Chapter 7
Purposeful Policy and Practice for Equity and Quality – A Finnish Case

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The Purpose of the Chapter

Finnish students' outstanding success in PISA studies (OECD, 2003, 2006, 2010) during the last decade has been a great joy to educational practitioners and decision-makers in Finland. It has been amazing how the Finnish education system, with only average monetary investments, a very small amount of homework and lesson hours, and extremely light education evaluation (no inspection system) can reach such results in high quality and equality in international comparisons (Reinikainen, 2012).

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on factors that are and have been the major reasons promoting high quality education in Finland. The article starts with a short historical and cultural description of contextual factors. Thereafter, policy level decisions and trends for the comprehensive school and teacher education are introduced. The chapter also summarises how equity and lifelong learning are connected together to provide equal opportunities to all learners. The chapter will focus on the factors that are important for keeping up the high quality in the Finnish system. Finally, the chapter will also bring some major challenges for the future.

This chapter is based on strategic national policy documents, especially governmental programmes and their action plans, decision documents of the Finnish National Board of Education and Ministry of Education and Culture, the University Act and Teacher Education Decrees. The analysis is based on the principles and contents in which students' learning is the focus. National evaluations and research projects on teaching, learning and teacher education have also provided important knowledge about the strengths and weaknesses of the Finnish educational system.

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National and Cultural Context – A Brief History

Roots of Educational Values in a National History

In the national history of Finland, learning and education have been central values for a long time. Thus, in Finland, we like to think that our success in the PISA surveys has been only a side product in the development of our educational system. A major cultural influential background factor is a strong sense of Finnish national identity. Having first been part of the Swedish realm from 1249 to 1809, then from 1809 to 1917 existing as a Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire, Finland finally became independent in 1917. From the late nineteenth century onwards, a strong Finnish nationalist movement, known as the Fennoman Movement, grew. The main message of the representatives of the Finnish national movement was the education of a nation. They advocated that the power of a nation depends especially on competent leaders and the quality of the civil servants and teachers. Teacher education was seen as a necessary means for national education. Teacher education has had a close relationship with universities since its beginnings in the nineteenth century. Respect for learning and teachers' work has had long historical roots in Finland and has been a deep cultural feature in Finnish society. Teachers were considered to be important actors in local communities. They were often responsible for cultural activities in villages when 6-year basic education became compulsory for all children in 1921. Teachers, nicknamed 'candles of the nation', very often educated the whole village and people in local regions by organising choirs, theatre performances and parental education in addition to their normal school work. This education process was strongly supported by the Finnish Lutheran Church that had demanded literacy as a requirement for obtaining permission to marry since the fifteenth century until the school system in society took responsibility for basic education and literacy (Niemi, 2012a).

Towards a Comprehensive School

The baby boom after the Second World War increased the number of pupils enrolled in Finnish schools in the 1950s. At the same time, the concept of a welfare society emerged. Education was seen as a crucial factor for upholding equity in society. An important part of this process was the idea that free education is a basic right for all citizens. After many contradictory and heated debates, wide consensus could finally be found among politicians that a small country has to promote equality in education by implementing a system that provides educational opportunities for as long as possible to all those who are motivated to learn, regardless of their socioeconomic status, gender or place of residence. At the time, Finland had a parallel system in education in place in which 10-year-old children had to decide on their future prospects and careers. One had either to pass entrance examinations into academically oriented schools or go on routes that led to

vocational fields. If they selected the vocational route, they could not seek entrance to higher education. The educational system put individuals into one of two categories at a very early stage of their lives, thus creating a divided nation. The academic schools very often had tuition fees, which further strengthened the divide.

Moving to a new school system that would be the same for all children was not an easy process in spite of a common general vision of the importance of education. After a very tough political debate in the 1960s, it was decided in 1968 that the parallel school system should be replaced by a national 9-year basic education that would represent the ideology of comprehensive education (Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2007; Laukkanen, 2006, 2008; Sahlberg, 2011). When the government delivered its bill to parliament in 1967, one of the arguments for the common 9-year comprehensive education for all was that it was too early to judge individual capacities after only 4 years of basic education. In the beginning of the new system, streaming was allowed but it was abolished in the 1980s because of unwanted consequences. It did not increase learning outcomes but strengthened the divide between different learners. In the 1970s and 1980s, the comprehensive school was a very centralised system. It was a time when a new concept of pedagogy had to be developed and teacher education was reformed radically. In the 1980s, a general decentralisation in all administrations was implemented in Finland and also in educational policy. It gave more freedom as well as responsibility to local educational providers. The teacher education system was also developed to provide new teachers with better competences to meet the whole age cohorts and to take more responsibility for curriculum development. During the 1980s and 1990s, there were many political debates about the relevance of the common comprehensive school for all. Critical voices demanded more attention especially to gifted children. However, the comprehensive school model remained. The main policy was that the comprehensive school could have different profiles locally and support students' individual qualities without streaming or having separate schools, for example, gifted pupils.

Educational Policy for Equity Throughout the System

Equity has been a leading principle of Finnish education policy and it covers the whole educational system from early education to higher education as well as adult education (Kumpulainen & Lankinen, 2012; OECD, 2005). This objective can be seen in every governmental programme for the past 20 years even though there have been different political parties in the government. It is included also in the national curricula of all levels of the educational system (Finnish National Board of Education [FNBE], 2004a, 2004b). The principle entails that everyone needs sufficient learning skills and opportunities to educate and develop themselves in different learning environments throughout their lifespan (Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland [MEC], 2011). The Finnish official policy can be summarised in the following way:

> The main objective of the Finnish education policy is to offer all citizens equal opportunities to receive education, regardless of age, domicile, financial situation, sex or mother tongue. Education is considered to be one of the fundamental rights of all citizens. (FNBE, 2012a, 2012b)

Since the late 1960s, Finnish basic education has been logically developed towards the comprehensive model, which guarantees everybody equal opportunities in education irrespective of sex, social status, ethnic group, among others, as outlined in the constitution. According to education researchers (Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2007; Laukkanen, 2006; Schleicher, 2007; Simola, 2005; Välijärvi, 2004), the educational policy has purposefully aimed at equity in education, which is the main reason for its good learning outcomes. Finland has built an education system with the following uniformed characteristics: free education, free school meals and special needs education. The principle of inclusion has been an important guideline. In the 1980s, all Finnish students in basic education began to have the same goals in mathematics and foreign languages. In so doing, the Finnish Government was realistic. In reality, these goals are attained by individuals with different levels of success. However, with extra support for the weakest students, we can considerably raise the performance of the whole age group.

Laukkanen (2006) summarises the most important decisions as: (1) the discontinuation of streaming; (2) the strong allocation of affordable educational resources to lower secondary education; (3) the decentralisation of decision-making powers; (4) the qualification of primary school teacher education was also raised to the MA level; (5) support for weak students was taken care of, and (6) different stakeholders were invited to express their opinions on educational policy.

One of the aims of the Finnish education system is to have an educational infrastructure that is devoid of so-called 'dead-ends'. Compulsory education is the 9 years of comprehensive school, but the national aim is to keep all children in connection with the educational system for at least 12 years and to provide several routes for lifelong learning after that. The aim of the system is to enable an individual's education to continue. Nearly 100 % of each age cohort completes the 9 years of comprehensive schooling. Of those who finish the 9th grade of comprehensive school, 94 % continue their studies in the same year either in upper secondary general school or upper secondary level vocational education (Statistics Finland, 2009). The 6 % of the age cohort, who do not continue their studies, are in danger of exclusion. Municipalities have launched various programmes to keep them in touch with education and learning so that they will be able to find pathways to further education. Without additional education they are in danger of being excluded from the labour market. The aims related to equity and the enablement of all people's development through learning and education set special requirements on teachers, the teaching profession and teacher studies at universities.

An inclusion policy and special needs education are extremely important in promoting all students' rights to learn. The basic principle is that all students with learning difficulties must be given help and support to overcome these difficulties.

They can have extra tuition hours or/and special needs instruction integrated into their own class, and temporary or more permanent help in special classes or groups. In each school there is a multi-professional student care group which consists of a principal, teachers as well as special need teachers, social workers and a nurse. According to a new decree passed in 2011, every teacher is responsible for identifying students' learning difficulties at the earliest stage possible (FNBE, 2012a, 2012b). This widens teachers' and local level actors' responsibility to seek solutions for supporting these students. Inclusion has been the main principle in the last decade and the new law from 2011 strengthens this trend.

Equity and Lifelong Learning (LLL) Are Connected

Niemi and Isopahkala-Bouret's study (2012) has revealed that the curricula and strategic plans of all levels had as common objectives: a readiness to continue studying at the next level, learning to learn consisting of increasing responsibility for one's own learning, and learners' personal growth. These LLL objectives are important within formal education. The same qualities are also needed when new technologies change the internal and external processes of knowledge creation in informal learning contexts, such as work organisations. (See Fig 7.1 for a schematic representation of this lifelong learning framework.)

In Finnish LLL policy, the equity principle is related to societal and economic purposes. In the governmental programme of 2011, equity is not only set as the aim for individuals' learning paths for all ages but also for the nation's welfare and growth of productivity. The Council for Lifelong Learning (2010) also emphasised the value of LLL from the perspective of Finnish society as a whole:

> Skilled people are Finland's primary resource and the foundation for successful welfare and business. . .The joy of learning and the possibility to apply new skills in life are the best sources of motivation. Learning provides individuals and communities the skills to tackle changes in the environment. Lifelong learning also prevents social exclusion. (p. 2)

According to the core curriculum of pre-school education, the major task of LLL is to promote learning opportunities by supporting and following up children's physical, mental, social, cognitive and emotional development (FNBE, 2000). This happens by enhancing their well-being and perception of themselves and increasing their opportunities for participation. The important objectives are to provide positive learning experiences, which strengthen children's healthy self-esteem, prevent learning difficulties, and advance social skills by providing social interaction with other people (2000). In pre-school, while children learn basic skills and abilities, they also learn "learning to learn" skills (p. 7). According to the core curriculum, learning by playing is central to children at this age. The basic objective is also to guarantee equal opportunities for every child to start comprehensive school.

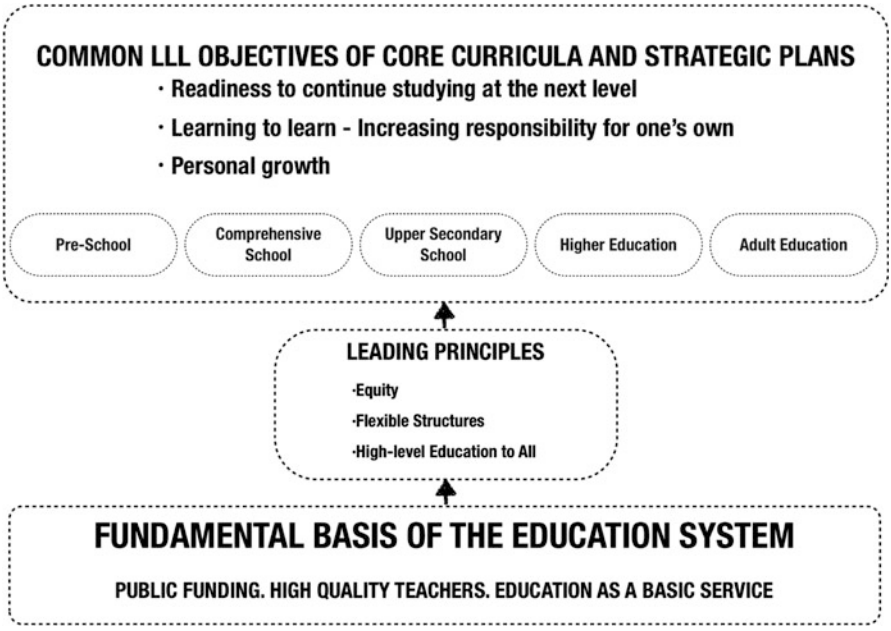

Fig 7.1 The leading principles and major LLL objectives in the Finnish lifelong learning policy (Niemi & Isopahkala-Bouret, 2012)

Comprehensive School

The national core curriculum for comprehensive schools provides the main objectives for the active learning of different subject matter and aims for the generic skills needed in LLL (FNBE, 2004a). The core curriculum emphasises that the main aim is to awaken a desire for lifelong learning. The objectives related to LLL are the following:

- To steer pupils to develop their abilities and to take responsibility for their learning, to assess it, and seek feedback to reflect on their own learning behaviour;
- To facilitate pupils to become aware of their own learning and to help them to find opportunities to affect it; and
- To provide opportunities for pupils to develop their own learning strategies and apply them in new situations. (p. 8)

Pupils must learn skills needed for their own learning at school and for their future learning outside the formal school system. LLL skills are generic, such as thinking and problem-solving skills, collaboration and interaction skills, self-knowledge and responsibility, and participatory and active citizenship skills. An important LLL objective in the core curriculum is to extend learning into different informal learning environments, including the new technology-based environments (2004a).

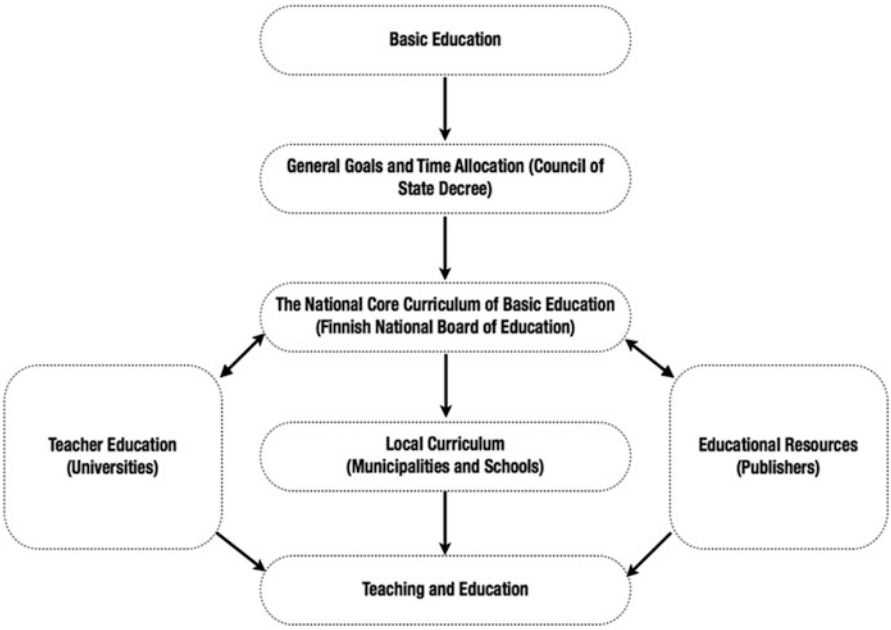

Fig. 7.2 The steering system of basic education (Vitikka, Krokfors & Hurmerinta (2012, p.86))

Responsibility for Quality at a Local Level

Finland has also balanced between a centralised and decentralised administration of education. At the beginning, comprehensive schools were very centralised, but in 1985 the municipalities' freedom and responsibility increased. The status of the then new national curricular guidelines was to create a framework for curriculum design in the municipalities (Laukkanen, 2006). Ten years later, in 1994, the National Board of Education only gave very broad aims and content guidelines for teaching different subjects. The municipalities and, ultimately, the schools set up their own curricula on the basis of the national core curriculum. Since 1999, new legislation has been provided to mainstream decentralisation. Providers of education – meaning municipalities, coalitions between municipalities and private foundations – have been given a lot of freedom when it comes to writing their local curricula. Still, the local curricula have to be drawn up in accordance with the National Core Curriculum for both comprehensive and upper secondary schools.

The local curricula have to determine the teaching and educational practices of the schools concerned. The curricula must be drawn up in such a way that they take into account the schools' operating environments, local value choices and special resources. The education provider may decide about the implementation of curriculum in cooperation with interest groups. The aim is to ensure a high standard of general education, with relevance to society and commitment from the community

as a whole to the jointly determined objectives and procedures. As it concerns pupils' welfare and home–school cooperation, the curriculum must be drafted in collaboration with authorities charged with tasks that are part of the implementation of the local authority's social and health services (FNBE, 2004a, 2004b).

Halinen and Järvinen (2008) point out that municipalities and schools are granted great autonomy in organising education and implementing the core curriculum. This is to ensure freedom to make individual choices based on the local needs of different schools, with the core curriculum serving as a common national basis. Local decision-making is also seen as a means of increasing local officials' and teachers' commitment to the implementation of the curriculum. Their active involvement in the process and therefore their ownership of the curriculum is reinforced by the autonomy and freedom they enjoy. (See Fig. 7.2 for the overall steering system of basic education in Finland.)

Vitikka, Krokfors, and Hurmerinta (2012) argue that textbooks and other materials produced by private publishers have a strong effect on teaching and learning but in Finland, textbooks and other learning materials are not authorised by the government. Previously, the National Board of Education approved all textbooks, but now private publishers independently interpret curricula into educational resources. Teachers have the freedom to choose what teaching and learning materials they use and whether they use textbooks or not.

Enhancement-Led and Formative Evaluation Policy for Promoting Quality

The quest for good learning outcomes is on the educational agenda of many countries. Globally, much controversy exists over what is the best way to use assessment as a tool to achieve high learning outcomes. Some countries have chosen standardised testing, which stresses competition between schools and focuses on measurable performances. Other countries have applied more formative aspects of evaluation. The Finnish choice has been enhancement-led evaluation at all levels of education. The assessment of outcomes is regarded as an important tool to improve education.

There is no inspection system to control the educational arrangements at schools or institutions (Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2007; Sahlberg, 2011). Instead of inspection, there is an evaluation system in place. For basic education, following up on whether schools have reached the national goals for learning outcomes set in the national core curriculum for basic education is done by national sample based assessments. Upper secondary schools have their own statute-based final examination system.

Since the mid-1990s, the Finnish National Board of Education has conducted national assessments of learning outcomes, mostly in the 9th grade of basic education (FNBE, 2012a, 2012b). Regular assessments have been carried out in

mathematics, the students' mother tongue (either Finnish or Swedish) and literature, and occasionally in other subjects as well. National assessments produce information about the quality and results of education and training in relation to objectives stated in the national core curricula. These assessments are sample based and thus do not cover the whole age group. This is because the results are used for the development of education. Recently, evaluations have also been started, for example, at the end of the second grade. The purpose of this is to enhance the use of evaluation for formative purposes. All schools who are being sampled in an assessment receive an individual feedback report. These reports are delivered to schools as soon as possible after the assessment data has been collected, as fresh results are more interesting for schools than results that were conducted months ago. Recently, feedback has been received as soon as 2 months after the data was collected (Laukkanen, 2006). At the local level, municipalities are encouraged to produce internal and external evaluations to develop education. Policymakers are informed about the status of education by assessments and special up-to-date reports organised by the Ministry of Education. Evaluations are implemented to find evidence to support the continuous development of education and learning (Kumpulainen & Lankinen, 2012).

The aim of the national evaluation system is to support the local/municipal education administration and the development of schools as goal-oriented and open units, and to produce and provide up-to-date and reliable information on the context, functioning, results and the effects of the education system (Niemi & Lavonen, 2012). The Ministry of Education is responsible for general education policy and financing educational evaluations. National evaluations are organised by the following special councils: The Finnish Educational Evaluation Council (2012) is responsible for evaluating general education, vocational education and adult education. Evaluation of school achievement/learning outcomes in basic education is carried out by the Finnish National Board of Education (2012a, 2012b). The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (2012) is an independent expert body assisting universities, polytechnics and the Ministry of Education in matters relating to evaluation and quality assurance systems. Besides the national evaluations, international evaluations are important in developing Finnish education. Since 2000, PISA has provided important information for the development of Finnish basic education (Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2007; Reinikainen, 2012).

Enhancement-led evaluation concerns also higher education and teacher education at Universities (Niemi & Lavonen, 2012). Society's trust in universities' degrees as well as teachers' competences are mediated via trustworthiness of the universities and makes them accountable. Trust is not a stable and permanent status. Results and quality must be assessed and evaluated systematically. Therefore universities' own quality assurance methods are important. All Finnish universities were audited by 2011 (Niemi & Lavonen). Teacher education has also been evaluated several times nationally and internationally in the last two decades. Evaluations have been enhancement-led and their purpose has been to produce improvements in teacher education. There is a close cooperative relationship between universities and the Ministry of Education in teacher education issues.

Many teacher education research projects have also been carried out jointly. The recent recommendations from the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC, 2007) stress the importance of strengthening research in and on teacher education. The Ministry of Education also requires universities to reorganise conditions for teacher education research.

Teacher Education as a Key Player

A Research-Based Approach as a Main Guideline

For decades, the Finnish orientation toward teacher education has committed itself to the development of a research-based professional culture (Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2007; Niemi, 2012b; Niemi & Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006). The critical scientific literacy of teachers and their ability to use research methods are considered to be crucial. Accordingly, many teacher education programmes in Finland require studies in both qualitative and quantitative research traditions. The aim of these studies is to train students to identify and analyse problems they may expect to face in their future work. Research studies provide students with an opportunity to complete an authentic project, in which they must formulate a research question in an educational field, be able to search independently for information and data, elaborate on their findings in the context of recent research in the area, and synthesise the results in the form of a written thesis. They learn to study actively and to internalise the attitude of researchers in the learning process (Niemi, 2011).

Professors have the responsibility to guide students in the research-oriented aspects of their education. The main objective of this guidance is not the completion of the Bachelor's or Master's thesis, but to actually engage students in becoming active participants of the education society. In this aspect of the degree programme, the processes of active working and thinking are integrated in various complex and sometimes unexpected ways. The aim of the guiding process is to help students to discover and tap his/her own intellectual resources and to enable him/her fully to utilise the resources of the study group in which he/she is working (Nummenmaa & Lautamatti, 2004).

The goal of Finnish teacher education is to equip teachers with research-based knowledge and with skills and methods for developing teaching, cooperating at school and communicating with parents and other stakeholders. The main guidelines are:

- **Teachers need a deep knowledge of the most recent advances of research in the subjects they teach**. In addition, they need to be familiar with the latest research concerning teaching and learning. Interdisciplinary research on subject content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge provides the foundation for developing teaching methods that can be adapted to suit different learners.

Table 7.1 Inquiry-orientation in an individual Finnish teacher's work (Jyrhämä & Maaranen, 2012, p. 105)

Content class
Develop and educate (oneself)
Evaluate one's own action
Constructivist view of teaching
Using multiple methods in teaching
Cooperation with teachers or other people in the school
Active, societal and critical orientation in teaching
Inquiry as a method in teaching
Relationships with students and the class
Collects feedback
Evaluation
Subject (content) knowledge

- **Teacher education in itself should also be an object of study and research**. This research should provide knowledge about the effectiveness and quality of teacher education implemented by various means and in different cultural contexts.
- **The aim is that teachers internalise a research-oriented attitude towards their work**. This means that teachers learn to take an analytical and open-minded approach to their work, and to draw conclusions based on their observations, and experiences and that they develop their teaching and learning environments in a systematic way.
- **Teachers need independent thinking skills and reflection in their work**. Teachers' competence must include readiness to analyse a situation like a researcher, draw conclusions and take action. This means that teachers need a critical mind and the ability to reflect. Reflection can be in action or on action. Because many decisions have to be made rapidly – in action – teachers must have deeply internalised the knowledge and the moral code which will guide them as they adapt to changing situations.

Student teachers see research studies in their teacher education as very valuable for their professional development. They see that research studies have helped them particularly in the following competences: Critical thinking, independent thinking, inquiring, scientific literacy, and questioning phenomena and knowledge. Niemi (2011) also found that even if the general picture is very positive, student teachers gave also a lot of feedback on how to improve the quality of research studies e.g. connecting them better with practice and further developing also the cooperation between subject matter studies and educational research studies.

We have some studies (Jyrhämä & Maaranen, 2012) which show how teachers in schools see the value of research studies in their work. Teachers gave the following themes on the relevance and usefulness of research based orientation in their work (see Table 7.1).

Jyrhämä and Maaranen have (2012) summarised:

> As a whole, the relatively high means [of student performance] indicate that the students have, in principle, accepted the idea of a research-based approach in their studies. The students expected a more research-based approach in the courses actually contained.

> The students appreciated the high level of the master's degree studies. In other words, they thought it valuable that teachers have rather long academic studies instead of a more practical teacher training and they felt that it was important that methodological courses started sufficiently early in the studies. It seems that the students have comprehended the basic idea of the curriculum of teacher education and this is very encouraging. (p. 105)

Integration of Theory and Practice

Teachers' pedagogical studies include supervised teaching practice (approximately 200 contact hours). The aim of the guided practical studies is to support students in their efforts to acquire professional skills in researching, developing and evaluating teaching, and learning processes. In addition, student teachers should be able to reflect critically on their own practices and social skills in teaching and learning situations. During their supervised practice periods student teachers meet pupils and students from various social backgrounds and psychological orientations and have opportunities to teach them according to the curriculum.

Teaching practice is integrated with all levels of teacher education. The practice is supervised by university teachers, university training school teachers or local school teachers depending on the phase of the practice (Jyrhämä, 2006). The main principle is that practice should start as early as possible and support student teachers' growth towards expertise. At the beginning, student teachers observe school life and pupils from an educational perspective after which they focus on specific subject areas and pupils' learning processes. Finally, it supports student teachers as they take holistic responsibility for their teaching and their overall stay at the schools. This period can be tightly connected with their research studies and Master's dissertation.

University teacher training schools (so-called 'Normal' schools) play a crucial role in the Finnish teacher education. The Normal schools are state schools (as opposed to municipal schools) and their teachers have a different status than those in other schools. Normal school teachers have a dual role: on one hand, they teach pupils; and on the other, they supervise and mentor student teachers. Many of the Normal school teachers are active in research and development and are members of teams that produce learning materials for schools. There is frequent critique on carrying out practice only in the Normal schools and demands for having a substantial part of the teaching practice in more typical schools. Parallel to the Normal schools there is a network of so-called 'field schools' with an important contribution to the capacity and volume of teacher education in the times of high demand of qualified teachers (Meisalo, 2007). At the University of Helsinki, all student teachers have experiences in teacher training schools and local schools. Both practices are supervised.

When student teachers were asked to assess their teacher education in two big universities in Finland (Niemi, 2011, 2012b), they gave very good feedback.

According to the survey, the student teachers had achieved very good competences in teachers' basic skills, such as planning instruction, managing teaching content, and assessing students. They had a deep commitment to teaching profession and saw that teachers need to learn throughout their career. The student teachers thought they had good learning competence for their future work. However, they also saw they had not achieved enough competences to collaborate in the school community as well as outside it, for example, with parents. Student teachers also regarded they would need more competence to meet students' diversity and prepare them to the needs of the future.

Teachers as Professionals

Teachers in Finland are representatives of a high quality academic and ethical profession. Teachers have to take an active role in raising serious questions about what they teach, how they teach it, and the larger goals towards which they are striving. Teachers need to view themselves as public intellectuals who combine conception and implementation, thinking and practice in the struggle for a culture of democratic values and justice. Teachers have a right and an obligation to articulate educational needs and challenges in the society they serve. They also have to be active in public debates and decisions affecting the development of schools and education. As professionals, teachers cannot only be implementers of decisions, but are also partners in their nation's development. Teachers are expected to be able to take an active role in evaluating and improving schools and their learning environments. They are also expected to refresh their professional skills, to cooperate with parents and other stakeholders, and to be active citizens (Toom & Husu, 2012).

Finnish teachers are recognised as professionals, and the teachers' trade union considers this status to be very important. Almost all teachers belong to the same teachers' trade union Opetusalan Ammattijärjestö (OAJ), which is a very powerful agency. OAJ has been invited to play an active role as a partner in all major reforms of teacher education and school curriculum in the last decades. It has also promoted the policy of having a Master's degree as teachers' basic qualification (OAJ, 2013). Finland has no inspectorate, no probation time for newly graduated teachers' or national school achievement testing. Finnish society considers teachers to be professionals who are morally responsible for their work.

Teachers' work is contextually bound, depending on learners' age level, cultural conditions, available resources and the contents they are mediating to learners. Teachers and teacher education are clearly related to national goals and purposes. The welfare and economy of the society are related to the quality of educational outcomes, which are associated with teachers' competences. Besides being guided by national and local community-based goals, teachers' work also have more generic aims. Teachers open doors and windows to cultural enrichment and help people to understand other human beings and their cultural contexts. Teachers are key actors in promoting human rights, justice and democracy in a global world

(e.g., Aloni, 2002; Biesta, 2009; Campbell, 2008; Carr & Hartnett, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 2010). In Finland, the school law contains values that promote these aims. Teachers are expected to implement them in their daily work. Since 2000, the Ethical Council for the Teaching Profession has worked to promote teachers' ethical awareness. Also, the teacher education programmes emphasise teachers' social and moral responsibility. A survey in 2010 showed that Finnish student teachers are committed to the teaching profession and are aware of the ethical bases of teaching (Niemi, 2011).

Teachers are working in conditions where they must identify, observe and understand complexity of educational processes and face the evidence that is coming from different sources. They also need to be open to acquire and assess local evidence. Scardamalia and Bereiter (2003) have examined the behaviour of experts. The feature that really distinguishes experts from others is their approach to new problems. The pattern recognition and learned procedures that lead to intuitive problem-solving are only the beginning. The expert invests in what Bereiter and Scardamalia call progressive problem-solving, that is, tackling problems. This increases expertise rather than reduces problems to previously learned routines.

According to Schön (1991), experts always face problems in situations that are unique and consist of uncertainties, value conflicts and other tensions because of their complexity. They work in complex situations and therefore need various kinds of evidence. This sets special requirements on their knowledge base. Experts' knowledge is rational knowledge, but this is not sufficient. They also need principles, rules and role models, and to know how to apply scientific theories and techniques to complex problems. Teachers' work comprises so many uncertainties and changing elements that they cannot be provided with directly applicable knowledge or practice for their work.

Future Challenges

The concepts of equality and equity are often used with the following meanings: equality refers to an ideal and aim that people should have the same rights with each other without considerations of their sex, status or race. Equity is a policymaking concept that embodies the quality of being fair and reasonable in a way that gives equal treatment to everyone. The Finnish educational policy has aimed to operate under an umbrella that encompasses both meanings. The educational policy has systematically reinforced practices that provide equal opportunities for different learners.

In future, Finnish society will face several challenges related to ensuring current high quality learning opportunities for all learners as Finland becomes a multicultural society. It is important to ensure that everyone will have equal opportunities for education and learning. The last PISA results (OECD, 2010) showed signs of slightly widening differences between schools. Aspects related to multicultural education, for example, Mother Tongue teaching, religious education and location of multicultural

pupils in all the schools in a city, are continuously considered in Finnish educational decision-making. In the next PISA measurements, multicultural education and learning outcomes of different ethnic groups will be a special national focus area.

Another threat is the diversity in the provision of education, by the municipalities who are responsible for the quality of education at the local level. There are considerable differences in their financial bearing capacity, and this has clear consequences for educational services. In 2012 National Board of Education set a working group to find out what is the national situation and make recommendations how to prevent unequal development.

Diversity and different learners are taken into account by identifying and supporting them at the early stages of their difficulties, by organising special needs education at local schools and classrooms, and by offering multi-professional support through pupil welfare groups welfare groups in which a principal, special education teacher, school nurse and school social worker, and often also school psychologist work together. Finnish schools subscribe to an inclusive policy for organising special needs education. The aim is to organise support for all learners – not by making problem students repeat classes, but by keeping all the youngsters with their peers as they progress through the educational system. A new law for special needs support in 2011 requires every teacher to identify learning difficulties as early as possible. The purpose of this is that students will get support in time and are able progress in their development. This is a real challenge both for pre- and in-service teacher education.

Summary and Conclusion

Biesta (2009) has analysed what is good education. He criticises the thought that there can be good education based only on external and instrumental aims. A position in a rankings table or PISA achievement test cannot be the main purpose for education. The same message comes also from leadership studies (Day & Johansson, 2008). Biesta advocates values when seeking good education. He suggests that education serves (at least) three different functions:

- Qualification, consisting of the ways in which education contributes to the acquisition of knowledge, skills and dispositions that qualify us for doing something – a 'doing' which can range from the very specific (such as the training for a particular job) to the very general (such as in the case of liberal education).
- Socialisation, through education, individuals become part of existing socio-cultural, political and moral 'orders.' This is the socialisation function of education. Schools partly engage in socialisation deliberately, for example, in the form of values education, character education, religious education or citizenship education. According to Biesta, socialisation also happens in less visible ways, for example, through the hidden curriculum and we can also see that education may serve the reproduction of social inequality.

- Individuation, a third function of education is different from both qualification and socialisation. This function is related to the ways in which education contributes to the individuation – or, as Biesta prefers to call this subjectification – of children and young people. Individuation consists ways of being that hint at independence from such orders, ways of being individuals, not simply a 'specimen' of a more encompassing order. It is about the ways in which education makes a contribution to human freedom.

On reflection, we may see a clear connectedness with values in the Finnish educational system. Equity has been the main leading principle for the past 30 years. Proving good lifelong learning skills to all learners throughout their life spans is linked with equity. This requires a very flexible educational system and structures in which learners always have an opportunity to continue their schooling. The Finnish system does not have a national curriculum. There are only national core curricula for different levels of the educational structure and they consist of a set of values for teaching and learning and set as objectives much wider purposes than mere success in international tests. Values are related to both social and individual growth processes and promote students to become active citizens, responsible and cooperative contributors in society. These same values also guide students how to self-regulate one's own learning and have agency in one's life. Teacher education is also connected with major educational values and the educational system even though teacher education is provided in universities. Teachers are expected to work as high quality professionals and their ability to reflect on their profession is one of the most important aims in the Finnish teacher education.

Connecting equity and quality requires a purposeful and persistent work for these aims. Without a strong political will and continuity across governments these aims are very difficult to achieve. Society, business and industry, technology, people's life conditions are changing continuously. No educational system is ever fully perfect and it cannot develop without active and honest evaluations and feedback on its functionality and ability to achieve its aims. This is also a case in Finland. It has taken a long time to mature to this phase. The Finnish educational system wades between success and challenges. The future is developed by decisions today and visions for the long term. There are many challenges to keep equity and quality together. So far, there has been commitment at different levels of education to continue in the selected path. However, it requires and will require persistent work for education.

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