

The Past, Present and Future of the Comprehensive School Reform in Finland: From Planning to Marketization?

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to examine the historical and present changes in educational policy in Finland. In this article we track and describe the development of the comprehensive school reform in Finland by asking: What was the background to the comprehensive school reform in Finland? What was the main content of the reform and how did it lay the foundation for the success today of Finland's educational model? What are the main contemporary challenges for the Finnish educational model? The article is supported by bibliographic, qualitative document analysis and makes use of state-of-the-art sources taken from studies pertaining to Finland's education system. It also draws from official government documents and multilateral institutional documents in which Finland's educational policymaking is investigated. We argue that the comprehensive school reform in Finland laid the foundation for the success of the country's educational model in international comparisons and that the success of the reform was the result of a set of historical, social, cultural, political, economic, and ethical-moral factors that have shaped Finnish society since the mid-19th century.

Keywords: education system; Finland; Finnish comprehensive school; sociology of education

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1. Introduction

It is a widely shared view that Finland boasts a high-quality education system; in fact, the country's education system has been ranked among the best in the world in international comparisons such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Finland first participated in the PISA test in 2000, and it has ranked consistently at the top in all PISA assessments over the past two decades. Although Finland's position in the PISA ranking dropped from first place in 2006 to third in 2009, the Finnish education system is still considered one of the best in the world based on the following two criteria: educational policies and teacher competence (OECD, 2011; Jin-Muranen, Cai, & Holtta, 2012; Juuti, Christophersen, Elstad, Solhaug, & Turmo, 2018). One of the most important aspects of Finland's educational success seems to be university-based teacher education and teacher competence (Reinikka, Niemi, & Tulivuori, 2018; Bastos, 2017). University level teacher education is a popular and highly competed academic area in Finnish universities.

In this article we track and describe the development of the comprehensive school reform in Finland by asking: What was the background to the comprehensive school reform in Finland? What was the main content of the reform and how did it lay the foundation for the success today of Finland's educational model? What are the main contemporary challenges for the Finnish educational model?

We first detail the historic background of the Finnish school reform because the history of education in Finland has shaped the development of the country's education system as one of the most advanced and egalitarian systems in the world. Second, we relate the reform to the core elements of Finnish schooling today and focus on teacher training, one of the great strengths of Finland's education system. Thirdly, we discuss the future challenges facing the Finnish educational model after the latest turn in educational policy towards neoliberal market-orientation.

This article is supported by bibliographic, qualitative document analysis and makes use of state-of-the-art sources taken from studies pertaining to Finland's education system. It also draws from official government documents and multilateral institutional documents in which Finland's educational policymaking is investigated. It is also supported by the conversations one of the authors had with two Finnish sociologists of education¹.

¹ In addition to our bibliographic qualitative document analysis of scientific publications on Finnish education the article is based on the first author's conversations on the history and future of Finnish education with two Finnish experts in education policy and teacher education, Professor emeritus Ari Antikainen and the second author of this article Professor Juha Suoranta. Professor Antikainen has contributed especially to the history and present of Finnish education and Professor Suoranta to the future of Finnish education. Both of them have acted long in Finnish educational sciences and in teacher education and worked as visiting Professors in the US for several occasions. Professor Ari Antikainen is the founding figure of the Finnish tradition of sociology of education and has worked both in Tampere University and the University of Joensuu (nowadays University of Eastern Finland). Professor Suoranta started his career in the University of Lapland and acted as the head of teacher education for several years. Since 2006 he has worked in the University of Tampere (nowadays Tampere University) as tenured Professor of Adult Education and Dean during the years 2010-2013. He has specialized in media education and critical pedagogy.

2. The Past: three phases of development

2.1. *The Age of Enlightenment: national awakening*

The present state of educational system in Finland was not achieved overnight; rather, it dates back to the birth of Finnish national movement in the 19th century. Thus, the development of Finland's current educational model should be understood from a historical perspective and as the outcome of a long series of political debates².

The case of general education in Finland is historically specific in comparison to other Nordic countries. The other Nordic countries — Sweden, Denmark and Norway — have been kingdoms and, as such, at least to some extent, imperial powers. Unlike its Nordic neighbors Finland had been a dependency for centuries, a quiet backwater of Europe. First it was under the rule of Swedish imperium for several hundred years (from the 1300s to 1809) and after that an autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland under the Russian Empire for another hundred years until its full independence granted by V.I. Lenin and the Bolshevik government in 1917 (Alapuro, 2018, p. 156).

During the Russian period (1809–1917) a strong nationalist movement, the Fennomans, was built in Finland. Their goal was Finland's independence. The idea of the independence was encapsulated by the following slogan of the movement highlighting the national identity building: «Swedes we are not, Russians we do not want to become, let us therefore be Finns» (Meinander, 2010, p. 125-126). Or, as J.V. Snellman, a founding figure of the 'idea of Finland' as an independent nation, stated in 1840: «Finland cannot do anything by force; the power of education is its only salvation» (Snellman, 1840). This statement understandable in the light of the fact that Finland belonged -and belongs today- «to the smaller European polities economically and politically dependent on big centres» (Alapuro, 2018, p. 1).

The development of Finnish educational system was closely related to 19th century nationalist Fennoman movement and education became a political question: along with the development of Finnish language, education was seen as a tool for national identity building. These «two aspects of nationalism were closely intertwined in Finland» as Alapuro has stated.

«On the one hand, Fennomania clearly worked for national self-assertion and liberation from Swedish cultural dominance and against the dangers arising from political dependence on an external power. In this respect the Fennomans' advocacy of both the adoption of Finnish as an administrative language and the

² The historical evolution of the Finnish educational system and its various aspects has been well documented. There is a lot of research on the history of Finnish education and how the historical reforms have help to shape one of the most advanced and egalitarian educational system in the world (Antikainen, 2008; Antikainen & Pitkänen, 2014; Simola, et.al, 1997; Simola, 2005), the Finnish national education curriculum (Burg, 2018), PISA measurement (Salokangas & Kauko, 2015), Finnish teacher education (Niemi, 2011; 2015, Juuti, et.al, 2018, see also Laukkanen, 2013), education business as well as marketing (Schatz, Popovic & Dervin, 2015), and the Finnish educational policy analysis from the macro perspective concerning the historical relationship between the state and the Finnish educational system (see Antikainen, et. al., 1999; Suoranta & FitzSimmons, 2017; Sahlberg, 2007).

establishment of public elementary schools in rural districts was essential, for it allowed the cultural emancipation of the independent peasants». (Alapuro, 2018, p. 88).

Both the national language and education can thus be seen as the two cornerstones in the *longue durée* of the history of Finnish schooling. In comparison to other Nordic countries, at least to some extent, the unique history of nation building explains the respectable status of Finnish schooling even today.

2.2. *Industrial Modernity: Educational Planning*

The modern phase of Finnish school reform dates back to the early parliamentary committees, which debated the future of education in Finland after the Second World War. After the war, the birth rate began to increase as people started to move from rural to city areas. There was also strong growth in heavy industry, especially as a consequence of the lost war against the Soviet Union: according to a truce agreement, Finland had to pay the Soviet Union 300 million dollars in war reparations. This debt was mainly paid by building trains and other machinery and equipment (Risku, 2014, p. 42-45).

The debate on education continued later in the 1950s at a time when Finland, which had attained independence in 1918, was still a poor, predominantly agricultural country. The country had lost tens of thousands of lives in the war against the Soviet Union, but its population grew rapidly after the war when the soldiers returned from the front. Thus, new schools and teachers were badly needed in the 1950s. Before the war, the country's economy had still been based largely on agriculture, but that changed in the 1950s. Now, as people poured into the cities, it became necessary to find solutions to their changing needs, including the requirement for them to learn new skills. At the same time, it was evident that educational reform was needed in order to solve the problem of educational inequality caused by the parallel education system, which served to maintain class divisions. Finland's former parallel education system involved four years of folk school for all students and eight years of grammar school for those whose parents could afford the tuition fees. Every other student was directed toward vocational education or the workforce (Antikainen, 2006; 2008).

The political consensus to replace the parallel system with the comprehensive school system and thus increase everyone's access to education and minimize inequality gained momentum in the late 1950s after the Social Democrats and the Center Party came to power. Right-wing factions, however, were opposed to the reform during the 1960s.

In the early 1960s members of the Finnish parliament passed a number of motions aimed at reforming the education system. As noted by Renfors and Suoranta (2018, p. 260), «education was beginning to be understood not simply as expenditure but as an investment both in the state's economic and educational policies and in the business sector. The left-wing parties and trade unions bought the idea of a broad educational sector as a way to improve workers' welfare and livelihood, as well as give them a chance to climb the social ladder».

This phase culminated with the enactment by parliament in November 1968 of the Basic Education Act. Its aim was to create a new, basic education system, which would essentially become the foundation of today's comprehensive school system. As a result of the legislation, students would enter comprehensive school at the age of seven and remain there until the age of sixteen. There were nine grades in total, which were divided into six years of primary school and three years of lower secondary school (Antikainen, 2006; Simola & Rinne, 2011).

In the broader context, this reform of the education system was part of the reformist movement of the 1960s in Finland, which also featured «left-wing parties in coalition with the Center Party, student movements, and single-issue groups aiming to push many legislative reforms, from social and health care to education (for example, *November Movement* fought for social and legislative equality, *Union 9* for women's rights, *Committee of 100* for peace, and *Tricont* for global development)» (Renfors & Suoranta, 2018, p. 260).

In effect, the educational reform of the late 1960s and early 1970s put an end to the old two-tier system of grammar and civic schools. Before the reform, children were separated by socioeconomic status and academic ability into two different tracks. Tracking was «officially» based on entrance examinations, school grades, and teacher assessments, but in reality, it was decided on the basis of students' socioeconomic status. Thus, working class students were directed to the lower track—most entered the workforce and took their predestined place in a class-based society, with the exception of an occasional student who was «miraculously saved» by a school (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1999, p. 49). Middle-class students and the elite, on the other hand, «chose» the higher track as their natural path. This selection mechanism resembled the classic ethnographic analysis of education described by Willis in *Learning to Labour* (1978). In Finland, the higher track prepared students first for upper secondary education and then for university, while the lower track prepared them for vocational school and the workforce. As a consequence of the comprehensive school reform, tracking was postponed until students reached the age of sixteen.

With the establishment of the Finnish comprehensive school system, the previous socially and regionally inequitable system of privately and publicly funded schools was radically changed to bring about a near universal comprehensive education system (West & Ylönen, 2010). The main objective of this educational reform was that the state would henceforth provide and create equal educational opportunities for all (Gérin-Lajoie, 2015).

This phase in the history of Finland's educational model marked the birth of a rather original Finnish paradigm of educational thinking. The paradigm consisted of three basic beliefs, namely, that education is a way for every person to get ahead in life; that the teaching profession is an important and therefore appreciated profession; and that the comprehensive school system must be developed and must continue to function effectively. These three beliefs formed a kind of national «truth» that most people shared, including parents, authorities, and politicians (Simola & Rinne, 2011).

The Finnish paradigm was based on deep idea of equality, that centralized educational planning and administration was a guarantee to equal opportunity for all the children despite their socioeconomic backgrounds. It was also believed that well-

organized centralized system was necessary in the education of entire population which in turn helped the small nation to succeed in the world market. The power of education was seen as Finland's only salvation as Snellman has reminded in the 19th century. As Kivirauma et al. put it:

«In the beginning of the comprehensive school period the great success story included the attempt to raise the level of education of every citizen to that demanded by the structural changes in society in order to contribute to the economy. But an equally important argument was to offer equal educational opportunities to all children regardless of their place of residence, or the wealth or status of their families, mother tongue or gender». (Kivirauma, Rinne & Seppänen, 2003, p. 186.)

2.3. *Liquid Modernity: Decentralization and Individualization*

Since the 1970s, a key objective of educational policy in Finland has been to provide all citizens with the same opportunity to avail of high-quality education, regardless of age, domicile, gender, economic status, or native language. When the abovementioned reforms were implemented in the 1970s, the education system was run centrally, and «the first national curriculum for basic education in 1970 was very detailed and the steering system strictly centralized» (Kupianen, Hautamaki & Karjalainen, 2009, p. 17). The Finnish government had control over most aspects of the new system, including the curriculum, external inspections, and general regulation.

This changed, however, in the late 1980s as Finland started to decentralize its government due to a gradual right-wing trend in party politics (Antikainen, 2014). In the general process of decentralization (or «anti-bureaucratization» as the right wing preferred to call it), schools became more responsible for their own management and were able to develop their own curricula while still adhering to the guidelines set by the National Board of Education.

This tendency to free municipalities from the guidance of central government continued into the 1990s. As a consequence, local education providers, or municipalities, were granted more authority, and teachers had more autonomy in terms of planning their own school-based curricula. In fact, schools and teachers have been responsible for choosing learning materials and teaching methods since the beginning of the 1990s, when inspection of learning materials at a national level ceased. As argued by Lavonen (2018), these processes of practical authority and autonomy «have inspired and empowered teachers and principals to develop the local curriculum and their own work processes and, moreover, to enhance the quality of education overall. Education authorities and national education policymakers trust professional teachers».

On the other hand, it has been suggested that decentralization has led to another kind of steering system and actual practices which in effect can cause unnecessary competition and unfortunate commodification and marketization of education, as

well as social segregation and exclusion of the students' of the lower classes (see Connell, 2013; Simola, 2015).

The consistency and duration of Finnish educational policy has arguably been characterized by sustainability and stability rather than conflicting reforms and fundamental shifts in political direction (Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006), and in essence, we agree with authors who maintain that to know the Finnish comprehensive model of education is to understand «that the new system was indeed comprehensive» and that it was also «both a necessity (...) and a chance encounter, a lucky constellation of political, economic, and social conditions» (Hautamäki et al., 2008, p. 197).

The centralized educational planning came to an end in the late 1980s as part of the right-wing government's decision to reform the management of the state apparatus: to decentralize and deregulate; the general aim was to make the educational planning processes lighter and faster, more flexible and liquid. The change meant a discursive change from the emphasis of citizenship to individualism and the beginning of the growth of social segregation. It was as if all the central stakeholders in education would have lost their faith in the before unquestionable centralized planning and governance as well as in common national narrative of «one language, one mind». (Kivirauma, Rinne & Seppänen, 2003; see also Rinne, 2000).

3. The Present: core elements of the Finnish education model

The current Finnish education model can be described by a certain of key elements. Fundamentally, the model is based on the following seven characteristics (see Antikainen, 2006; 2008; Renfors & Suoranta, 2018; Sahlberg, 2009; 2015)³.

Local School Principle. In Finland, students usually enroll in their neighborhood schools. There are no same-sex schools, nor is there a significant private school system. Schools work in co-operation with each other and do not compete for students. As part of municipal public health and social services, schools have responsibility for students' health and nutrition. This means that students can avail of free health care and a free daily lunch (Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Manninen, 2010), along with transportation, learning materials, and counseling when needed. According to Renfors and Suoranta, «[t]he Finnish education system is one of the cornerstones of the Nordic welfare model, which provides, for example, free health care and maternity clinics, fully paid maternity leave (105 week days plus an optional 158 days of parental allowance), unemployment benefit, pensions, and long vacations» (2018, p. 264).

Public Funding. The Finnish school system is financed by progressive taxation, and these tax funds are distributed by the administrative authorities and allocated

³ Currently, the Finnish education system consists of «one year of pre-primary education and nine years of comprehensive school, followed by post-compulsory general and vocational education. Class teachers teach pupils in junior classes one to six (ages seven-13), while specialized subject teachers lead classes seven to nine (ages 13-16). Education is free to everyone from the pre-primary to higher education levels and is based on meritocracy (including the university entrance exam)» (Renfors & Suoranta, 2018, p. 263-264).

according to schools' needs and not by their measured outcomes or performance. The public funding system guarantees «that every child can have an equal chance to attend school and learn» (Ibid., p. 264). In international comparisons, Finland has been found to provide high-quality education for all students at a reasonable cost. In 2011, the total public expenditure on educational institutions in Finland, as a percentage of the GDP, was 6.5%, which is close to the OECD average of 6.1% and less than that of the United States (6.9%). According to Renfors and Suoranta, «[s]tudies have shown that there is no apparent positive correlation between educational spending per student and measured outcomes in education. Thus, the efficient use of resources is more important than the level of expenditure» (2018, p. 264).

Common Values. Despite the fact that schools in Finland today have considerable autonomy in terms of their decision making, Finland still has a national core curriculum, and this is decided by the National Board of Education. The national core curriculum includes common values and basic principles for schools and teachers, while schools' own autonomy is based on the right to create municipality- and school-based curricula. Autonomy is also evident in the fact that classroom teachers are independent in their work. Essentially, curricula are intended as a means to support teachers' work but not to control it.

Teachers as Trusted Persons. Teachers are trusted and respected in Finland, and parents typically have few complaints about teachers or school conditions (Lavonen, Korhonen, & Villalba-Condori, 2017). In addition, «the Finnish education system is based on trust; there are neither school inspectors nor officially approved teaching materials in Finland anymore. High-quality teachers do not need to be accountable or to report their work to anyone and are permitted to teach autonomously in their classrooms with materials and resources of their own choosing» (Renfors & Suoranta 2018, p. 265). Students and their teachers enjoy short school days compared to schools internationally, and homework is minimal. Finnish teachers' job satisfaction is relatively high, and they tend to stay in the same schools for long periods. Teachers' salaries are slightly higher than the average salary in Finland (the median was 4,008 euro a month in 2018), and a further incentive of the teaching profession is its long, paid holidays (14 weeks a year).

Everyone is Taken into Account. One important characteristic of the principle of equal education for all is that «students with disabilities are included in general classrooms and special education is an essential part of compulsory education». Educational progression prevention is a shared strategy whereby special educational needs are «identified as early as possible and anyone can avail of special education when needed». This has resulted in «a low level of grade repetition, while dropping out is currently almost non-existent» in Finland's schools (Ibid., p. 266).

No Testing. Yet another core element of the Finnish school system is that it does not feature standardized national testing. In fact, the only compulsory test is the matriculation examination for students who want to progress from comprehensive level to upper secondary school (around 60% of the total student cohort). Teachers integrate continuous assessment in their work in the classroom, and this practice is closely linked with their professional skills. They are not obliged to report to anyone on their classroom assessments. In addition, student self-assessment is an everyday practice and is used in all grades.

Teacher Education. The role of teacher training has been one of the main areas of focus in educational policymaking in Finland since the reform of the school system began. One can also bear in mind that the first professorship in education in the Nordic countries was established at the University of Helsinki, Finland, in 1852 (Tirri, 2014).

By the end of the 1970s, all teacher education programs had become university based. Today professional teachers are required to have a master's degree, and their five-year training includes compulsory practical training periods as teachers, both in teacher training schools linked with universities and in ordinary comprehensive schools. Teacher education for primary and secondary schools in Finland received a boost in the early 1970s when it was reassigned from teacher training colleges to universities in 1974 and granted an academic, science-centered status. The basic qualification for secondary and elementary school teachers was defined as a master's degree in 1979. A typical teacher education program, with educational sciences as its main subject, requires five to six years of study. For quite some time, the teaching profession has retained its position as one of the most popular careers in terms of pass rates in university entrance examinations (Jussila & Saari, 2000; Kansanen, 2003; Simola & Rinne, 2011, p. 235; Tarhan, Karaman, Kempainen, & Aerila, 2019).

The requirement for a master's degree in education in order to teach in a comprehensive school is based on the notion that every practicing teacher is also a researcher of his or her own work who, in this role, needs a strong knowledge base in relation to educational theory and research methodology. Research skills are essential in teacher education in Finland, and teachers should have the capacity to explore local curriculum planning and development of teaching and school practices. In addition to theoretical and methodological knowledge, didactics and educational psychology are popular subject choices for students in teacher training (Moisio, Raiker, & Rautiainen, 2017).

On the whole, teacher education in Finland is designed to prepare future teachers who can work not just as traditional teachers capable of transforming information and curriculum content to classroom material, but also as agents of change who can integrate their pedagogical knowledge with subject knowledge and classroom-based research. Finnish teachers can also avail of opportunities to continue their studies in doctoral programs. All of these factors have made Finland's teacher education an academic, research-oriented discipline.

The above characteristics are at best idealization of the actual workings of an educational system including university-based teacher education as a whole. As such they materialize only partly in the mundane practices of schooling and can present a certain «wishful rationalism» of educational reality (Simola, 1998). For instance, «no testing» does not mean that there would not be exam in Finnish schools; there are indications that the number of exams is increasing even among the younger students.

There is also a danger that free school choice, «families right to choose» as it were, which was made possible in educational legislation in the 1990s (Kivirauma, Rinne & Seppänen, 2003, p. 181) can erode the idea of local school principle and increase students' social segregation. In addition, the erosion of the comprehensive

educational model can be seen in the discourse of gifted education. An empirical study revealed that top Finnish educational administrators stressed global competition and economical success which «require that education produce better quality learning and top skills». Furthermore, they maintained that «nation, to be successful in the global economic competition, has to raise its best forces, even though this may violate the old policy of equity» (Kivirauma, Rinne & Seppänen, 2003, p. 182.).

In sum, it must be borne in mind the above core principles were developed at a specific time and place and are not necessarily replicable in other contexts (Salokangas & Kauko, 2015). As Renfors and Suoranta (2018, p. 267) note:

«In reflecting any education system or reform, we need to bear in mind that it is always subordinate to society's political regime and environment and forms only part of the totality of society. As this totality changes, so too does the education system. The birth of the comprehensive school system was part of a larger political overhaul of the Finnish welfare system, which included legislation giving ordinary people more freedom and improving their livelihoods. These improvements in people's basic living standards established a firm foundation for pupils' attendance at school and, in turn, improved school achievements».

4. The Future: towards marketization?

As described above the Finnish comprehensive educational model has a history which partly explains its present state but what about the future of the model? The present model was designed during the relatively stable (and even static) state of modernity after the Second World War, and especially in the 1960s and 1970s. In the late 1980s the system began to meet the social, political and economic pressures of the neoliberal turn. In education these changes consisted of deregulation, new public management (as managerialism) and concentration on individual learning (as opposed to social development and citizenship education).

It has been noted above that the current Finnish school system is hard to change, not just because of national legislation but also due to people's belief that education is a key element in the equality of Finnish society. However, empirical evidence suggests that the education system does not exist in a national vacuum but are influenced by international educational trends (Antikainen, 2010a; 2010b). One of the most influential international bodies in the area has been the OECD, specifically its educational policy recommendations and PISA. As Rautalin (2013, p. 11) has demonstrated, the OECD «exerts its influence on national education systems by shaping our conceptions of what is a desirable policy in an international context and how this can be achieved. However, this is not the same as claiming that having been approved and so assimilated in the international context, the OECD, through PISA, is harmonizing national policies; rather, it would appear that the OECD is synchronizing them».

This synchronizing effect of the OECD and other international organizations refers to a certain mechanism for the domestication of global educational trends and fashions. These trends and fashions as external forces affecting national educational

systems as well as individual learners have been in line with and followed global political turns and economic changes, the recent one being the turn to neoliberal market orientation (see, e.g., Baltodano, 2012; Giroux, 2005; 2007; 2019).

In Finland these turns have been studied by sociologists of education who maintain that along with economic repression and budget cuts in the early 1990s the education system started to differentiate. Since then, in the era of liquid modernity (Bauman 2000), there has been pressures to streamline the education system into more 'liquid' and 'flexible'; the focus has moved from improving the 'rigidly' led educational system into developing individual learner's 'competencies' to meet the needs of competitive economy and the capitalist market (as opposed to general education as nation building and *Bildung*). These changes have meant nothing less than a revolution in the discourse of Finnish education policy (See Kivirauma, Rinne & Seppänen, 2003, p. 186; Simola, Rinne & Kivirauma 2017, p. 34).

In what follows we present six generative themes emerging from this new educational discourse and impacting the education system in Finland. At the same time as these themes are part of a future agenda of the Finnish comprehensive school they pose a challenge to the Finnish education system at large.

Marketization. Finland's publicly funded education system and schools are increasingly of interest from the point of view of private education businesses. Both national and multinational businesses have been integrated at every level of education system the world over, even in Finland, and this has helped them to gain a foothold in education and create an educational market. Peter Vesterbacka, former executive of Rovio, a Finnish company who invented video game franchise Angry Birds, suggested in Twitter (May 9, 2020) that there should be the freedom of trade in Finnish higher education so that multinational universities could enter the Finnish higher education market (at the moment the system is national).

Similarly, businesspeople are nowadays part of the executive teams and committees that devise national education policies and deal with union leaders (Seppälä, 2018). In today's world, companies can freely advertise their products in the classroom under the guise of educational entrepreneurship; for example, ICT companies not only sell their products to schools, thereby monopolizing this market, but also produce and distribute their own «innovative» learning guides despite Finland already having national core curricula to suit various levels of education. However, as noted by Tomperi & Tervasmäki (2018, p. 174-175), the prevalence of big companies and commercial collaborative projects in schools is now a given and their role is seldom been questioned.

Digitalization. One of the metanarratives in the world of education since the first personal computers were invented in the 1970s has been the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the classroom, followed later by digitalization. The lines of debate were drawn early on between pioneers extolling the use of ICT and skeptics opposing this rising trend. In between were those who maintained that ICT was a good servant but a bad master. In terms of schools and ICT, Finland has had two long-term issues to contend with. The first is how to educate teachers in the use of ICT for their teaching (in other words, how to build their ICT skills), and the second centers on the cost of such technologies (hardware as well as software).

The problem of inequality between schools is also an issue, with some teachers willing to use ICT and others not so willing. In addition, not all schools have high-quality hardware and software at their disposal. While half of the teachers interviewed said that they had basic ICT skills, around 60% felt that their digital tools were not fit for purpose (Tanhua-Piironen et al., 2016). In relation to students in lower and upper secondary school, their digital engagement was typically found to be determined by gender, age, and gendered educational choices (Kaarainen, 2019).

The importance of ICT in schools has frequently been noted among Finnish scholars in the area of teacher education, who emphasize that «ICT and learning should be able to connect better with the content that is the focus at school». They further note that «ICT also influences school culture; at its best it supports communication and a collaborative learning community that includes parents or experts outside the school» (Vahtivuori-Hänninen et al., 2015, p. 26). Furthermore, teacher education requires a high level of ICT literacy and media education, as well as practicing teachers continuing their education in order to improve their ICT skills (including media literacy). In order to avoid the rising costs of ICT, Finland should ideally opt for Free/Libre Open Source (FLOSS) software throughout the education system.

In the spring 2020 Covid-19 pandemic forced Finnish teachers in all levels to rapidly adapt to school closures and to utilize the possibilities of distance learning via various video-communication services. Due to coronavirus the government of Finland had to review Basic Education Act so that the law would allow distance learning in exceptional circumstances.

School Motivation. Although the education system seems to function structurally and its achievements are well documented, it cannot be denied that there are some internal issues, for example, teacher burnout and lack of motivation among students. Some claim that these problems are caused by the discrepancy between the learning content in schools and the time teachers and students have available for teaching and learning. As one of the leading researchers in the field puts it, «[c]urrently, the school curriculum is overloaded. Students do not have enough time to learn key concepts and live a balanced life, which, in addition to school, should include friends, adequate sleep, and physical exercise» (Salmela-Aro, 2018, p. 21).

The same applies to teachers, and all too frequently, their time is taken up with individual students' social problems or group-related issues within the school instead of the basic task of teaching. However, an overloaded school curriculum is not the only problem; students' free time is similarly being hijacked, in large part due to a consumerist culture and the regressive, social media-based environment in which they live. Schools' progressive interest, that is, the information and knowledge they provide, must compete with this.

New Class Divisions. Although the Finnish education system is built on the general principle of equality, cracks began to appear in the system from the 1990s on. These days, the education system is marred by internal differences caused by new class divisions in society, and this has led to even more class divisions. A case in point is Helsinki, the capital of Finland, and the Helsinki metropolitan area. Studies have indicated that schools in this area are experiencing segregation in terms of their students' socioeconomic and ethnic status (Bernelius & Vaattovaara, 2016).

Another worrying and related phenomenon is «school shopping» in Helsinki and other major cities. It has been noted that parents, especially those with a university degree, are trying to ensure that their children «get the best possible start in order to operate in the global market economy». As the author further notes that for this reason, «schools focusing on the English language (and languages in general) and schools considered the best on the local scale have attracted widespread competition; for example, a large number of day care centers are already private» (Männistö 2019, p. 35).

The major setback in terms of social segregation and the possible birth of new class divisions came in 2015 from the prevailing right-wing government, which made record budget cuts to education. All of the branches of education in Finland suffered, but vocational education was hit the hardest. The coalition government of 2019 made up of the Social Democratic Party of Finland, the Center Party, the Left Alliance, the Green League, and the Swedish People's Party of Finland has begun to implement measures in a bid to turn the tide, but at the time of writing this text, it is too early to say if those measures have succeeded in correcting the financial situation of education.

Multiculturalization. The fifth theme concerns the question of multiculturalism, since Finland has long been reasonably homogeneous in terms of ethnicity and religion (Antikainen, 2016). Immigration is an increasingly important driver of population growth, and there has been an influx of refugees in recent years (Dervin et al., 2012; Holm & Londen, 2010). Although ethnicity in Finland's population of 5.3 million is not causing the same issues as in many other European countries, Finland is gradually becoming a multicultural society, and that poses challenges for the Finnish comprehensive school system and adult education (Sahlberg, 2007; Antikainen, 2010). Outside the school environment, social segregation is a problem in relation to housing and the labor market in all of the Nordic countries (Tunström & Wang, 2019). Within schools, teachers need more appropriate skills to cope with the diversity of students, but this is often a difficult task given the lack of training in teacher education (Dervin, 2015).

Democratization. The theme for the future of educational ideals and practical solutions in Finland is democracy and the democratization of the education system, especially the democratization of students' school life. As Finnish educational scholars argue, schooling and teacher education can affect peoples' overall democratic sentiments and how democracy and democratic culture work in a society (Raiker & Rautiainen, 2019; Rautiainen, 2019). In essence, this requires that students be given opportunities to build their agency, involvement, and participation both in teacher education and in the classroom (Hoikkala & Paju, 2013; Männistö, 2019; Tomperi & Piattoeva, 2005).

These qualities and skills are also vital in the area of higher education in Finland (Suoranta & FitzSimmons, 2017). The problem of democratization can be solved through the development of an authentic school culture that nurtures co-operation, in addition to shared norms and habits. The notion of a school culture may serve to emphasize that schools are an integral part of young people's lives and ought to be developed as respected places of communality, hope, and social justice (Suoranta, 2003, p. 138-141).

5. Conclusion

In this article we have tracked and described the past, present and future of the comprehensive school model in Finland. We have argued that the ethos and development of the model is based on historical continuum dating back to 19th century national movement in Finland. The present model was founded after the Second World War and in the 1960s' as a result of progressive parliamentary politics and building of a welfare state structures. The success of Finland's present education system can be attributed, first and foremost, to the fact that it is based on a system of equity; in other words, all students have the right to avail of high-quality education.

The Finnish education system and its place in international comparisons, including the much-debated PISA test, have been described by scholars, perhaps more in a tongue-in-cheek manner, as a «miracle» (Simola, 2005; Simola & Rinne, 2011; Renfors & Suoranta, 2018). However, other scholars argue that there is nothing miraculous about the Finnish educational system. If there was any «miracle», it was the political decision to establish education for all, and in effect, it was the comprehensive school reform that laid the foundations for the future success of Finland's educational model. At the heart of that measured success was a set of social, cultural, political, economic, and ethical-moral factors that has shaped Finnish society since the late 1950s and early 1960s.

To summarize, Finland's educational reform was initiated during the 1960s and 1970s, followed by the professionalization of teachers' work in the 1970s when teacher education was established at university level. During the 1980s and 1990s, new legislation on education was passed, and the central administration system was decentralized. For some considerable time, the Finnish comprehensive model of education reflected the whole of society and its basic values; in effect, it was a manifestation of a left-leaning welfare ideology, and indeed, until the late 1990s, it fulfilled its promise as part of that welfare system and supported students' overall development and growth.

The future is of course uncertain, but as we have claimed, the age of stable development of the Finnish education system seems be over due to global and local developments such as social segregation, migration and multiculturalization and new class division in Finnish society. Quite certainly these phenomena will affect schooling. What will happen remains to be seen: shall the Finnish comprehensive model of education prosper in this era of neoliberalism or will it capitulate to the individualistic, consumerist (schools as commodities and parents as consumers) ethos of capitalism.

As Marx and Engels so aptly put it once, capitalism «cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society» (Marx & Engels, 1848). Freewheeling capitalism chases new markets for its products all over the world and turns public services into commodities, be they health care, social services, or education. Only time will tell whether we are living in the end times of the welfare state in Nordic countries and how the social and political innovations of those countries, for example, the Finnish comprehensive education system, will fare in the future.

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