regularly highlight the fact that many of them feel ill-equipped to deal with ‘teaching special learning needs students’, ‘student discipline and behaviour’ and ‘ICT teaching skills’” (p. 35). MacBeath (2012) also concluded that “a common finding internationally is that teachers are generally unprepared for surviving and thriving in the world of classrooms” (p. 17).

While teacher educators are crucial for the quality of the teaching profession, “there is surprisingly little knowledge of how teacher educators are, themselves, prepared. In many OECD countries, universities enjoy complete autonomy in developing teacher education programmes, from curriculum to practicum requirements and professional qualification standards” (OECD 2014, p. 42). However, “most countries have no professional standards or models of competences for teacher educators (beyond the academic competences required of all Higher Education staff)” (European Commission 2012, p. 55).

In the New York 2011 Summit: “The area of sharpest discussion and disagreement was certainly the design and implementation of fair and effective teacher-evaluation systems” (Asia Society 2011, p. 26).

> There are also areas of emphatic disagreement, including the weight given to student test scores or value-added measures in teacher appraisals and the relationship of performance to rewards, especially bonuses or merit pay (as opposed to salary differentials that go with different career roles). It is also difficult to balance the goals of improvement and accountability. Poorly designed or top-down appraisal systems can unintentionally create a climate of fear and resistance among teachers that inhibits creativity. (Asia Society 2014, p. 10)

Reducing teachers’ performance evaluation to instrumental, isolated elements—which are easier to observe, for the sake of objectifying and quantifying for statistical and bureaucratic purposes—is to avoid its complexity and holistic nature and, consequently, to disfigure it. The frenzy of data-driven accountability reaches a

climax when teachers' test-based evaluations are published, naming and ranking individual teachers as effective or ineffective.[10]

According to an OECD Report (2011a), "giving teachers responsibility as professionals and leaders of reform", and trusting their professional responsibility, is "[p]erhaps the greatest challenge to reform" (pp. 5, 55).

The New York 2011 Summit Report affirms: "For the teaching profession to improve, teachers need to see themselves as autonomous professionals rather than just the subjects of management" (Asia Society 2011, p. 16). The New York 2012 Summit Report notes, referring to the USA: "Fundamentally, American society's view of teaching has to change from the factory model of yesterday to a view of teaching as a true profession" (Asia Society 2012, p. 9). Following the European Commission *Document* (2012):

> Recruiting excellent people into teaching requires a more attractive work environment – where teaching staff are treated like professionals, and have sufficient scope to work autonomously. According to recent reviews of the evidence, developing and retaining a motivated, committed teaching profession requires limiting 'dissatisfiers' and increasing 'satisfiers'. 'Dissatisfiers' for teaching staff include: feeling not in control, lack of time for all work required, isolation from colleagues; prescribed curricula, bureaucracy, pressure to meet targets, testing, an overload of new policies and initiatives; lack of parental support, poor student behaviour and stress. The 'satisfiers' concern: being valued, trusted and listened to; adequate time for learning, teaching and planning; autonomy, initiative, creativity; contact with pupils, collegiality; scope for innovation and experimentation. (p. 31)

The *A Teachers' Guide to TALIS 2013*[11] reaffirms: "As for most professionals, teachers derive the most satisfaction from their work when they feel that they are treated as professionals, when their opinions are sought and valued, and when they feel they have a say in how they work" (p. 27).[12]

In sum, the teaching profession quality is neither cheap nor evaluable in snapshot, but what is at stake in education is priceless.

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[10] This was done in the USA, in the State of New York, in 2012, where a teacher recognized as teacher of the year by the Parent Teacher Organization earned a score of 7 out of 20 points. Her school Principal wrote: "Despite the judgment of the New York State Education Department, Ashley remains a model teacher in our school: beloved by students and parents, respected by colleagues and supervisors" (Valerie Strauss, "Meet Ashley, a great teacher with a bad 'value-added' score". (Retrieved April 2013 from www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/meet-ashley-a-great-teacher-with-a-bad-value-added-score/2012/09/13/27836e4e-fdb7-11e1-a31e-804fccb658f9_blog.html).

[11] www.oecd.org/edu/school/TALIS-Teachers-Guide.pdf.

[12] In this connection, an OECD Report (2011a) remarks:

> Unions are sometimes perceived as interfering with promising school reform programs by giving higher priority to the unions' 'bread and butter' issues than to what the evidence suggests students need to succeed. But the fact is that many of the countries with the strongest student performance also have strong teachers' unions, and the better a country's education system performs, the more likely that country is working constructively with its unions and treating its teachers as trusted professional partners. (p. 56).

3.5 Finland: An Admirable Public Education System with Human Right and Global Public Good Quality, as Well as a Very Prestigious and Esteemed Teaching Profession

• **Beyond PISA**

In 2001, when it appeared at the top of the ranking of the education systems assessed by PISA, Finland became a destiny of educational pilgrimage.[13] Finnish students had not been specifically taught to get such results. Thereafter, other countries began to “work for PISA” and got to the top, but by ways less admirable, even “unpalatable” (OECD 2011b, p. 152). In this respect, Pasi Sahlberg, the most mediatic ambassador of Finland’s worldwide prized education system,[14] comments:

> One may also conclude that these international standardized tests are becoming global curriculum standards. Indeed, OECD has observed that its PISA test is already playing an important role in national policy making and education reforms in many countries. Schools, teachers and students are now prepared in advance to take these tests. Learning materials are adjusted to fit to the style of these assessments. Life in many schools around the world is becoming split into important academic study that these tests measure, and other not-so-important study that these measurements don’t cover. Kind of a GERM in grand scale.[15]

[13] “Finnish schools have become a kind of tourist destination, with hundreds of educators and policy makers annually travelling to Helsinki to try to learn the secret of their success” (OECD 2011b, p. 118).

[14] ‘How GERM is infecting schools around the world?’, published in *The Washington Post* on 29 June 2012 (www.pasisahlberg.com/blog).

Pasi Sahlberg is the author of *Finnish Lessons: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland* (Teachers College Press 2011) that has earned him the 2013 University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award in Education (USA). He also received the 2012 Education Award of the Trade Union of Education in Finland. He wrote:

> Since the beginning of 2000, I have given more than 250 keynote addresses and 50 interviews about the Finnish educational system around the world. My estimate is that this means talking to some 50,000 people directly and many more through published stories and news. Numerous conversations with people who are interested in education like I am have greatly advanced writing this book. Following are some of the questions that have been asked over and over again: “What is the secret of Finnish educational success?”, “How do you get best young people into teaching in Finland?”, “How much does lack of ethnic diversity have to do with good educational performance there?”, “How do you know that all schools are doing what they should when you don’t test students or inspect teachers?”, and “How did Finland save its education system during the economic downturn in the 1990s?” (Sahlberg 2011, p. 2).

[15] http://dianeravitch.net/2012/12/14/exclusive-pasi-sahlberg-on-timss-and-pirls.

What is GERM?

> Ten years ago – against all odds – Finland was ranked as the world's top education nation. It was strange because in Finland education is seen as a public good accessible to all free of charge without standardized testing or competitive private schools. When I look around the world, I see competition, choice, and measuring of students and teachers as the main means to improve education. This market-based global movement has put many public schools at risk in the United States and many other countries, as well. But not in Finland. […]
> One thing that has struck me is how similar education systems are. […]
> Education reforms in different countries also follow similar patterns. So visible is this common way of improvement that I call it the Global Educational Reform Movement or GERM. It is like an epidemic that spreads and infects education systems through a virus. […] Education systems borrow policies from others and get infected. As a consequence, schools get ill, teachers don't feel well, and kids learn less. GERM infections have various symptoms. The first symptom is more competition within education systems. […]
> The second symptom of GERM is increased school choice. It essentially positions parents as consumers empowering them to select schools for their children from several options and thereby promotes market-style competition into the system as schools seek to attract those parents. […] Increasing numbers of charter schools in the United States, secondary school academies in England, free schools in Sweden and private schools in Australia are examples of expanding school choice policies. Yet according to the OECD, nations pursuing such choice have seen both a decline in academic results and an increase in school segregation.
> The third sign of GERM is stronger accountability from schools and related standardized testing of students. Just as in the market place, many believe that holding teachers and schools accountable for students' learning will lead to improved results. Today standardized test scores are the most common way of deciding whether schools are doing a good job. Teacher effectiveness that is measured using standardized tests is a related symptom of GERM. According to the Center for Public Education [USA], standardized testing has increased teaching to the test, narrowed curricula to prioritize reading and mathematics, and distanced teaching from the art of pedagogy to mechanistic instruction. […]
> We should instead restore the fundamental meaning and values of school education. Without public schools, our nations and communities are poorly equipped to value humanity, equality and democracy. […] Diversity is richness in humanity and a condition for innovation.[16]

That is why Finnish teachers were neither very surprised nor excited with the news. "Many teachers and principals in Finland have a skeptical view of international measurements and benchmarking tools. They perceive teaching and learning as complex processes and are aware that quantifying their effectiveness is difficult" (Sahlberg 2011, p. 134). In addition, the PISA results are not *scholarly pure*, as already documented. According to the 2005 OECD study: "The first and most solidly based finding is that the largest source of variation in student learning is attributable to differences in what students bring to school—their abilities and attitudes, and family and community background" (p. 26).

> Learning is not separate from learners' personal lives, socio-economic situation, or the attitudes, values, traditions, and beliefs held by their community. Making education systems more relevant and effective requires an approach that recognises the interconnecting

[16] "How GERM is infecting schools around the world?", published in *The Washington Post* on 29 June 2012 (www.pasisahlberg.com/blog).

> roles played by many different stakeholders, including parents, wider society and government. (European Commission 2012, p. 20)

The value of the Finnish public education overcomes all that such international surveys are able to assess.

> One point of view is that academic achievement tests, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) focus on areas too narrow to capture the whole spectrum of school education, and thus ignore social skills, moral development, creativity, or digital literacy as important outcomes of public education for all […]. (Sahlberg 2011, p. 9)

Below are very briefly highlighted the main features of the Finnish education system.

- **Education System of Finland**

The Finnish education system is governed by the Ministry of Education (that has two Ministers: the Minister of Education and the Minister of Culture) and the National Board of Education (responsible for primary and secondary education as well as for adult education and training). It is composed of the following:

- Pre-primary education offered by day care centres, as well as in primary schools in the year preceding the beginning of basic education, at six years. It is voluntary, but is attended by some 96 % of the age group.
- Basic education in comprehensive schools (*peruskoulu*) begins at the age of seven and lasts 9 years. While it is provided within a single structure, without division into primary and lower secondary education, year classes 1–6 are mainly taught by class teachers and year classes 7–9 by specialized subject teachers.[17] It is completed by nearly all children (99.7 %).
- After basic education, a year of additional voluntary basic education is available that is attended by around 2.5 % students.
- Post-compulsory school education is designed to last 3 years, but may be completed from 2 to 4 years. It includes general and vocational upper secondary education and has a modular structure, i.e. not tied to year classes. It is attended by about 93 % of each age group (general: around 54.5 %; vocational: around 38.5 %) immediately after leaving comprehensive school. The certification is delivered when the required number of courses is complete.
- General upper secondary schooling ends with a national Matriculation Examination that includes a test in the mother tongue and in three of the following subjects: the second national language (Swedisch or Sami), a foreign language, mathematics or one subject in general studies (humanities and natural sciences).

[17] Class teachers are those who teach a class in grades 1–6 in basic education. Subject teachers are those who teach only a discipline or specialized area in grades 7–9 in basic education and at upper secondary school.

Students may include optional tests. The Matriculation Examination may also be taken by students in vocational upper secondary education and training.

- Tertiary education consists of two complementary sectors: Universities and Polytechnics (also called Universities of Applied Sciences, providing both theoretical knowledge and practical skills). Universities are independent corporations under Public Law or Foundations under Private Law. About 64 % of their budgets are directly funded by the Government. Polytechnics are municipal or private institutions, subject to governmental authorization.
- The education system has no dead ends, and adult education is also available at all levels. More than 1.7 million adults participate in different types of adult education each year.

Education is free at all levels, from pre-primary to higher education. This includes, at pre-primary and basic education levels, transportation, textbooks, meals, comprehensive health care, including dental care and psychological support, guidance and counselling, and special education services. At the secondary level and in higher education, the books are not free, but a free meal is provided at the secondary level. Responsibility for educational funding is divided between the State and local authorities.

Only about 1 % of schools providing basic education are private, accounting for around 2 % of all their pupils. Private schools are not allowed to collect student fees (with some exceptions), but publicly supervised private schools generally receive State aid according to the same principles as other schools.

> Today, Finland is a wealthy Nordic welfare state with zero illiteracy, low infant mortality, high productivity and relatively high taxes. A major aspect of societal income distribution is investment in education which is free-of-charge from the pre-school year at age 6 to tertiary education, and accessible to all regardless of language, ethnicity, gender, or social status. Basic education is a combination of centralised and decentralised management and the private sector is very limited due to both historical reasons and a general trust in the high standard of the municipal schools. (Kupiainen et al. 2009, pp. 49, 50)

Finnish public education is inspired and aims at cultivating values that may be synthesized as follows.

• Values and Principles of the Public Education

- *Humanism and universalism*
- *Equity and inclusion*
- *Differentiation and decentralization*
- *Trust and responsibility*

The Basic Education Act 628/1998 (Amendments up to 1136/2010), Section 2 (Objectives of education),[18] provides the statements:

[18] www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1998/en19980628.pdf.

1. The purpose of education referred to in this Act is to support pupils' growth into humanity and into ethically responsible membership of society and to provide them with knowledge and skills needed in life. Furthermore, the aim of pre-primary education, as part of early childhood education, is to improve children's capacity for learning.
2. Education shall promote civilisation and equality in society and pupils' prerequisites for participating in education and otherwise developing themselves during their lives.
3. The aim of education shall further be to secure adequate equity in education throughout the country.

According to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2004 (2.1 Underlying values of basic education)[19]: "The underlying values of basic education are human rights, equality, democracy, natural diversity, preservation of environmental viability, and the endorsement of multiculturalism. Basic education promotes responsibility, a sense of community, and respect for the rights and freedoms of the individual". These values "are to be incorporated into the objectives and contents of basic education, and into everyday activity". The Core Curriculum includes seven "Cross-curricular themes" to approach "the educational challenges of the time", which should be "included in the core and optional subjects and in joint events such as assemblies, and are to be manifest in the school's operational culture" (7.1). The first two are "Growth as a person" and "Cultural identity and internationalism". The objectives of the first are the following (7.1.1):

The pupils will

- come to understand their physical, psychological and social growth, and their uniqueness as individuals
- learn to evaluate the ethics of their actions and to recognize right and wrong
- learn to recognize the importance of aesthetic experiences to the quality of life
- learn to recognize their individual learning styles and develop themselves as learners
- learn to function as members of a group and community

The core contents of the second are as follows (7.1.2):

- one's own culture, the culture of one's home region, and the nature of being Finnish, Nordic and European
- mother cultures and multiculturalism
- human rights and prerequisites for trust, mutual respect, and successful cooperation among human groups
- internationalism in different spheres of life, and skills for functioning in international interaction
- the importance of the culture of manners

One of the objectives of the third cross-curricular theme (media skills and communication) reads: "take a critical stance towards contents conveyed by the media, and to ponder the related values of ethics and aesthetics in communication" (7.1.3).

The Core Curriculum also includes Ethics as alternative to Religion, an objective of which is to "gain an introduction to the principles of human rights, tolerance, justice, and sustainable development, and learn to assume responsibility for

[19] www.oph.fi/english/curricula_and_qualifications/basic_education.

themselves, other people, the community, and nature" (7.12). It is "a multidisciplinary whole in terms of its foundation" whose rich contents include "The community and human rights, namely":

- foundations of living together, rules, agreements, promises, trust, honesty and fairness, the Golden Rule
- rights of children, right and obligation, human rights
- equality, peace, democracy, the world of the future
- foundations of ethics, moral justification of action, purpose and consequence of action
- my own life's ethical problems solutions

It further includes "ethics of human rights, environmental ethics", as well as "my future, acting for the future's sake". In this connection, it should be highlighted that, on 26 September 2013, the Ministry commissioned a report to examine how democracy and human rights objectives are implemented and their content is processed in teacher training in universities and polytechnics. The report concluded that, while democracy and human rights are seen in all units as key values in education, much more should be done. It made a number of recommendations on teacher education and teacher training for making democracy and participation more visible and better incorporated into the education of teachers. This requires, in particular, that resources are targeted towards research on democracy and human rights education.[20]

The Ethics assessment criteria mention:

- know the main features of human and civil rights and be capable of explaining the difference between them […]
- be able to explain the mutual dependence between rights and responsibilities […]
- recognize violations of human and civil rights and know how to evaluate the bases of various demands for equality and rights
- know about problems of contemporary society and be able to present both optimistic and pessimistic outlooks on the future

Sahlberg (2011) highlights:

> Equity in education is an important feature in Nordic welfare states. It means more than just opening access to an equal education for all. Equity in education is a principle that aims at guaranteeing high quality education for all in different places and circumstances. In the Finnish context equity is about having a socially fair and inclusive education system that is based on equality of educational opportunities.
> […]
> The Finnish education system follows the principle of inclusiveness regarding the treatment of students with differing characteristics and needs. […]
> The equitable Finnish education system is a result of systematic attention to social justice and early intervention to help those with special needs, and close interplay between education and other sectors – particularly health and social sectors – in Finnish society. (pp. 45, 69)

In his opinion, "if I had to pick up one thing that Finland is doing particularly systematically and well to enhance equity, it's the special education system. It's

[20] www.minedu.fi/OPM/Julkaisut/2014/Demokratia_ja_ihmisoikeudet.html?lang=en.

very pricey, it's very expensive. But when we do our economics of education, we also calculate that the cost of not doing that would be much higher later on".[21] Special needs should be identified and met as early as possible in order to prevent their worsening and cumulative effects.

Following the Amendments and Additions to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (3.4)[22]:

> Differentiation of instruction is a primary means of taking the needs of the teaching groups and the diversity of pupils into account, permeating through all instruction. […] Each pupil is guided to learn in the way that suits him or her best. Pupils' interests are taken into account in instruction by linking the knowledge and skills being learnt to experiences and activities that they find meaningful.

Another feature of the Finnish education system is decentralization. It is largely decentralized and municipalized (there are 446 municipalities). Schools can be municipal, inter-municipal (cooperation between municipalities) or private but subject to governmental approval. Each school is usually managed by a board where teachers, non-teaching staff, students and parents are represented. Comprehensive schools, upper secondary schools and vocational institutions draw their curricula based on the National Core Curriculum issued by the National Board of Education. Teachers and schools are responsible for assessing student performance, there being only one national assessment: the Matriculation Examination, at the end of general upper secondary school that is the only external national test in the Finnish education system.

> Much of what has been previously noted is possible only if parents, students, and authorities trust teachers and school principals. The Finnish education system was highly centralised until the early 1990s. Schools were strictly regulated by the central agencies; a dense network of rules and orders governed the daily work of teachers. The gradual shift towards trusting schools and teachers began in the late 1980s. In the early 1990s, the era of a trust-based school culture formally started in Finland.
>
> The culture of trust means that education authorities and political leaders believe that teachers, together with principals, parents and their communities, know how to provide the best possible education for their children and youth. Trust can only flourish in an environment that is built upon honesty, confidence, professionalism and good governance. (OECD 2012, p. 100)

Consequently, as an OECD Report (2011b) notes: "As with all education systems that achieve good results, Finland's success is a function of the interaction of several different factors that work together to create a coherent approach that supports consistent system-wide performance" (p. 123). They compose an alchemy whose main ingredients may be summarized as follows.

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[21] Retrieved June 2014 from https://theconversation.edu.au/finnish-education-guru-pasi-sahlberg-in-conversation-full-transcript-9836.

[22] www.oph.fi/download/132551_amendments_and_additions_to_national_core_curriculum_basic_education.pdf.

- **Explaining the "Finnish Education Miracle"**

- *Education reform: consensus, vision, wholeness, depth*
- *Education quality: reflex and ferment of social quality*
- *Welcoming and well-equipped schools*
- *Less can be better*
- *Teaching profession: at the heart of the education quality*

Following Sahlberg (2011):

> As this book illustrates, there is no single reason why any educational system succeeds or fails. Instead, there is a network of interrelated factors – educational, political and cultural – that function differently in different situations. I would, however, like to cite three important elements of Finnish educational policies since the early 1970s that appear to transcend cultures. The first one is an inspiring vision of what good public education should be. Finland has been particularly committed to building a good publicly financed and locally governed basic school for every child. This common educational goal became so deeply rooted in politics and public services in Finland that it survived opposing political governments and ministries unharmed and intact. […]
> As a consequence, the basic values and the main vision of education as public service have remained unchanged since the 1970s. (pp. 6, 131)

It has been "a longer-term vision", built upon "strategic principles, such as equal opportunity for all and putting learning before teaching. Rather than seeking short-term gains education development has focused on consolidating these basic values in education" (Aho et al. 2006, p. 3). Indeed: "There have been over 20 different ministers of education and government coalitions since the 1970s in Finland, but the main principles of education policy have changed little".[23]

A far-reaching vision implies that extensive education reform does not consist in "doing more of the same", as well as "that educational change should be systematic and coherent, in contrast with the current haphazard intervention efforts of many other countries" (Sahlberg 2011, pp. 62, 132).

The education system being a sub-system of cultural–sociopolitical–economic systems, their interplay generates a circle that may be vicious or virtuous.

> Education policies are necessarily interwined with other social policies, and with the overall political culture of a nation. […]
> Finland has a competitive national economy, low levels of corruption, good quality of life, a strong sustainable-development lifestyle, and gender equality. […]
> [E]ducation system performance has to be seen in the context of other systems in the society, for example, health, environment, rule of law, governance, economy, and technology. It is not only that the education system functions well in Finland, but that it is part of a well-functioning democratic welfare state. Attempts to explain the success of the education system in Finland should be put in the wider context and seen as a part of the overall function of democratic civil society. […] The quality of a nation or its parts is rarely a result of any single factor. The entire society needs to perform harmoniously. (pp. 39, 96, 115)

[23] http://pasisahlberg.com/finlands-educational-success-is-no-miracle.

Consequently, the Finnish education system holds the pedigree of the Nordic *Welfare State* and the sociocultural and political *ethos* of Finland as a country that also regularly features in other international rankings: good governance, justice, health, security, freedom, environment, well-being, corruption, etc.

Sahlberg notes that:

> Another overlooked direction of Finnish educational development is reform of school architecture along the guidelines set out by the National Curriculum Framework and its pedagogical and philosophical principles. […] Physical environment provides an important context for both students and teachers. […] The school building can create a sense of well-being, respect, and happiness – all hallmarks of Finnish school. (p. 128)

As the Amendments and Additions to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education[24] reads: "The school community should be safe, friendly and respectful in terms of atmosphere" (2.3), and learning should be meaningful in order to "stimulate a desire to learn" (3.4).

Furthermore, the desire to go and to be in school is not nourished with overloading work and the pressure of standardized tests. According to the Basic Education Act 628/1998 (Amendments up to 1136/2010), Section 24.1 (Pupil's work load)[25]: "The pupil's work load in basic education must be such as to allow him or her enough time for rest, recreation and hobbies over and above the time spent in school, school travel and homework". In this regard, Robert Schwartz said that Finland "is a wonderful case study. Kids start school later; school hours are shorter than most others; they don't assign homework; their teachers are in front of kids less" (as cit. in Pearson 2012, p. 41). The Finnish school proves that *less can be better*.

Last but not least, as Sahlberg (2011) wrote:

> Many factors contributed to Finland's educational system's current fame, such as its 9-year comprehensive school (peruskoulu) for all children, modern learning-focused curricula, systematic care for students with diverse special needs, and local autonomy and shared responsibility. However, research and experience suggest that one factor trumps all others: the daily contributions of excellent teachers. […] Finnish experience shows that it is more important to ensure that teachers' work in schools is based on professional dignity and social respect so that they can fulfill their intention of selecting teaching as lifetime careers.
> […]
> Indeed, Finns continue to regard teaching as a noble, prestigious profession – akin to physicians, lawyers, or economists – driven mainly by moral purpose, rather than by material interest, careers, or rewards.
> […]
> Due to the popularity of teaching and becoming a teacher, only Finland's best and most commited are able to realize those professional dreams. […] Annually, only about 1 of every 10 applicants will be accepted to prepare to become a teacher in Finnish primary schools. […]

[24] www.oph.fi/download/132551_amendments_and_additions_to_national_core_curriculum_basic_education.pdf.

[25] www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1998/en19980628.pdf.

> Thus, I call this phenomenon the ‘Finnish advantage’, while other nations continue to wonder how to get the ‘best and brightest’ into teaching.
> […]
> A critical condition for attracting the most able young people year after year to teacher education, however, is that a teacher’s work should represent an independent and respectful profession rather than merely focus on technical implementation of externally mandated standards, endless tests, and administrative burdens. (pp. 70, 71, 73, 76, 95)

In short: “Teachers in Finland are representatives of a high-quality academic and ethical profession” (Niemi 2012, p. 35). Their quality is constructed and cultivated through a global approach embracing all aspects of the teaching profession: selection, education, independence, work conditions, pay, etc. As a consequence: “Parents trust teachers as professionals who know what is best for their children” (Sahlberg 2011, p. 129).

An OECD publication (2011b) comments:

> The fact that there seems to be very little interest in Finland in instituting the assessment and external accountability regimes that have characterised the reform strategies of many OECD countries, most prominently the US and the UK, is perhaps the best evidence of the fundamental trust that seems to exist between the educators and the community. Given the extraordinary performance of the Finnish system over the past decade, this is a lesson others might want to study. (p. 131)

All in all, Finland’s education system is an example of a human rights approach to education quality.

- **Right to Education: The Secret**

The secret of the *Finnish Educational Miracle* is the *right to education* as a fundamental right and global public good that is everyone’s right to every education he or she is entitled to, while respecting all their human rights.

The Finnish Constitution states: “Everyone has the right to basic education free of charge” (Section 16—Educational rights).[26] The Amendments and Additions to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education[27] repeat: “Every pupil has a right to high-quality education as well as an opportunity to receive guidance and support for learning and schooling on all school days” (4.1). Earlier, it had been recalled: “Finland has also committed to international agreements, programmes and declarations which require provision of education so as to guarantee learning for children and young people at a common school for all” (2.3). Sahlberg (2011) remarks: “Education in Finland is widely seen as a public good and is therefore protected as a basic human right to all in the Constitution” (p. 10).

As a consequence, if the *habitat* of the *Finnish Educational Miracle* is not exportable, its principles are nevertheless universally realizable. They meet the principles of the Ethics of the Right to Education—embedded in the Ethics of

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[26] www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/1999/en19990731.pdf.

[27] www.oph.fi/download/132551_amendments_and_additions_to_national_core_curriculum_basic_education.pdf.

Human Rights and drawing on the Ethics of the Rights of the Child—that may be thus stated:

- *Primacy of the best interests of the holder of the right to education*
- *Full development of the human personality*
- *Respect for the dignity and rights of the child*
- *Priority of human rights education as an ethical, civic and international education*

These principles attempt to synthesize the normative content of the right to education that is a complex of rights: those formally recognized as elements of its core content, or implicit in its scope, or concerning the conditions of its implementation.

The Finnish school is a school of the right to education because it is an institution centred on each child or adolescent as a unique human being who has an indefinite potential and a need to learn, to learn to learn, to learn to be—to be human and to live humanely together with other human beings, close or distant. It is a school of liberty, creativity, responsibility and universality. "Purpose of schooling has focused on holistic development of personality that includes knowledge, skills, values, creativity and interpersonal characteristics" (Aho et al. 2006, p. 3).

As we saw, Finnish education politics does not overlook the deep interdependence existing between the right to education and other human rights, both of children and of their parents, including a broad conception of the right to human rights education. The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education includes many references to human rights and the rights of the child.

In sum, education is a real national priority, both as "a moral and economic imperative", as Sahlberg (2011) wrote. "Governments from the political left and right have respected education as the key public service for all citizens and maintained their belief that only a highly and widely educated nation will be successful in world markets" (pp. 1, 130).

Other principles of the *Finnish Educational Miracle* are not new either. The merit of Finnish reformers was rather to want and to know how to apply, with creativity and consistency, principles borrowed from the universal pedagogic heritage, such as the following:

- *Individualization and participation as methodological principles*
- *Autonomy and responsibility as higher values of education*
- *Desire as the drive of learning*

As we know, centring the learning process in the learner and making it active was a common feature of the "new schools" which the New Education Movement gave rise to during the first half of the twentieth century. These principles were closely related to those of autonomy and responsibility promoted through the democratic participation of children and adolescents in school governance. Autonomy may be considered as the highest expression of the free and full development of the human personality. It implies the consciousness of, and capacity for, responsibility as the highest expression of human morality.

Another principle underlying Finnish education politics and pedagogy seems to be one that is the most neglected by education reformers and professionals worldwide. It was highlighted by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) when he said in *Émile* (1762) that the best method is "one which is generally overlooked—it consists in the desire to learn. Arouse this desire in your scholar […] any method will serve" (1993a, Book II, p. 96). Indeed, while the human being has needs, it is essentially a being of desires. The child learns only what he or she desires to know, with whom he or she likes to learn, and where he or she feels well. This is critical for any human future.

- **Conclusion**

Finland is probably the most harmoniously developed country in the world. Education has been the engine of its high global well-being.

> After World War II, the idea was to provide all Finns with an equal opportunity for good public education regardless of their domicile, socioeconomic status, or other life conditions. This became the main principle in building *peruskoulu* in the early 1970s. The first PISA survey in 2000 proved that the Finnish Big Dream was fulfilled. (Sahlberg 2011, pp. 139, 140)

Peruskoulu (common basic school) reaches far beyond the PISA boundaries, as indicated earlier.

> Comprehensive schools that offer all children the same top quality, publicly financed education – not only excellent teaching but counseling, health, nutrition and special-education services as well – seems to play a key role in building a high-performing education system. Good school for all, not for some, is the core value that drives education in Finland. (Aho et al. 2006, p. 2)

The Finnish common basic school is probably the best in the world. It epitomizes the compatibility between equity and quality, inclusiveness and competitiveness, so making more evident, by contrast, how miserable neoliberal education politics is.

However, success may have mollifying effects (as the Nokia case illustrates) or be contaminated by neoliberal pressures (funding for primary schools has been cut, for example). In any case, human education is never a finished endeavour: it is a work in progress because societies transform and change, and new challenges arise.[28]

[28] In this connection, a UK Report notices:

> The transition from an industrial society to a knowledge society has brought about an unprecedented level of wealth, meaning that people can move beyond thinking about survival to thinking about their subjective well-being.
> Values have shifted from an emphasis on physical and economic well-being to individual freedom and self-expression (amongst others).
> This new focus on subjective well-being is combined with unparalleled availability of information due to the exponential growth of technology in the past quarter of a century. (Spada 2009, p. 6).

Therefore, the Finnish Government has launched in February 2014 a national report entitled "The Future School of Finland: A New Beginning".[29]

To resist the neoliberal winds blowing over the world (which are more gelid than the Nordic winter) and not breaking but rather deepening the virtuous circle of the right to education school that has it been so wise to create—here is Finland's historic responsibility towards its children and future, and, in addition, as an example, towards all children of the world and the future of Humankind.[30]

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[29] The process is steered by a broad-based group chaired by the Minister of Education and Science that includes representatives from eight political parties; delegates from the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Board of Education; four to five representatives from research fields, who are also members in the theme area working groups; delegates from the Trade Union of Education in Finland, the Association of Finnish Principals, the Association of Finnish Independent Education Employers, the Trade Union for the Public and Welfare Sectors, the Association of Finnish; involvement of Local and Regional Authorities, the Finnish Parents' League and secondary school student organizations.

The steering group coordinates two working groups focusing on the following themes: 1) the significance of competence and learning in terms of societal development, and 2) motivation for learning, school satisfaction and teaching arrangements and methods. (See: www.minedu.fi/OPM/Tiedotteet/2014/02/perusopetus.html?lang=en).

[30] *The Future is Finnish*—such was the title of a text published on the *Newsweek* website on May 23, 1999… (www.newsweek.com/future-finnish-166786).

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