

Tiina Tikka and Esa Suominen

EDUCATION SOCIETY 2.0

– INCLUSION AND SKILLS FOR ALL

KALEVI SORSA FOUNDATION
LEARNING SOCIETY FOR ALL PROJECT

Foreword

Finland is a leader in the PISA surveys and our comprehensive school is, justly, of interest to the world. Educational equality has had a significant role in our country rising from an agrarian society to the absolute top class of the world, whether we look at social rights or the economic competence. In this development, both the general and vocational education and training have played an important part.

However, the image of the society is changing. New divides are forming in the Finnish society. While education opens up possibilities and creates the conditions for social equality, it also produces and reproduces the differences between people. In a world that is becoming more and more complex and international with a quickening rate of structural change, education and training is in a more central role than before. Ever fewer people get through their entire career with just one education. The labour market is becoming more international and more and more of future employees need language skills and abilities to encounter people from other cultures in their work. All of this underlines the necessity of successful educational policy.

Recent public discussion has too often concentrated only on higher education. The “Education Society 2.0 – Inclusion and Skills for All” report by the Kalevi Sorsa Foundation strives to complement this discussion by drawing attention to both the comprehensive school and vocational and adult education and training as well. It calls for significant reforms to particularly the upper secondary level education system.

Fixating to a particular path too early and narrowing the options for young people must be prevented. In adult education and training, we must move toward employment security. Everyone must have the right for education and training during their career. Currently those who become excluded from adult education and training are those who need it the most.

The business-driven discussion about education policy needs educational and social aspects alongside it. It is often those that produce the best business policy as well. To this discussion, the report you are holding brings interesting views.

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1.



The Finnish education system

The Finnish education system is often described as an egalitarian system of the Nordic welfare state model. In international comparison, the system is defined with small differences between educational institutions, a high average performance level and a small number of students who do particularly poorly. Degree-oriented education is, all the way to higher education institutions, free of charge. Private educational institutions follow the same regulations on e.g. fees as other educational institutions. In the OECD's PISA surveys that compare the learning outcomes, Finland has been ranked at the top in the world.

Children who live in Finland permanently have a statutory duty to complete the basic education syllabus, the scope of which is nine years. Compulsory education begins in the year when the child turns seven and ends when the basic education syllabus has been completed or ten years have passed since the beginning of the compulsory education. Before the compulsory education the child has the right for one year of pre-primary education. In 2008, there were 3,174 comprehensive schools and 561,100 students in them. By the most part, municipalities are responsible for organising the basic education.

The Finnish education system is comprised of education and training of various levels. After the comprehensive school students apply for general upper secondary education or vocational education and training, i.e. for the upper secondary level. Both forms of education enable further studies on the higher level provided in polytechnics and universities. The Finnish education system makes it possible for everyone to get a vocational or higher level education. The main reason for this is that general education is not considered as adequate in

The Finnish education system makes it possible for everyone to get a vocational or higher level education.

Finland and thus everyone is guaranteed an equal possibility to continue their studies after the comprehensive school.

The purpose of the general upper secondary school is to provide general education for 16 to 19-year-olds. Its objective is to carry on the educational task of the comprehensive school and support the adolescents' growth to being stable and educated individuals and members of the society. The entrance prerequisites are completion of the comprehensive school and prior school success. The general upper secondary studies include both compulsory and optional subjects and courses. The school year is divided into five or six periods and the students themselves can choose how to distribute their courses in the periods. Thus, the general upper secondary school single age classes are ungraded. At the end of the degree, a national matriculation examination is taken. In 2007 there were 115,250 students in general upper secondary schools. A clear majority of those who have completed the general upper secondary school syllabus are girls.

Vocational upper secondary education and training is organised in many fields of study. A degree can be completed either in vocational institutions or as apprenticeship training and its objective is to give basic abilities for tasks in that particular field and special skills in a particular sector of that field. The scope of the basic degree is three years. The student also has the possibility to complete a joint degree that can cover two degrees and includes a vocational degree and the general upper secondary school syllabus, or a triple degree that includes the matriculation examination as well. In 2008 the National Board of Education estimated that there were 264,000 students in degree-oriented vocational education and training. This number includes those in apprenticeship training. The entrance prerequisite to vocational education and training is, like in general upper secondary schools, the basic education syllabus and either previous school success, or success in the entrance examination/aptitude tests and previous work experience.

The Ministry of Education finances and grants the permissions for the providers of basic education, general upper secondary education and vocational education and training. The funding comes mainly from the state and municipalities that have a statutory obligation also in terms of funding. The municipalities' share of the funding is 54.7%. General upper secondary schools

and vocational institutions alike are usually municipal. Polytechnics, then, are mainly municipal or private. The state is mostly responsible for the maintaining of universities, which have a considerable autonomy.

In the higher education level, polytechnics and universities form a dual model in the Finnish education system. They both have their separate roles but do complement each other. Both forms of education are generally applied for through entrance examinations or aptitude tests.

Polytechnics are a relatively new form of education in the Finnish education system. The first study programmes began in the beginning of the 1990s. Polytechnics emphasize connections to the working life and regional development more than universities. However, they do apply the existing research as well as produce applied research for the needs of business and companies. In 2008 there were 132,500 students in polytechnics and altogether 37,000 new students enrolled. The studies are organised in eight different fields of study. The objective of the studies is to acquire a vocational qualification and a polytechnic degree.

The education and training at open polytechnics is intended for all irrespective of their educational background and age. The studies can be done as contact, multiform and Internet learning. The education supply is large and it covers all fields of study. The training does not, however, lead to a degree. It is possible to attach the completed courses to a polytechnic degree later if a student begins degree-oriented studies.

The prerequisite for a higher polytechnic degree is a polytechnic degree or another applicable higher education degree and three years of work experience from the field in question. The purpose of the degree is to increase the vocational skills of those in the working life and to answer its needs. A central part of the degree comprises of a vocational final project and cooperation with the working life. The degree gives the same qualification as a master's degree even though they are not direct equivalents.

In universities, the emphasis is on scientific research. It is possible to complete degrees of various levels in them: bachelor's and master's as well as licentiate's and doctoral degrees. Completing a degree is free of charge. Also available are open university studies that can be taken by all who so wish, irrespective of their previous education. It is possible to take individual courses or entire

Adult education and training is offered on all levels of the education system.

study modules in the open university. These studies are liable to charges. There are also various kinds of continuing education for the employed and teaching for the elderly. In 2007 there were 176,300 students in universities and an estimated 68,700 had applied for the studies beginning in the autumn of 2008, 22,500 of which will be accepted.

Adult education and training is offered on all levels of the education system. It can be voluntary, personnel training or labour policy education and it can either be degree-oriented or free of set targets. In 2007 there were 2.3 million participants in education and training that does not lead to a degree. Adult education and training most differs from educating the young in the organisation of the studies. Adults are offered the chance to study alongside work and thus education and training is available both during the day and in the evenings and weekends as well. Degree-oriented studies are, like those intended for young people, free of charge and it is possible to get financial aid for them.

The Government Programme of Matti Vanhanen's second cabinet and the Education and Research 2007–2012 development plan ratified by the government set plenty of objectives for the Finnish education system. These include, among others, elevating the level of education, enhancing the school system, preventing social exclusion and raising the rate of employment. Another objective is to raise the education level of Finns to be among the highest in the world so that the proportion of young adults who have completed a post-basic level education would be 92.5 per cent instead of the current 90 per cent by 2015.

2.



Why write about education policy?

In many respects, Finland is considered to be a model country for education policy. Especially the Finnish comprehensive school has gained respect e.g. in the OECD PISA surveys. Finnish school children are top class in the world when it comes to knowledge, and especially the number of students who do poorly in their education is very small in the international perspective. For a small economy and society based on know-how this is essential.

However, there are challenges growing behind the PISA results. They are related to not only education but also to social policy more widely. International examples tell their own tale about how the growing differences in income and wealth, diverging regional structures and early differentiation of children into successful and unsuccessful ones threaten the learning results and thus future opportunities in life. Talent goes to waste. Despite the fact that Finland still is among the most equal societies in the world, here, too, too many people find themselves on the outer rim without a real possibility to fulfil their dreams or participate in society as a full standing member.

The coming years are crucial for the Finnish education policy. A great deal of international attention is directed at our education system but will we make the right decisions in the future? In a world of rapid structural change the return from education appears slowly. Will the Finnish decision makers and other influential people have enough patience and wisdom to see the long-term lines of development toward an economy and society that demands an ever wider range of knowledge? This requires more, not less, equality. Can we see that knowledge and inclusion belong to everybody, not just to those few who are strong or lucky enough to guarantee themselves a secure place in the society?

At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, Finland is wealthier, more individual and open than ever before. At the same time it is, in many respects, a more unequal and insecure society than what we got used to during the last century. Finland is a part of a world that is characterised by speed, insecurity and a new set of challenges, like the climate change. National decisions influence the boundary conditions less than before. A great part of the forces that affect Finland and the lives of Finns are outside the immediate influence of our political system.

As globalisation progresses and deepens, and as the climate change dramatically changes all of the boundary conditions of human activities, the lives of people diverge. Zygmunt Bauman¹ speaks of liquid modernity. By this he refers to a situation in society where everything that we have learnt to consider permanent, is subjected to change. Liquid modernity is characterised by change in the use of time and space, instability of labour markets, loosening of commitments and weakening identities. A cultural shift toward a more pronounced individualism and a more rapid change of values form a challenge that we must meet if we still want to hold on to the basic principles of the welfare state.

This cultural shift can clearly be seen in the class structures of society. Old, clear divisions have disappeared but the division of society into groups, whose cultures and actual life prospects differ greatly, has not faded. In a society that is equal by principle, where all groups have the right to seek education, the crucial differences in the division of intellectual capital have not disappeared. Children from higher social groups get an advantage over their peers in lower groups in many ways.

The appreciation of education and the ability to support the youth in their studies give the higher social groups a chance to utilise the possibilities offered by the society better than others. The meaning of education in making and maintaining social divisions is growing continuously. This is why we need a new, equal education policy that gives everyone the chance to participate in education, the labour market and in public activities. We need a guarantee for inclusion.

¹ *Bauman (2002)*

Small export-driven national economies are exposed to changes in the world economy. Rapid changes of the market have threatened to topple entire societies into chaos when the existence of crucial export businesses has been threatened. To escape this vulnerability, small open national economies have built welfare states that act as protection systems for the entire society. The welfare state has managed to split the risk in the society so that the inevitable fluctuations of the world economy will not rock the entire society.

A more insecure world calls for more – not less – public insurance i.e. for an education society that incites knowledge, skills and participation. Ever fewer people manage with just one profession or education. Subsequent to technological development and the internationalisation of the economic life, the skills demand in the labour market increases. Finland will not succeed by trampling terms and conditions of employment or by low taxes, not to mention wages. At the same time the production of goods and services can move from country to country. Education becomes an even more central part of people's life management, searching one's place in the labour market and readiness for changes.

The question is not only of surviving in the labour market of the future. It is also about equality among people. Education is one of the most significant systems that generate differences between people. Many paths of life are opened – and closed – through it. Education pays off, measured both in wages and as a decreased risk of unemployment. The high level of education correlates very highly with employment. Through education an employee is able to reduce his/her dependency on one employer. Education is also a way to meaningful life projects and to expressing oneself. For equality to actualise, it is especially important to ensure that everyone has the chance for an education that suits their motivations and abilities without the structures of the society, one's background, wealth or other people preventing it.

The present welfare state is, in many ways, built to rely – and built for – the baby boom generation. The generations entering the labour market are smaller than the ones retiring, also in a situation when labour-based migration is increasing. Public resources will increase if the prosperous financial development

continues but the disparity between those who receive services and benefits and those who pay their share of them through social expenses and taxes will grow.

We must remember that drifting to the outer rim is not an inevitable or passive process. The existent education system requires young people to have the ability to choose their direction of life as early as at the end of the comprehensive school and, on the other hand, allows dropping out of education. All adolescents are not mature enough to make the choice and the school and the parents cannot support them enough in their studies. The general upper secondary school is, for many, just a way to postpone the final choice, a way to mature the decision. Then again, some are dragged out of education altogether. Too many young people, who are forced by the system to make decisions they are not ready for, are slung to the outer rims of skills and knowledge. The system allows many to drop out before they have acquired true qualifications to act in the society or in the labour market.

A labour market and a society that are open for all are essential for the justification of a cultural society based on knowledge and skills

The Finnish society needs every young person in the labour market with ever more competence. Otherwise, not only the legitimacy of the welfare state but also the financial basis of it is threatened. A labour market and a society that are open for all are essential for the justification of a cultural society based on knowledge and skills. The education system has a key role in creating them. It must be able to ensure adequate skills in the labour market as well as an adequate education for a meaningful life and an active citizenship for all. The education system is a part of collective activities that must ensure that all citizens are party to the society.

The purpose of education and training is not to simplistically serve the labour market or the business life. The main function of education is to educate people. An education system that feeds the culture and will for education helps people and the society to get closer to a purposeful and meaningful life.

The key idea in the comprehensive school reform was to utilise the entire population's talent potential not only in business life but also in human development. The topicality of this objective has not disappeared; rather, we should assess what this means today. The objective of education must be a citizen who can take initiative and who possesses the capability for critical and creative thinking. The means of reaching this in a new situation in the society must be

devised and action needs to be taken. Does the compulsory education limited to nine years still guarantee adequate civic abilities or should we examine the compulsory education again? What should be taught in schools and educational establishments?

From the point of view of future social policies, the key question is people's ability to influence their lives. Education, its contents, quality and availability have a significant role. New and larger groups in the society face faster changes. The China effect, and increasingly also the India effect – in the future maybe the Africa effect as well – must also be seen as the third world integrating into the world economy.

These effects will, in the future, have an impact on fields that require higher knowledge and on traditional white-collar work as well in addition to primary production and simple industrial processes. We can best prepare for these changes and benefit from them by investing in growing the national intellectual capital. Formal rights for inclusion will remain a dead letter if they are not complemented with financial and political rights that enable real actualisation of inclusion.

The meaning of education as a producer of human, social and cultural progress is indisputable. The rise of the nation's education level has brought significant positive externalities for the society. At the same, more people have been able to advance to a path of education that suits their abilities. According to the OECD publication 'Understanding the Social Outcomes of Learning'², the positive effect of education on health and citizen inclusion can clearly be shown. The effective connections are, however, not immediate. They are shown and accumulated through other social relations.

According to statistics, education is also a very profitable investment financially. The rise of the level of education has brought significant financial benefits as education affects productivity positively. Every extra year in education has been calculated to cause an approximately 5–9 per cent rise in gross wages. Compared to just a comprehensive school education, completing up-

² *OECD (2007C)*

per secondary education brings a 7% wage benefit. The benefit from a master's degree is 88%.³

The Finnish education system has, in many ways, been laudable. Its most notable achievements are related to educational equality. The small, poor and agrarian Finland rose to be one of the most successful and competitive societies in the world in a few decades. In recent years the Finnish comprehensive school has received international attention in the PISA surveys that measure the learning scores of children finishing the comprehensive school.

These top level PISA scores in the OECD countries do not, however, tell the whole truth. In Western Europe, the educational differences between generations are among the greatest in Finland. Prolonged unemployment continues to be a significant Finnish problem. Behind it is often the dated knowledge and skills of employees. Too many young people do not continue to upper secondary education after comprehensive school. The estimates on the number of young people left outside education and working life vary from a few tens of thousands up to a hundred thousand. There is no consensus as to the extent of the problem, which in turn proves that not enough attention has been paid to the situation of this group. Statistics also show clearly that children are not happy at school. Lack of school satisfaction is a problematic phenomenon because it has in turn been said to lead to dropping out of education.

Of the young people who finish the basic education not all reach the preparedness needed for further education. According to the 2006 PISA survey approximately 5% of the Finns who finish the basic education had inadequate knowledge and skills in the fields of mathematics, reading, natural sciences and problem solving. Even though this number is very small internationally, nearly 3,000 young people suffer from inadequate basic abilities every year. There is a greater chance for them to drop out once they enter general upper secondary or vocational education. Even adult education and training does not necessarily present a real option for those who have fallen through the system as it accumulates on those who already are well-educated and successful in the education competition.

³ *Asplund & Maliranta (2006)*

The IEA/Civic/CIVED studies show a less known problem in the Finnish education system. Although the skills related to mathematics, natural sciences, reading and problem solving of Finnish adolescents are at the top of the class their activeness in the society is scarce. The Finnish youth is not interested in influencing the society or really aware of what is going on in the decision making in the society. This tells that the Finnish education system pronouncedly favours objectives of knowledge and skills over objectives of attitudes. One part of the reason for this may be the abolishment of school boards, which took out a channel of making a difference and learning from the Finnish schools.

The gender division in the Finnish labour market is still high. Though the broadening of education has opened new possibilities for women, this has not been seen in narrowing of the difference in pay between the sexes. This is mainly a question of the labour market being divided to men's and women's occupations. As such, education is worthwhile for women: the difference in pay is smaller for educated women in comparison with uneducated women than it is for educated men in comparison with uneducated men.⁴

Naturally, there are also other factors behind the lower level of wages for women than just education. Especially the question of combining family and work is a central one. According to a report by Stakes⁵, mothers take care of their small children at home more often in Finland than in many Central European countries. This has a clear influence on the labour market status of women as their careers tend to be shorter and more fragmented than the careers of men.

Amidst all this we must remember the individual point of view, that of a normal person. In what ways can the society support his/her positive life story, participation in the society and in the labour market, flexible flow of the everyday life, managing and steering the changes and fulfilling his/her dreams and wishes through education? It is clear that education policy alone cannot accomplish this and we must not belittle the meaning of the individual's own choices. However, the society's actions and the direction of the education policy have a significant and increasing role in it.

⁴ *Naumanen (2002)*

⁵ *Anttonen & Sointu (2006)*

3.



What are we talking about when we speak of educational equality?

Education has been seen, especially in the Nordic welfare states, as one of the social rights and central tools in pursuing social equality and social justice and in preventing social exclusion. This is also connected to the idea of national unity, building a community. There have, however, been great differences in the implementation in different countries and different eras alike.

Despite the fact that studies have defined one function of education to be choosing and placing individuals in social hierarchies, striving for equality has been pre-eminent especially in the public discourse. The equality of the comprehensive school has been seen as especially important, as the early school years profoundly define the chances of an individual for further education and form a basis for the development of cognitive skills. The knowledge and skills acquired in basic education are critical for functioning in the society.

IN AN EQUAL SOCIETY THE INDIVIDUAL'S BACKGROUND DOES NOT AFFECT THE SUCCESS

Three types of societal views of equality can be raised: egalitarianism, principle of justice and equal opportunities. Moderate egalitarianism can essentially be seen to correspond with the idea of equality of the Nordic welfare states. According to this, the equality must be seen in the end results as well.

The equality referred to in the principle of justice is fulfilled when everyone gets support from the society according to their needs. In this, defining the needs is problematic. Who defines what needs must be fulfilled specifically by societal actions and how are they measured and controlled? The equal opportunities principle highlights every individual's equal rights to pursue success. Inequality is acceptable if it arises only from differences in making an effort, talent and luck.

There have been broad and narrow interpretations of the concept of equal opportunities. According to the narrow view, equal opportunities are actualised when everyone has the same formal rights in the society. The broad interpretation underlines the relation between the starting point and the end result: The opportunities are equal if the background does not predict the end result. The broad view of equal opportunities is, in fact, close to the egalitarian interpretation of equality.

The significant problem in the Finnish discourse on education policy has been that terms are not given exact and proper content. Everybody is pro equality, especially when it comes to opportunities, but too often the discourse remains at the level of headlines only. It is the meaning and content that is given to the idea of equality that is important.

This report strives to apply, above all, the broad view of equal opportunities. The societal status of an individual must not be dependent on his/her social background. In an ideal situation, the society would be based on such a grade of equality in which the socioeconomic or other structurally dependent background could not be deducted from people's life situation at all. In education, equality should be seen for example so that the portion of students from the lower middle groups in the student population of the entire educational establishment would be equivalent to their portion in the entire age group.

For comprehensive school, educational equality means that the school must not produce results that are distorted due to the social background, geographical area or gender of the students. The society must be able to secure the students' chances of achieving good results according to their abilities. In a world that is becoming more and more complex and competitive, the meaning of this is on the rise. Poor success and inadequate preparedness will expose people to social

exclusion and deprivation more explicitly in the future. This will be costly not only humanely but also economically.

The objective of the regional education network is to efficiently bring the talent reserve of the country into use so that the place of residence, wealth or other things do not form an obstacle for anyone's education. The policy of equal opportunities for both genders is a key element of the modernisation process. It is needed for both economical and social reasons: to prevent social and economical exclusion, to build social cohesion, to support economic growth and to enhance the state of public economies. It is a way to bring everyone and everyone's potential into use and to allow everyone and everyone's potential to develop.

EQUALITY AND EFFICIENCY GO HAND IN HAND

Implementation of new technology and increasing cultural and linguistic diversity raises the skills requirements in all fields of occupation. The unequal division of education will lead to segmentation of the people. The people are segmented into educated successful ones and uneducated dropouts. For this reason, narrowing the skills gap between different groups of people should be high on the social policy agenda.

Guaranteeing equal learning opportunities is a central way to increase a nation's human and social capital. Many studies show, that the countries that best take care of the education and the strengthening the learning potential of the weaker part of the people, succeed best when evaluating the entire country's growth potential as well as economically, socially and culturally. Degrees themselves are currency, though the possibilities for benefiting from them might depend on other factors, such as cultural capital, gender or ethnic background. Thus, also the culture of the comprehensive school and further educational establishments is significant.

Finland has been ranked among the top countries in various comparisons measuring international competitive ability for many years now. Economic efficiency and the ability to adapt to various pressures for change do not have to be in conflict with social equality. The comprehensive Finnish education system

that offers equal possibilities for study has obviously been an important factor in strengthening the economy's ability to grow and adapt.⁶ Finland's success in the international surveys (PISA, IALS) has been interpreted as proof of how efficiency and equality can actualise at the same time and support one another in education. Many studies show that competition and selection by no means enhance but rather hinder effectiveness and competitive ability in the education system.

Some decades ago the matriculation examination alone was hard currency in the labour market and a fresh male graduate of a commercial institute could rise straight to the management level. As the general level of education has risen, many, even practical, professional groups are forced to prolong their education and raise its level to strengthen their position in the labour market. However, the rising of the level of education can be seen as desirable from the points of view of economic growth and employment as well as equality.

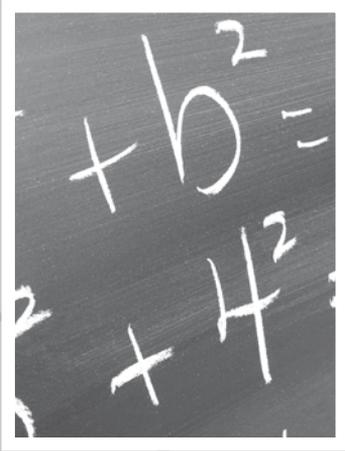
According to the OECD's information, the profit from education investments is very good in Finland when compared internationally. This concerns both the economic profit to the individual as well as the profit to the society.⁷ The often-repeated argument on the weakness of qualitative employment, i.e. people ending up in jobs that do not correspond with their education, is not a particular problem in Finland. Though the phenomenon may exist in individual cases, Finland does well in the OECD studies in this respect as well.

The Finnish way of building welfare by combining efficiency and equality has proven to be functional for the entire society. The high-quality education system that is known to be equal has opened up possibilities for many from poorer backgrounds or less educated families that their parents did not even dream about.

⁶ *Secretariat of the Economic Council (2006, 20)*

⁷ *OECD (2007a, 165–166)*

4.



Boundary conditions of education policy in the 21st century

The phenomena shaping the central boundary conditions of education policy in Finland are especially the next phase of globalisation with its division of labour as well as the change in the age structure. The following explains the meaning and effects of these briefly. Finland is still suffering from a severe unemployment problem. This affects also the immigrant population that will grow rapidly in the future.

DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION POLICY THINKING IN THE PAST DECADES

After the Second World War, economic growth created the possibility for increasing wellbeing in Finland. During that era a three-principle policy gained strength in most of the well-off world. Those principles were: wealth, security and opportunity. Public policy, business, families and education alike leaned on these principles. As a concrete expression of a principle, wide measures for economic subsistence security, full employment, social wellbeing, professional mobility and opening up educational possibilities were implemented.⁸

A key element in the ideology of educational equality has been the expansion of the public sector. The public sector has financed education services, owned

⁸ Antikainen (2000, 134)

schools and educational establishments and directly and indirectly supported the funding of the students' studies. The objective of the education policy was, in the establishing phase of the comprehensive school, the equality in the end-results of the education. The tools for this were great administrative solutions, such as creating a common, nation-wide curriculum.

Since the 1980s the ideas about the organisation of the public sector and, at the same time, the education system began to change. The efficiency, productivity and effectiveness of centralised organisations were questioned. Ever more attention was paid to the options of the people. At the same time the achievements of the system got attention: did we get what we wanted with the resources invested in the functioning of the government?

Competition and options were increased as a guarantee of productivity and effectiveness of the education. The bases of the policy have been individuality, flexibility and independency. The practical measures were seen, for example, in reducing educational legislation and advance regulation, loosening of the curriculum-related norm control, parental right for a free choice of school and in striving for the accountability of schools. At the same time, at least unofficial ranking lists began to appear. The connection of these lists with the actual performance is highly questionable.

In the education policy of the 1990s the pendulum has swung away from the 1970s' sometimes strongly overemphasized central planning and detailed guidance of administration. Interestingly, in the times of loosening control and guidance the educational establishments from comprehensive schools to universities have felt that the control is constantly becoming stronger and ever new demands are presented to them.

PROFESSION STRUCTURE SHIFTS TOWARD KNOWLEDGE WORK

The change in the profession structure is connected with the changes in means and the organisation of production. New methods and technologies that require new abilities from the workers are constantly brought into use. The development of production often eradicates some tasks and creates new ones at the same time. Also, strong changes in the external operational environment,

such as market liberalisation and increasing international competition, are reflected in the profession structure. As a result, employment might increase in certain fields, while the employment in other branches decreases. Also the fact that many companies concentrate on their key operations by outsourcing other processes influences the profession structure.

New jobs have arisen especially in fields that call for high education and skills. The losses of jobs have been directed at branches of manual skills. An ever-bigger part of the human contribution of the society is used in producing, refining and distributing knowledge. As a result of the demands of the knowledge society, the tasks will be distributed differently between those over the age of 45 and younger people. The number of employed will probably continue to decrease especially in agriculture, forestry, office work as well as in industrial and construction work. The biggest growth is predicted to be in consultant and management work in production, traffic, economy and administration, and in nursing and care taking.

When an ever-smaller part of the workforce is, in the future, employed in manufacturing and distributing physical objects, it affects the supply and content of education. As our national economy is connected with the world economy more closely than before, the capability of predicting the future needs for workforce and education weakens. In the changes of the world economy, entire fields of economic operations may disappear and new clusters form very fast. Predicting the need for workforce and education based on exact professions cannot answer our need for information. At the same time the change challenges our entire educational thinking. Education can no longer be seen as leading to just one profession and career.

The change of the profession structure seems to actualise unevenly geographically. Both jobs and people are strongly concentrated in big growth centres. The demand for workforce in the growing professions, such as labour consultants, researchers and teachers, concentrates in the Helsinki region and in other big towns while the creation of jobs in other regions stick to more traditional professional groups. The attractiveness of surrounding areas as a location of production is decreasing and the regional polarisation proceeds as the

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wealthy become wealthier. As a multiplicative effect, the concentration of jobs creates plenty of various sector service jobs in the growth centres.

NEW PHASE OF GLOBALISATION CHANGES THE DIVISION OF LABOUR AND EMPHASIZES DIVERSE SKILLS

Globalisation has, in many ways, affected the Finnish society, labour market and thus the education policy as well. Many issues that previously were under national authority are now beyond the reach of democratic systems. Particularly clearly this is seen in the possibilities to steer the financial and productive development. One dimension of globalisation is that the competition for jobs becomes worldwide and the relative power of states in comparison with the supranational capital and business diminishes. If the competitiveness of a particular nation is not, in the markets' opinion, adequate or compatible, the result may be that investments and jobs increasingly move elsewhere. This brings about many kinds of social problems.⁹

During the early 1990s depression, Finland lost more jobs than any other industrial country: almost a fifth when compared to the number of jobs before the depression. However, compared to the jobs created and the jobs that have otherwise been terminated, the number of jobs that have moved abroad has been limited. Especially the growth of Asian economies has increased the Finnish companies' possibilities for export and expanding their production in Finland as well, and thus the net loss of jobs has been small. The situation is problematic because the advantages and disadvantages affect different people and areas in one country. Often the people who have suffered from changes in the global division of labour are workers with limited education who have difficulties in finding a new job.

The moving of production and jobs to low labour cost countries, known as the China effect, primarily affected certain industrial branches, but as communication and coordination develop the global division of labour has and will reach further and further into other branches and inside companies as well.

⁹ *Kasvio (1999, 40)*

Because individual operations can be moved abroad, globalisation may benefit some workers of a certain company while it causes harm to its other workers.

Operations that can be done as remote work are most likely to move abroad, especially to Asia. This includes, among others, many clerical jobs, planning, research and development. 15–20 per cent of the jobs in the Finnish service sector have been estimated to become exposed to new international competition.¹⁰ A large part of the service sector and a part of the production as well are, by nature, such that they cannot be moved or produced as remote work. For example property and equipment maintenance as well as care require presence and cannot, at least comprehensively, be done elsewhere. A society like Finland and its industry must respond to competition by specialising even further.

The competition for jobs progresses as more fine-textured than before and it is difficult to predict the winners and losers of globalisation. This exposes new and better educated groups to the China effect and further decreases the probability of one education and training being enough for an entire career. What can be somewhat reliably predicted is that predictability in general will decrease in society. It is this that underlines the significance of equal possibilities available for all for updating one's skills. Getting new professional skills and know-how must be not only possible but also worth pursuing and motivating.

The deepening of the global division of labour calls for a new kind of flexibility from the labour market and employees. The workforce must continuously enhance its productivity. This, on its part, calls for a wide skills base, readiness and willingness for change as well as mobility. The challenge for our education system is not so much teaching certain, specific skills but giving wide general capabilities and thus creating a basis for constant development of occupational skills. This concerns all workers.

For Finland, globalisation also means increasing emigration and immigration. As the emigrating Finns are generally well educated, the national education system must replace the losses of human capital caused by the emigration. On the other hand, the integration of immigrants into the Finnish society requires educating them, strengthening their skills and taking them culturally into ac-

¹⁰ *Secretariat of the Economic Council (2006, 13)*

count. Finnish work environments, also in basic industry and services, will most likely become multicultural rapidly. This increases the need for language skills as well as knowledge and understanding of other cultures.

POPULATION IS AGING BUT CAN THE PARTIALLY EMPLOYED AND IMMIGRANTS FILL THE JOBS?

One of the most significant processes for the future economic development and labour market is the substantial and permanent change in the population structure. The proportion of those over the age of 65 is estimated to rise to one and a half times the current in the next 30 years. The number of people over the age of 80 will double. When at the same time the younger age groups get smaller, the sustenance relation weakens.

Aging also has a significant effect on the service structure and public spending of the society and municipalities, as the aging people need social and health services more than average. The need for these services increases faster than the number of the elderly. Regional differences in the age structure of the population are significant. The proportion of pensioners and the elderly is smaller in towns than in the country and small, remote villages. As a result of migration and differences in birth rates, the regional differences are believed to increase.

By the year 2015, a wave of approximately 900,000 workers will leave the workforce by retiring. The diminishing of the younger age groups, then, leads to reductions in the education supply for children and young people and fewer workers than before graduate from the schools to the labour market. The age group entering the upper secondary level will begin to decrease significantly from 2010 onward. According to population development, the number of students will decrease from the now 450,000 to 390,000 students in the next decade.

Issues with the attractiveness of certain fields hinder the young people's employment in the jobs that become vacant in the labour market. A significant part of meeting the requirements for new workforce requires recruiting workers from the adult population. This means both efficient use of the workforce reserve comprised of the unemployed and those outside the workforce as well

as creating labour market dynamics that release the employed to proceed to new tasks and thus vacate jobs for those without one.

A key part of sustainable funding of a welfare state and a smooth labour market is not only getting the young age groups into education and work more efficiently, but also keeping the older workers in the labour market. The working life should offer attractive alternatives for early retirement. A typical feature of the Finnish working life has been that the proportion of the working ones of the entire age group begins to decrease from the age of 55 so that only approximately a tenth is still working when they reach the age of 65. The pension reform seems to be working as desired and, on its part, postponing the retirement.

Some positive development has been seen in the participation in work and employment rate of the older people. On the other hand, extending the careers from the beginning, i.e. young people entering the labour market earlier, has not developed as smoothly and, for example, the average age of those completing a higher education degree has risen despite the opposite objective.¹¹

Some conclusions concerning the adults' education behaviour can be drawn from the changes in the age structure. Participating in education related to work or profession decreases significantly in the older generations. The motivation for studying of pensioners and adults approaching retirement age is more related to the local community and hobbies than to work. The government has set a target of raising the annual participation level of the population of working age to 60 per cent by 2008.¹² According to the preliminary information from the 2006 adult education and training survey, the growth of participation in adult education and training has decreased and it appears that the participation objective will not be met.¹³

If we continue down the current path, Finland will most likely face a situation where there is a significant structural unemployment and a labour shortage on certain branches or professions at the same time. This may have an impact also in terms of the location of productive operations. On the other hand, significant placement of the currently unemployed to the open sector jobs is not

A key part of sustainable funding of a welfare state and a smooth labour market is not only getting the young age groups into education and work more efficiently, but also keeping the older workers in the labour market.

¹¹ Secretariat of the Economic Council (2007)

¹² Ministry of Education (2006, 25)

¹³ Statistics Finland (2007e)

likely. Despite the positive development, the number of unemployed is nearly double compared to the 1980s level that preceded the depression. This is not a question of lack of absolute workforce but a question of the demand and supply not meeting in certain branches and regions. There is an adequate workforce reserve but a major part of it is incompatible for the tasks available.

As a consequence of the shift in the profession structure the demands of the jobs available and the qualities of the unemployed no longer meet. Many a jobseeker has been trained in the wrong field and has learned things that are no longer useful. In the eyes of a company, the available workforce has inadequate work experience and basic vocational training as well as insufficient workplace related special skills. A large part of the jobs that become available are meant for well-educated specialists, whereas especially the level of education of especially the older unemployed people is lower than average and their skills are out of date.

The ways of bridging the gap between the level of education of the available workforce and the level of education demands of the employers would significantly affect the chances of the middle-aged to advance to new tasks and new branches in their work. Follow-up studies suggest that the employment effects of especially labour market training are smaller than expected.¹⁴ For the unemployed with a weak basic education, the current labour market training can only produce skills that are needed in low skills jobs.

Alongside the lack of skills, the lack of workforce can be related to the demand and supply of jobs not meeting regionally. The creation of new jobs concentrates in growth centres but workforce is available outside of them. To be employed, the unemployed from the surrounding areas should move to the centres but due to high housing and living costs it is more economical to stay in the current place of residence. It seems that a smoother movement of the workforce cannot be achieved without specific measures in housing policy.

Young and well-educated immigrants are inexpensive workforce for the country of destination if they manage to find a job. The receiving country is spared of the costs that educating citizens to the labour market requires. Of the

¹⁴ E.g. *Hämäläinen (2002)*

immigrants coming to Finland, the Russians and the Estonians are usually well educated: nearly 90 per cent has at least a secondary level degree. Then again, there are insufficiencies in the education of especially refugees. So far Finland has managed to attract relatively little capable foreign workforce. The proportion of immigrants in those with higher education is 0.7 per cent in Finland, whereas the same number is 15 per cent in Australia, 18 per cent in Canada, 7.2 per cent in the USA and even in Sweden it is 3.8 per cent.

Also, utilisation of the human capital of immigrants is imperfect: every fifth unemployed foreign national is highly educated.¹⁵ Official calculations predict the volume of immigration to be 4,000–5,000 people per year. This means over one hundred thousand incomers in twenty years, which, according to estimates, is a third of the real demand for workforce. There have also been estimates, according to which Finland may in the future be faced with competition over the highly educated Finns.¹⁶ This view does not, however, take the meaning of especially children's services in returning to the home country fully into account.

If Finland does not succeed in its education and labour market policies in the future years, the jobs that become available through the population's aging may either move elsewhere or completely disappear if suitable workforce is not available. A situation where the aging of the population radically changes the maintenance relation and where a significant part of the workforce continues to be outside the labour market or is only partially employed against their will, is unsustainable for the financing of a welfare state. Solving the situation calls for the society's ability to support the improvement of its citizens' skills level, postpone retirement and prevent young people from dropping out of school.

¹⁵ Pekkarinen & Taimio (2004, 45)

¹⁶ Poropudas & Volanen (2003, 137–138)

5.



Finnish education under a magnifying glass

The report's evaluation chapter and future guidelines concentrate especially on the challenges of upper secondary level education and adult education and training. At the same time we do, however, take a look at the state of the comprehensive school and the challenges it faces especially from the point of view of equality. When looking at the equality and working life relevance of education, it is clear that the view cannot be limited to results only. The educational success of the comprehensive school has a significant role when examining people's later educational paths and their success in their studies. This is why the analysis must begin at the comprehensive school level.

PROVISIONS FOR STUDYING FROM THE COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

The Finnish compulsory education covers the period from seven years of age up to the age of sixteen. In the past years, the compulsory education has been expanded to cover special groups, such as the children of immigrant families and mentally handicapped children. The principle of our education system has been a far-reaching decentralisation of decision-making. Municipalities have considerable possibilities to decide how the education is organised. The task of the central administration is norm control in the frames of which municipalities and individual schools carry out their teaching.

The Finnish comprehensive school has succeeded extremely well in international comparisons. In the OECD's PISA surveys in 2000, 2003 and 2006 the Finns at the final stage of the comprehensive school were ranked first and sec-

ond in the world in reading, mathematics and science alike. There were exceptionally little poor students in Finland and the number of the top class students was similar to that of the other top countries. The claim that the comprehensive school forces everyone into the same model is not true. It is the systems that do not divide students into different level schools or teaching groups that seem to succeed in the PISA surveys.

Generally it seems that the Finnish education system gives good qualifications for further studies and lifelong learning. The system no longer has educational blind alleys, i.e. missing possibilities for continuing, like it used to. Instead, mechanisms of selection are forming inside the education. They divide the students more discreetly than before and create different life paths for them.

The diversification of Finnish families and accumulation problems increase the challenges that the school faces. In many respects, Finland has never been as prosperous, especially if we look at the financial situation of families. Still, people seem to be doing worse. The school faces all the variation in the family life situations, as there are no mechanisms for choice or differentiation. Young immigrants present a special challenge. The perceptions on learning and the status and meaning of formal education often differ greatly from the traditional Finnish views. There are also great differences between the immigrant groups.

The crumbling of neighbourhood communities can be seen in the schools rapidly. Illfare builds up regionally in many parts of the country. The school can be the generator of change to one direction or another. Productive cooperation between the parents and the teachers can also be gathered around the school. This can improve communications and build the future of the youth but it can also bring the community to life and create social cohesion.

Are some more equal than others – the school's invisible selection mechanisms

Alongside the official objectives in school, there are unofficial, often subconscious practices that separate the students and select and steer them toward their own paths of life. Through the moral at school the students learn to perceive themselves and their abilities in comparison with others and the demands set by the school alike.

The comprehensive school success is a key factor in terms of future career in education and work. Performance in basic education is, according to studies, clearly reflected in the success in the matriculation examination, so differences in abilities and thus the seeds of inequality develop as early as in basic education. Every child and adolescent needs experiences of success and approval in learning. If the school cannot or will not provide them to him/her they will be sought from outside the school. Success and achievements in some subjects will increase the capacity to also get through the less motivating studies. Poor success at school is too often related to dropping out.

Comprehensive school learning difficulties and the hindrances they cause for education do not necessarily arise from unwillingness for education or lack of learning abilities of the student. Alongside the different styles of learning that the school should be able to recognise, the reasons may also lie in general difficulties in life situation and control. The problems often present themselves as problems in relationships and mental health as well as substance abuse.

FACT BOX 1:

GOOD PRACTICES IN EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION OF THE SCHOOL AND HOME

The national experimental and research program MUKAVA (2002-2005) sought to develop patterns to support the pupils' socio-emotional growth and to increase the school's social capital.

As a part of the MUKAVA program, a new practice was introduced in the Jyväskylä municipal educational administration. The top management of the educational administration meets the chairmen of the schools' parents' associations and discusses the cooperation of home and school. This was seen as a good forum to steer the home and school cooperation on the municipal level.

The School of Männistö in Kuopio networked with quite a few local businesses in 2003 to develop both the home and school cooperation and connections with economic life. A set of lectures with top-level specialists was organised for all of the parents of the school with the financial help of the businesses. The open monthly parent-teacher meetings were very popular and up to 400-500 parents gathered in them to listen to the education lectures of specialists.

Source: <http://www.mukavahanke.com>

It should be noted that the Finnish national objectives are set higher than the PISA criteria. If the PISA scores are evaluated according to the national categories, approximately one fifth of our school children would be seen as underachievers who can reach better learning results than what is seen from the marks in their report cards. It has also been noted that the school satisfaction of Finnish students is poor.¹⁷

FACT BOX 2:

GOOD PRACTICES IN HELPING STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

The KOTA project was carried out in 2005-2006 in three target schools in the Kontula residential area in Helsinki. The primary objective of the project was to enhance the regional educational equality especially through teacher training. Other objectives included improving the cooperation between the area's schools as well as recognising students with learning difficulties and enhancing helping them.

The continuing education of the teachers was designed from the schools' point of view so that the challenges arising from the area and the need to integrate students with special needs were taken into account in the training. The aim was that an adequately large number of teachers would complete practical studies in special education and then spread the new knowledge and attitude to the entire school community.

41 class and subject teachers completed the KOTA project special education study modules. All approximately 120 teachers of the schools took part in the more compact sections of the training. According to the evaluation questionnaire, all parties saw the project as a success. The teachers felt that the training succeeded in supporting their professional development and giving them extra skills to meet students with special needs.

One of the proclaimed objectives of the curriculum is enhancing gender equality. Equality is here interpreted as reaching equal rights and responsibilities of both sexes in family life, education, work and more widely in the society as well. Several processes that do not support reaching this objective have been discovered in the practices of school and education. In education, girls

¹⁷ Poropudas & Volanen (2003, 76); Kontoniemi (2003)

and boys are socialised into gender roles that then interlink with both the traditional division of labour between men and women in the family and in the labour market as well as presumptions on the gender-divided personality traits of an individual. Separate labour markets that are seen suitable for men and women have formed in the society. In them men and women are positioned in different branches and positions of different levels.

The questions of gender equality are complex in the comprehensive school. Both boys and girls are exposed to many expectations due to their gender role models from an early stage in their lives. Even though women are more educated than men they end up in well-paid and socially appreciated jobs more rarely than men. Dropping out of the education stream, on the other hand, concerns especially boys. This problem culminates at the final stage of the comprehensive school when the time of making crucial choices coincides with the most difficult time for boys during the most intense puberty.

The differences between schools are, internationally seen, very small in Finland. Also, the influence of home background on the success at school is smaller than in other countries. Still, there are differences and they are defined, in particular, by family background and socioeconomic status. The PISA surveys showed that the students whose parents were in the highest socioeconomic quarter did, for example in mathematics, approximately ten per cent better than those in the lowest quarter.

The gifted students from higher social groups do best at school when measured by grades. Pointedly, the children from the highest social groups succeed in school irrespective of ability but often even the talented children from the lowest groups do not succeed. In families of workers, it is easier for the parents to accept that children who were mediocre or poor in their studies settle for the shorter path of education, than for parents with a higher education. Families with scarce resources might even think that continuing education on a higher level is not worth the risk. It is more sensible to get to the labour market as early as possible.

The meaning of family background in seeking education is highly significant. The family transfers values and attitudes to the child. The relationship to school of lesser-educated parents is a more distant one and thus they do not

encourage their children to proceed in their education. This has been seen to show in negative attitudes toward school, which are more common in the children of parents in blue-collar occupations than in those with parents with a higher education. Dropping out of school and being educationally alienated is most common in those adolescents whose mothers' level of education is low. The mother's level of education predicts the success at school better than that of the father as it is a reliable indicator of the level of and attitudes towards education of both parents.

According to the PISA surveys, the parents' level of education explains approximately 6 per cent of the students' learning results. This result has also been seen in other education systems alongside the Finnish one. On the one hand, we can ask why it is a problem if the parents' education efforts have a positive impact on their children as well. It is somewhat impossible to reach a society where parents cannot help and encourage their children, nor do we want to. On the other hand, we must remember that the effect that the family's fortune has on the child's success is, after all, an unearned benefit. In all likelihood, the impact of the genotype on the course of a person's life cannot be entirely removed. For equality it is thus essential to try to assure such circumstances that even up the effect of family background so that the socioeconomic background cannot be seen from the end-result.

From time to time there are discussions about ability groups in basic education. The argument for the ability groups is often that the talented have the right to their own teaching – or, vice versa, the needs of the students who need special support. Studies do not, however, support the presumption that ability groups would enhance learning results on the scale of the entire school especially for the weaker students.¹⁸ Ability groups could bring some benefit to those children who were chosen to be in the best groups whereas the results of the others weaken. The most recent PISA survey backs up the view according to which selecting and dividing students into ability groups does not lead to good learning results.¹⁹

¹⁸ Hautamäki (2007)

¹⁹ OECD (2007b, 224, chart 5.3)

The skills of other children in a class, on the other hand, have a positive impact that can be seen in all students.²⁰ On the population level this impact is significant. If the objective of the school is to utilise the talent reserve as fully as possible, dividing the students into ability groups cannot be seen as fair or efficient. The arguments related to the education and learning of talented children are not accurate either, as the talents are often very versatile and develop at different times in different children.

The division into “good” and “bad” schools

The corner stone of the Finnish comprehensive school system – the division of those of the compulsory school age in schools according to their place of residence – was replaced by free choice of school in the 1990s. Instead of the neighbourhood school, parents could choose another comprehensive school of their choice for their child. In the late 1990s, a kind of school market formed in Finnish towns: the schools present their strengths and emphases and the students and parents are seen as customers.

There are examples of the growing differences caused by the free choice of school. Surveys made by the Helsinki education department suggest that schools became different by their socioeconomic background in the 1990s because of the parents’ free choice of school. The division of schools into desired and rejected ones leads to the differentiation of the student base between schools. This creates differences in the learning results of the schools and causes the learning environment to deteriorate in the most rejected schools. The effects of the student base differentiation cannot be prevented with the normal resources of the schools and substantial extra resources should be directed at the schools in the most challenging areas. Unless the situation is addressed, there is a threat that the most rejected schools drift into a spiral of negative development where all of the educationally motivated families move their children into other schools and the functioning conditions of the rejected schools weaken further. In the

²⁰ Robertson & Symons (2003)

light of international examples, there is also the risk that a particularly difficult working environment might affect the teachers' choice between schools.

Particularly clearly this polarisation of schools has emerged in Stockholm where the crumbling of the neighbourhood school principle caused a rapid and dramatic growth of differences. However, it is important to notice that re-establishing the neighbourhood school principle would not necessarily guarantee the equalisation of the learning results. It might, on the contrary, accelerate the migration, in which the more well off people would be the active ones. In a situation where the differences have grown to be big, making the choice of school more difficult might aggravate the differentiation of areas.

Especially the regional differentiation that has begun in the Helsinki region underlines the growing inequality based on the socioeconomic status. People with small incomes and those with social problems concentrate in the same areas. A common factor in these areas is the high proportion of immigrants. There have been cases in which migration of the original population begins as the proportion of the immigrant population reaches approximately one fifth of the areas population.²¹ This then leads to a relative decrease in property value. Examples of this can be found especially from the United Kingdom. Those who migrate often have a better income and a better education than those who stay in the area.

Regional differentiation is seen in the local schools. There is a noticeably clear connection with the schools' learning results with, for example, social housing, unemployment and the proportion of immigrants in the population. Educational alienation accumulates and begins early. In Helsinki, there is a clear connection between the comprehensive schools' learning results and the urban structure of the area from where the students come to the school. Up to 70 per cent of the variation in learning results in the lower level and approximately 60 per cent in the upper level of the comprehensive school can be explained with the help of variables that represent the urban structure. Social housing and the proportions of poorly educated adult population and immigrants in the area

There is a noticeably clear connection with the schools' learning results with, for example, social housing, unemployment and the proportion of immigrants in the population.

²¹ Andersson (1998)

where the comprehensive school's students come from are the most important variables that explain the learning results statistically.²²

In a situation like this, the children from the families that are less well off end up in a downward spiral that threatens to limit their chances and weaken their learning environment for reasons they are not responsible for. The community policy of the municipality, i.e. does the municipality make sure that a social community where different groups of people are variedly represented forms in all areas, is, then, essential for the equality between schools. If this principle of community policy is abandoned educational equality is abandoned as well.

The current government of Finland is the first one in a long time that resolutely attempts to extend the operational possibilities of private schools. The reasons may be seen as unusually ideological. The PISA surveys show that in the countries where the private school system is strong the average level of achievement is weak. This is, above all, based on the strong effect of taking the pickings in the systems based on private schools.

It is also notable that, especially in Finland, a large part of the private schools are based on purposeful cultural differentiation on the basis of, for example, worldview. Revealing the negative overall effect of private schools is one of the central PISA survey observations. There are warning examples of education systems where public schools have had to give way to multinational companies as organisers of education.

THE TRANSITION POINT BETWEEN THE COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL AND THE UPPER SECONDARY LEVEL

School dropouts in danger of social exclusion

In Finland, the educational supply has been planned so that everyone is guaranteed the possibility for a place of study after the comprehensive school. However, this right is not a subjective one and there is a competition for the

²² *Bernelius (2005)*

available places. This happens mainly through the national joint application system and the education providers choose their students according to the national principles verified by the Ministry of Education. If they so incline, the education provider can hold entrance examinations or aptitude tests and decide on the more detailed admission criteria. Among others, previous success at school and emphasised grades, the options of preference for vocational education and training, work experience and gender. Those who apply straight after the basic education or the voluntary additional basic education (10th class) get extra points in the admission.

The transition from the comprehensive school to the upper secondary level is the stage where educational alienation takes place the most in Finland. When moving from the comprehensive school to the upper secondary level adolescents may experience many kinds of transition difficulties. The adolescent does not apply for a place of study at all or is left without one despite taking part in the joint application system. Dropping out occurs in this transition point also if the adolescent cancels the study place s/he got through the joint application system or drops out in early stages of the education. Difficulties have been identified in approximately 12 per cent of those in the final grade of the comprehensive school when moving to upper secondary education.

Those young people who have already finished the comprehensive school but have not managed to get a place of study on the upper secondary level fall through the safety net, as their guidance is not appointed to any authority. There are great differences between districts in how the results of the joint application system and the adolescents' moving to the upper secondary level are followed up and what the actions are when someone does not accept a place of study or drops out of school.

The educational alienation of adolescents constitutes a problem with large economic, social and individual consequences in the society. As the functionality and productiveness of the school system is often measured by the number of degrees and dropouts, dropping out leads to underuse of the places of study and waste of financial investments and resources put to education. Dropping out also weakens the society's financial competitiveness in the sense that be-

cause of it we do not get the impact of human capital on financial growth that would come from a finished degree.

Actions to implement the education and society guarantee have begun as according to the Government Programme. The objective is to, through cooperation with different administrative sectors, get more adolescents in education after basic education and then into the labour market or further studies. The aim of the young people's education guarantee is that in 2008 at least 96 per cent of students finishing basic education will start in a general upper secondary school, a vocational institution or in the voluntary additional basic education in the same year. This number was 94.5 per cent in 2003. The set goals are challenging, as the age group finishing basic education in 2008 is some 6250 people bigger than in 2003.²³

The continuing rise of skills requirements from the labour market strengthens, on its part, the development where educational alienation becomes the key factor in supporting unemployment and thus permanent poverty and segregation in the society. This is why every single adolescent who does not apply to upper secondary level education or drops out of it is too much both from an economical and a humane point of view. Even from the currently unemployed a significant part lacks basic or upper secondary education and their employment in the competitive labour market is difficult. Another noteworthy fact is that unemployment, like a low level of education as well, can be inherited. Improving employment does not automatically improve the situation of these people, as their unemployment is often prolonged and recurring by nature.

Too soon to adulthood?

The choice of the correct occupational field and line of education and training has a central meaning for both further education and the entire life in the current system. The adolescents face this choice in the heat of puberty, which seems to cause problems especially in the educational career of boys who do poorly in the comprehensive school. It can be assumed that the boys' level of

²³ *Ministry of Education (2005, 55)*

FACT BOX 3:**GOOD PRACTICES IN PREVENTING EDUCATIONAL ALIENATION**

In 2006 the Ministry of Education started the Flexible Basic Education (JOPO) programme that supports students who are at risk of not getting their basic education certificate. Another objective is to prevent dropping out from education before or during the upper secondary level. Individual approaches and teaching methods that take the students' various needs into account are developed for basic education with the help of the programme.

The aim is to establish the flexible basic education as a new approach in basic education and it is meant for adolescents who would benefit from action and work-based work methods. Altogether 27 municipalities across Finland take part in the programme in the 2006-2007 school year and in 2007-2008 there are altogether 75 JOPO groups.

Source: http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Julkaisut/2007/Joustava_perusopetus?lang=fi

Productive action in Tampere

There has been long-term work to solve the problems of the transition point in the city of Tampere. The state of guidance counselling was studied. The Tampere city council decided in November 2005 that the number of guidance counsellor positions in basic education must be increased in order to guarantee sufficient guidance. The city's basic education still names the strategic objective of no more than 250 adolescents per guidance counsellor. This has been realised with the help of part-time teachers in the schools where the limit has been crossed.

The 'AKU – to vocational training and a career' work has proven to be suitable for the support actions. It is carried out in cooperation with the vocational institutions and the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Parishes in Tampere. Annual number of customers and the centre of focus have varied to meet the special needs of the current year with the key idea in supporting the young people to find their individual strengths and to help them forward in their life.

The quantitative and qualitative supply of basic education has been developed with determination. Multi-professional activity and cooperation over sector boundaries has brought results. In the autumn of 2007, 2000 young people finished the comprehensive school and approximately 53% of them entered general upper secondary school, 37% vocational training and fewer than 4% went for a combination of the two. Less than 5% of them began additional education and a small number started working or in apprenticeship training. All in all 17 people, i.e. 0.9%, were left outside education. 12 of them did not begin their studies and 5 of them could not be reached through the spring's contact information.

Source: Tom Tarvainen, Ville Pietiläinen, Tapio Kuure (ed.) *Nuoret eivät odota: palvelurakenteen muutos nyt. Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden tutkimuskeskuksen selvityksiä 2007:61, Helsinki 2007*

education, which is lower than that of girls, could be raised if the choices that shape one's life so greatly would be made at an older age.

Being left outside education is largely a problem of towns and population centres. This may be related to social problems on the one hand and, on the other, with too many options for the adolescents to perceive.²⁴ Being left outside education also seems to be related to unrealistic application desires in comparison with success at school.²⁵ In the transition point, the risk of alienation is greatest for young people suffering from various problems related to school and their personal life control as well as immigrants.

Language difficulties and such cultural factors that the school system currently cannot adequately recognise are accentuated in the case of immigrants. In a situation where the number of immigrants will rapidly increase, for example in the Helsinki region (practically the entire population increase in the Helsinki region will comprise of people speaking some other language than Finnish or Swedish), this challenge must be taken seriously.

However, it is essential to notice that a large part of the problems that immigrants face is not just due to the fact that they come from somewhere else. A large part of the problems can be traced back to the socioeconomic status of the immigrant families and the meaning of family background. At the moment, only approximately 70 per cent of immigrant adolescents continue to upper secondary level education. Being left outside education is thus nearly three times more common than with adolescents in the main population.

As a consequence of changes in the society and the labour market, the choice of occupation has become more difficult and complex. Young people finishing basic education must make choices between general upper secondary studies and different fields and degrees of vocational education and training. When it comes to the choice of occupation, many of the adolescents finishing basic education are still immature or feel it is too early for the choice.

According to a study in 2002, a bit over 10 per cent of those who entered vocational education and training directly after basic education believed they

²⁴ *Alatupa (2007, 15)*

²⁵ *Karppinen & Savioja (2007, 136)*

FACT BOX 4:

GOOD PRACTICES IN SUPPORTING IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

The Culture Laboratory was a member project in the European Social Fund EQUAL development programme. It was carried out in Helsinki in 2001-2004. The objective of the project was to increase multiculturalism in educational institutions and to enhance good inter-cultural relations.

The Culture Laboratory was a forum that gathered different people together to actively influence their own studies and create new activities that cross cultural boundaries.

The Culture Laboratory produced plenty of suggestions to develop education. Experiments based on these suggestions were carried out in the school year of 2002-2003. Also, the education curriculum was reformed and new tools for inter-cultural teaching and studying were produced.

Source: <http://www.hesote.edu.hel.fi/projektit/kulttuurilaboratorio/>

were in the right field, approximately one third were uncertain about their field and over half said that they were not in their own field yet.²⁶

According to the Evaluation of Educational Guidance and Counselling in Finland (2002) report published by the National Board of Education students felt there were deficiencies in the counselling despite the fact that most of them did apply and were accepted to upper secondary education in the joint application system. The young people found deficiencies in, for example, the counselling in personal growth and development and the guidance of study skills. Guidance in occupational orientation was a particular problem area.²⁷

The importance of the transition point choices is underlined by the strict separation of the general upper secondary education and vocational education and training. Even though the vocational path, in theory, does offer the same possibilities for further studies as the matriculation examination, the option is little used in practice. On the general level the educational structures are very rigid but significant cooperation projects have often been established in

²⁶ Numminen, Jankko, Lyra-Katz, Nyholm, Siniharju & Svedlin (2002)

²⁷ Numminen et al. (2002)

the local level to increase the flexibility of the educational path and lessen the dependency from the choice made. However, the difficulties in combining the upper secondary studies practically have received surprisingly little attention compared to the fact that the problems in career planning and educational mobility of the considerably older people in higher education have been noticed.

There is an effort to integrate the adolescents left outside education back into the society through alternative education models. The reason behind dropping out and being left outside education often lies in that the young people do not see the current school content and forms as relevant for their own lives. For many of the dropouts, the practical subjects were the favourite ones in the comprehensive school. For these students the school cannot necessarily offer meaningful learning experiences and the relevance in practical life of the taught information and skills remains weak.

On the general level the educational structures are very rigid but significant cooperation projects have often been established in the local level

UPPER SECONDARY LEVEL – THE TIME OF CHOICES

This report focuses on the challenges on the upper secondary level especially from the point of view of vocational education and training. The central challenges of the upper secondary education are related to the problems in applying to further studies in the transition point and impractical choices as well as especially to the attractiveness and quality of vocational education and training and the rigid nature of the structures. The strict separation of general upper secondary schools and vocational institutions sustains the difficulty in combining the studies in a meaningful way.

In Finland, compulsory education extends to the age of 17 or to the point of having completed the comprehensive school. There is no obligation for the young people to continue their studies after this. The expectation of the educational policy is, however, that everyone continues their studies and gets a profession. By the end of 2006, 2,806,000 Finns, i.e. 64 per cent of the population over the age of 15, has completed a post-comprehensive school degree in a general

upper secondary school, vocational institution, polytechnic or university. There are 1,570,000 of those who have only completed the comprehensive stage.²⁸

For those finishing the comprehensive school, the possibility for further studies has been guaranteed so that there are more study places in the upper secondary education than the size of the age group requires. There are approximately 1.4 places of further study per person finishing the comprehensive school. In the past years, the share of those beginning the general upper secondary school has varied relatively little: approximately 53–55% of those who have finished the comprehensive school choose the general upper secondary school. The share of those entering vocational education and training has varied between 37 and 39 per cent.²⁹

The distribution of the popularity of the general upper secondary education and vocational education and training varies quite a lot regionally and in different municipalities. At best, the share of those who enter vocational education and training rises up to 70% of the comprehensive school students in some small municipalities, whereas in certain municipalities in Southern Finland only 8% of the age group chooses vocational education and training. This can be seen to be partially linked with immediate social surroundings and socialisation caused by the environment.

Vocational training has been developed strongly in the past few decades. Reformed legislation emphasises lifelong learning, cooperation with the working life and between different educational organisations. Through the new school acts, all vocational degrees were extended to last three years and a new competence test or a series of competence tests that resembles the matriculation examination was added to vocational degrees. Another new thing is the dual degree, through which the student can complete both a vocational degree and the matriculation examination. Recent propositions have focused on the direction of partial degrees.

From the point of view of the education system, those who have completed vocational education and training or general upper secondary education are

²⁸ *Statistics Finland (2007b)*

²⁹ *Statistics Finland (2007e)*

equal when it comes to eligibility for further studies. In practice this principle does not, however, materialise. The cultural value structure strongly favours the general upper secondary education. The self-strengthening circle produces young people to the vocational education and training whose motivation for learning is, on the average, lower than that of their peers entering the general upper secondary school. This group, that naturally does not include everyone in vocational education and training, has negative attitudes toward school in many respects. They do not so much choose vocational training as they choose to remain “outside the general upper secondary school”.

Interest toward vocational basic education has begun to increase in the past few years and the number of applicants has risen. There were 143,780 students in the curriculum-based vocational basic education in 2004. 131,240 of them studied in institutional education and 12,540 in apprenticeship training.³⁰

Fewer than 10% of general upper secondary school graduates apply for upper secondary level vocational education and training and approximately 40% apply for polytechnics. The general upper secondary school thus functions as basic training for about a half of the vocational education and training on different levels. However, this function of the general upper secondary school has not been taken into account in its curriculum that mainly targets academic further studies, to which only about half of the level's students apply or is accepted. It may be estimated that whereas the comprehensive school counselling keeps both the academic and vocational paths open, the general upper secondary teaching narrows the students' viewpoints only toward academic further studies and neglects the introduction to working life and professions that choosing the vocational paths would require.

About the labour market relevance of vocational training

Also the upper secondary vocational education and training is often criticised for being too theoretical and adapting to the needs of the labour market too slowly. The theoretical learning in school has passed on to inadequate skills

³⁰ *Statistics Finland (2007f)*

at the work place. The transfer of formal education has been criticised to be low: 15–20 per cent do not reach all of the learning targets and not all of the things learnt are relevant outside the school.³¹ Recent discourse and propositions in educational policy toward e.g. partial degrees and workplace-related skills support this line of thinking. The dynamics of the labour market and the difficulties in attaching young people to their studies are used in highlighting the workplace-related skills.

The concern is, in many respects, a correct and a justified one but the means are wrong. We must ask what reducing general learning skills and general, often transferable skills in the education would mean in practice. In the short term, partial degrees might work as a tool to help with the companies' employee shortage but the least educated young employees would most likely be the first ones to bend in a situation where the company gets into difficulties.

A situation where young people are trained for specific tasks at specific workplaces is problematic in the long run. No-one can guarantee that the particular workplace or company succeeds, stays in Finland or is spared of rationalisation measures. Inadequate skills make young employees especially dependent from one employer. This, then, has an effect on their negotiation positions when agreeing on, for example, pay and the terms and conditions of work in the local level. We must also ask how wage tables that are connected to degrees relate to students completing partial degrees.

The weak basic training and inadequate skills of employees also hinder the company's operations in the medium term and they may pose an obstacle for development and expansion. This may happen especially if the company changes its production sector or begins to develop new products that require new skills.

Vocational education and training must not be approached as employment policy but as education policy. Transformation ability and the possibility to meet the future employment needs must be defined as the objectives of vocational education and training so that their own autonomy and possibilities of choice increase. Mere passive reacting and preparing to the current demand is short-sighted and quickly leaves young people with no support.

³¹ *Hämäläinen & Komonen (2003, 9)*

Throw in the towel

According to Statistics Finland, 13 per cent of those who begin vocational education and training drop out – often even in the early stages of the training. The key career management risks during upper secondary education are related to the choice of field and study motivation. A large section of the young people who have applied to upper secondary education has made their selection remarkably randomly.³² The random nature of the choice can be seen in that 10 per cent of the first year students who applied for upper secondary studies drop out and only 15 per cent thinks that they are in the right field. Vocational education and training drops a part of the adolescents who are “allergic to school” outside education at an early stage.³³

Dropping out of school and applying for new training is an economic question. The time spent on completing a degree may grow unnecessarily long and the education expenses per completed degree unreasonably high. This is the case especially if the student has not managed to acquire such skills that could be accredited in the new degree before changing the line of training. This is one of the reasons why it would be important that as many as possible would choose the right path for themselves as early on in the studies as possible.

Unwanted actions that waste the society’s resources may, still, be rational for an individual. A large part of the dropouts drop out only to move to a field that better suits their wishes. However, we must ask why the education structure does not enable a more flexible search for one’s own field without having to restart the studies from the beginning just because the first choice did not end up being the right one. “Wrong” study choices postpone the final graduation and attachment to the labour market.

Various learning difficulties and psychosocial problems have increased among the upper secondary level students. It is estimated that approximately 10 per cent of the students have learning difficulties. The number of students with special needs has increased at a rate of about 1,000 per year in the 21st cen-

³² Numminen *et al.* (2002)

³³ Hämäläinen & Komonen (2003, 10)

ture.³⁴ As the number of students who need help grows, there are not enough skills and resources in all of the vocational institutions to meet the growing demand. Large group sizes, lack of professional teachers and inadequate personnel resources in student welfare in comparison with the number of students are a problem in a large number of institutions across the country.

The education motivation of young people who are bored of studying is stimulated with more practical learning opportunities in various workshops, workshop projects and in apprenticeship training. The workshop experiments have, in general, been seen as a success: students have become excited and responsible for their studies through them and the absence and dropout rates have decreased. It has been estimated that at best the workshops decrease the dropout rate by about a third or even by half. It must be noted, however, that as mentioned above, concentrating too much on learning at the workplace threatens acquiring the learning skills and the emergence of general labour market skills.

There has been an effort to decrease the absolute number of the young unemployed through social policy. The young people without a vocational training were refused unemployment benefits unless they would show a particular willingness for training. The obligation to apply for vocational training in the labour market act promotes the educational placement of those young people who consider a vocational training necessary despite the difficulty in choosing the field. On the other hand, those young people who do not see the importance of education cannot most likely be motivated through the pressures and obligations from the education society. As a result of this system, there are unmotivated young people in, for example, polytechnics who have applied for a place of study – and been admitted – merely because of the labour market subsidy who later drop out. Thus they have taken a place of study from those young people who have a true interest in the field.

The problems of the adolescents are often so complex that it takes cooperation and sharing of knowledge between different personnel groups both in schools and in other units to engage in them. Data transfer from one school to another and between the various professionals inside the school is problematic

³⁴ *Statistics Finland (2007c)*

in the transition point and student welfare work. Many laws, such as the special legislation in social and health care and the general legislation, regulate the confidentiality and the releasing of the information of each professional group. The regulations form a difficult and complex entity for the professional groups to work together on.³⁵

The often limited knowledge of the Finnish language of immigrants steers them to vocational education and training more often than the main population. For the student being able to follow teaching and succeed in his/her studies the language skills must be of a good level on the upper secondary level. Only a few vocational institutions have the resources to ensure additional language teaching. At the same time there have been insufficiencies in evaluating the equivalencies of previous degrees or studies. Thus dropping out of school is more frequent for immigrant students.

FACT BOX 5

GOOD PRACTICES FOR SUPPORTING THE IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

MORO i.e. the Multicultural recruiting and learning project was a European Social Fund funded EQUAL development programme and it was carried out in 2002-2004. MORO took place in Tampere, Joensuu and Lappeenranta. The objective of the project was “to make the training, practical training and recruiting into a functioning chain the parts of which smoothly link together”.

The multicultural training offered by the MORO project helped teachers to understand why all students do not understand the Finnish language adequately despite having attended language courses. The teachers' attitudes toward multiculturalism and the effect of this to the teaching situation were also addressed. The objective was to get the personnel to commit to multicultural orientation.

Source: [http://www.vaestoliitto.fi/mp/db/file_library/x/IMG/57020/file /
Maahanmuuttajaprojektit.pdf](http://www.vaestoliitto.fi/mp/db/file_library/x/IMG/57020/file/Maahanmuuttajaprojektit.pdf)

³⁵ Kivelä & Ahola (2007)

FACT BOX 6:**GOOD PRACTICES IN PREVENTING EDUCATIONAL ALIENATION**

The objective of the Activity School of East Finland 2000 project has been to prevent the educational alienation of young people. The activity school model is a pedagogical model developed for vocational education and training that answers the needs of the changing working life and different students. The model both produces vocational skills and supports the students' abilities to function, be involved and participate in the society. Approximately 60-80 per cent of the studying in vocational education and training happens through on-the-job learning. Work-like and flexible studying also means abandoning the 45-minute classes and strict timetables. Contact teaching periods, in which core subjects and vocational theory are studied, are organised as clear entities as possible throughout the year.

Source: Hämäläinen & Komonen 2003

There have been many projects directed at reducing the dropout rate and the educational alienation of young people. One example of this is the work schools where the young people get both vocational training and skills for life management. Positive experiences from on-the-job learning influence their self-image, social skills and study motivation.

Baby out with the bath water – waste of talent reserve and inefficiency of the system

The basic problem of the current education system is formed by the inefficiency of the upper secondary level education and the way it reproduces social inequality. The Finnish comprehensive school's achievements in equality are indisputable: the differences in abilities between students are very small when studied school by school. An explanation to the evenness of the study success is the common basic education for the entire age group and the relatively late division onto different educational paths. It has been seen that after the young people are divided into general upper secondary schools and vocational institutions, the differences explode to the European level in a couple of years.

The division of the forms of upper secondary education can be seen to lead to a waste of the talent reserves in many ways. The new school legislation obligates the educational institutions to cooperation but in the practical school world there is a distinct division. The general upper secondary school studies of those in vocational training are limited to just a few subjects, such as business and administration. The vocational studies of those in the general upper secondary school are marginal as a whole.

There are not enough functional possibilities for the students to choose common subjects in all municipalities. There are blind spots especially in the countryside. It is understandable that small education providers do not have the possibility to produce wide-ranging services. The greatest hindrances in producing a common educational supply are practical organisational challenges and negative attitudes as well as the administration of vocational education and training and general upper secondary schools being under different administrators in different municipalities. The lack of local objectives affects the irregularity of the functions and the financing system does not particularly encourage to cooperation.

The network of vocational institutions is even more scattered than that of the general upper secondary schools and all of the vocational institutions do not have all of the fields. The students in upper secondary vocational education and training suffer from financial difficulties more than others as beginning studies often means moving away from home at an early stage in one's life. The student financial aid of the students in upper secondary education is influenced by their parents' income also when the students live – or have to live – independently.

Keeping the current upper secondary level structures apart weakens the understanding of crafts and other practical jobs of those who receive a theoretical education. At the same time it reduces the respect for general education of those who have completed a vocational degree. Inheritance is strong in both sectors of the upper secondary education. Finland cannot afford the juxtaposition of these two worlds, the general and the vocational, particularly not in the near future when the change in the age structure calls for more productivity from the human resources.

Being left outside education, multiple education produced by the system, unnecessary rigidity in the choices and in getting appropriate skills as well as the inability to answer the regional changes in the age structure cause inefficiency in the upper secondary education. The inefficiency is concretised in that getting lasting employment is, in practice, impossible without an upper secondary education.

The education system shows its rigidity when an interest to continue to higher-level studies arises in the student during vocational training.

The education system shows its rigidity when an interest to continue to higher-level studies arises in the student during vocational training. Even though the general upper secondary school and the vocational institutions basically give the students the same possibilities for further education, in practice they have proved to be unequal paths when it comes to future studies. At the same time we must note that up to half of the general upper secondary level students would benefit from the chance to include vocational subjects in their degree.

Student admission is included in the autonomy of higher education institutions. This has led to a situation where applicants often get more entrance points for the matriculation examination than a vocational degree. In practice, the eligibility for further studies from the upper secondary vocational education and training is not equal to the matriculation examination even though this is the intention. Only a few per cent of the university students have come through the vocational path. Even in polytechnics, which were where the students from vocational institutions were mainly expected to apply for further studies, the share of those who have come through the vocational path is only about 15 per cent.

The status of the matriculation examination in student admission will become even more accentuated when higher education institutions begin to take advantage of the more precise information that the new exam from one subject from the sciences or humanities will give about the applicants' knowledge and skills. At the same time, the actual possibilities to be accepted to a higher education institution for those who have completed the upper secondary vocational training will weaken even more. To ensure admittance to higher education a student in a vocational institution will have to complete the matriculation examination after the training – or after dropping out.

FACT BOX 7:**GOOD PRACTICES IN LOWERING THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

Cooperation models and practices for the general upper secondary schools and vocational institutions have been developed in the upper secondary level “youth school” experiment in 1991-2001. The experiments showed that young people are interested in diversifying, expanding or strengthening their studies by choosing subjects from other institutions as well. About a third of the students both in the general upper secondary schools and vocational institutions took advantage of the possibilities for choice. The experiment produced timetable solutions that enable cooperation and the so-called two-degree system in which students can take general upper secondary school courses and complete the matriculation examination alongside the vocational training.

Examples of regional cooperation models for general upper secondary schools and vocational institutions in the Seinäjoki region www.opinlakeus.fi and in the Jyväskylä region www.jao.fi/?newsid=11&deptid=11330&languageid=3&NEWS=1

Source: Volanen, M. V. (ed.) 2000. Kokeiluista reformeiksi. Tuloksia ja johtopäätöksiä nuorisoasteen koulutuskokeiluista ja ammatitkorkeakoulureformista. University of Jyväskylä: Finnish Institute for Educational Research

It is not sensible for the society that a young person who has completed a vocational degree and who has in the course of his/her studies become interested in studying in a higher education institution must begin a three-year general upper secondary school project so that he/she can finally at the age of 24–25 apply for his/her dream job education at a university. The same double education burden falls on those who have finished the general upper secondary school and find their future profession from the study programmes of vocational institutions.

Approximately 10 per cent of those in general upper secondary schools continue to upper secondary vocational training after the matriculation examination. They spend about five years in upper secondary education. A more flexible combination of study content would enable either complementing one's own

matriculation examination or vocational degree or accrediting earlier studies more easily. Overemphasising the structures and them being an end in themselves speaks of the prevailing institutional thinking in which the needs of the students are not on the first place.

ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING – FOR ALL OR FOR FEW AND FAR BETWEEN?

In Finland that is based on skills and knowledge, development and welfare can no longer be based solely on using the young and constantly renewing age groups whose skills are better and better. We also need persistent adult education and training policy. According to the PISA-equivalent International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) the skills level of adults is currently, on average, the highest in the world in Finland and the other Nordic countries. Adult education and training can be seen as “a second chance” for those who have, for one reason or another, drifted outside the working life.

Unskilled and little educated people have often been named as the main target group of adult education and training.³⁶ The demand for adult education has increased in the 1990s and participating in it has become common among the Finnish adults. The focus of the adult education and training policy has shifted from liberal adult education to vocational education and training. Half of the working age adults in Finland took part in adult education and training related to their work or profession in 2006.³⁷

Most of the job or profession-related training is personnel training supported by the employer. The studying takes place during the working hours and the employer sends people to be trained. The personnel training either takes place at the work place or the employer buys the training services from, for example, a vocational institution. Personnel training is often short-term continuing education or course training but also degree-oriented vocational basic education and higher education is organised as personnel training.³⁸

³⁶ Järvinen & Vanttaja (2001, 103)

³⁷ Statistics Finland (2007b)

³⁸ Rinne, Kivinen & Naumanen (1991, 133)

Adult education and training can be seen as “a second chance” for those who have, for one reason or another, drifted outside the working life

57 per cent of the employed took part in personnel training in 2006. The most active ones to get training were professionals. Nearly three out of four of higher professionals, more than three out of five of lower professionals and only two out of five of workers received personnel training.³⁹

Voluntary vocational adult education and training gives people the opportunity to educate themselves independently from their employer and in their spare time. The National Board of Education covers most of the costs but also the participants themselves pay for some. The education and training can be financed through the state financial aid for students or, when unemployed, the training insurance. In long-term training, also the municipalities take part in financing it.

Labour policy education is mostly vocational further education and training. The objective of the labour policy adult education and training is to enhance and support the balance between labour demand and supply in the labour market, prevent unemployment and eliminate labour shortage by educating the adult population. The labour administration buys the education and training it needs from vocational adult education centres, educational institutions, higher education institutions or other suppliers under the National Board of Education.⁴⁰

Increasing internationalisation, and the increasing demands for quality that follow, increasing the flexibility of studying for adults, a degree system independent from the means of acquiring skills and the degrees being based on the skills needed in the labour market are, among others, behind the development of the competence-based qualification system. Alongside those in the working life, the vocational qualifications system also has objectives related to the vocational adult education and training, such as enhancing the level of education among the aging people. The possibility of completing a competence-based qualification is hoped to reach especially adults without a formal vocational training and degree.

A clear problem in the adult education and training system is its unreasonable dispersion. The training offered by employers accumulates to those with a

³⁹ *Statistics Finland (2007d)*

⁴⁰ *Sappinen (2001, 129)*

good labour market status and the training supported by the society is scattered around an immense area. People easily get lost in the jungle of courses without a clear idea about the relationship between or quality, relevance and content of the studies. Many do not bother taking part in the education and training.

Adult education and training accumulates to successful educated people – social exclusion threatens elsewhere

When we look at the realisation of the life-long learning objectives as adult education and training participation rates, it seems that certain groups of people are left or stay outside education more often than others. Those who most need training and support take the least advantage of the services. This has become a problem in adult education and training.

Of all socioeconomic groups, the higher professionals complete the most adult studies. Also the activity of lower professionals to take part in the training is above average. Instead, participating in adult education and training does not seem to interest workers, farmers or entrepreneurs. Women train themselves more often than men. The more previously educated the person is, the more active the participation. Less people take part in adult education and training in rural municipalities than in densely populated and urban ones.

Participating in adult education and training weakens the older the age group is. Most of those left without training are aging men. Proportionally most of them live in the provinces of Lapland, Oulu, Eastern Finland and Western Finland. When support for a new beginning is needed the real ability and motivation of many to participate in training is weak. Many do not believe that the training has a chance of improving their lives. As for the oldest generations, the official objectives, possibilities and norms of the information and learning society seem to hold only for a small minority that is highly educated.

Among the unemployed, taking part in adult education and training is the lesser the longer the unemployment periods have lasted. One problem is also in that building labour policy education that would produce skills required by the labour market is difficult on the often modest educational background of middle-aged people. In lack of sufficiently efficient and flexible further education,

the labour market uses either the younger age groups with a better educational background or those already working.⁴¹ On the other hand, weaknesses can be seen in the cooperation between the labour and education administrations. The unemployed are prevented from participating in formal daytime education controlled by the education administration. The unemployment benefit limits the unemployed from participating in anything other than labour policy education.

In the end of the 1990s, the labour policy education orientation has been toward a more long-term education. The education guarantee promises a training subsidy for full-time vocational education and training or studying in a higher education institution that lasts at least 20 credits. The requisite of a long working history, however, leaves young people or the unemployed, who have been outside the labour market for longer periods, outside the benefit.

Labour policy education has also suffered from an image problem. The criticism has been targeted at the supposedly weak standard of the courses, inappropriate contents, poor organisation, lack of results and the label of “forced training”. The meaning of one’s own motivation is central in the success of the training and the criticism must be seen in this light. The poor appreciation of labour policy training in the labour market does not improve the employment effect of the courses either.

There have been many studies about the effectiveness of labour policy education in Finland. The results of these vary. A key message of the studies is that the economic situation affects the success of the education. Also, the time span in which the effects are evaluated is significant. The education takes up time from the unemployed and decreases the chances of seeking work from the open labour market during the training. Thus the final results of the education will only show in the long run.⁴²

There are problems in the education alongside work for the employed. The principle of equality has not fit in the education policies of companies. The employers determine the educational needs of their staff and choose those who get training. The education is mainly directed at groups who hold key posi-

⁴¹ Sappinen (2001, 122)

⁴² Kauhanen, Lilja & Savaja (2006)

tions in increasing the productivity of the company. It is not profitable for the employer to invest in the education of such groups of employees that can easily be replaced with educated people from the open labour market. Personnel training is unequally divided in different lines of business and the unemployed and often also those in short-term employment are left outside of it from the get-go. The probability of receiving education paid for by the employer is significantly lower for those in temporary and part-time jobs than for those in so-called normal employment.

If such employment becomes more common the divide of the labour market into the insiders and the outsiders can worsen still. It is just those in short-term jobs whose skills most often need improvement through training. Someone whose studying skills are good and who is doing temporary jobs in the beginning of his/her career has no other option to finance the studies than to apply for the general student financial aid or to work alongside studying.

What is wrong when there is no appetite for studying?

It has been estimated that nearly two million working-age people feel the need for vocational training. Even if most of the employees are in need of further skills, most of them are deprived of the actual possibility to participate or the possibility is not used. Lifelong learning is often portrayed as a “necessity” and a “common goal”. The problem is seen to be in that people are often not as keen to train themselves as the employers would like.

Not participating in education is discussed little, especially in public. The only explanation is that there is something wrong with people’s attitudes. However, the structural factors of work have been seen to still have a central effect on the study motivation and real study opportunities of employees. The willingness to study of those with little education is decreased by their often inexistent possibilities to influence the development of their work and to advance in their career.

Different groups of people expect different things from education and training. The interest of employees is, above all, to secure their place in the labour market. For middle-class employees, the aims of studying are related more to

enhancing the content of their jobs, creating a career and improving their social status. The higher the socioeconomic status of the employee, the more likely s/he feels the need for further vocational education.

According to studies, one condition of participating in adult education is securing the economic status. Even a short-term absence from the labour market for studying is an expensive investment. The employee, the employer or the government must pay for it. The investor must believe in the productivity of the adult education investment. If the investor is the employer the investment is based on the expectancy of a more efficient work effort of the trained employee or a more flexible use of the workforce. Education is thus used as a motivational factor in general human resource policy, an increaser of work productivity or in preparing the employees to take on new tasks. From the employees point of view the main conditions of participating in adult education are a secure work place and a secure welfare during the studies.

Employees participate in personnel training ordered by their employer and according to the collective bargaining agreement. A condition of participating in independent adult education is that the employee can take time off for the studies without losing his/her job and that his/her income does not suffer unreasonably. Those participating in independent education find the place of study themselves and can, even now, get limited support to ensure or enhance their income. Especially the possibilities for participating in more long-term training that builds up vocational skills for business owners and the employees of small and medium-sized businesses are limited.⁴³

39 per cent of the little educated 30-54-year-olds in the Ministry of Education Noste programme target group would study if they could keep their current net income. If the student financial aid would cover three quarters of current net income 18 per cent of studied group would be ready to begin their studies. 12 per cent of those who answered the survey would study with half of the net income.⁴⁴ The study voucher systems that have been implemented in some municipalities have brought unemployed people to study.⁴⁵

⁴³ *Ministry of Education (2006, 40)*

⁴⁴ *Kokkila (2003, 61)*

⁴⁵ *Ministry of Education (2006, 12)*

In a situation where the possible gain of studying is left unclear, studying is not necessarily seen as a sensible choice.

In a situation where the possible gain of studying is left unclear, studying is not necessarily seen as a sensible choice. For employees with a scarce basic education or those unemployed, education does not promise good rewards such as a job or a better salary. For example the impact of completing a competence-based qualification has proven to be small for the income development. According to studies, adult education and training benefits men more than women. Out of the group that Kokkila⁴⁶ studied, 44 per cent of the men got more pay as a result of the training whereas a half of that number, 22 per cent, of the women reported that the education had led to a rise in their income level. This can also be seen in the job description development. Participating in training guaranteed more challenging tasks, a change of job or profession or keeping one's job more often for men than for women.

On the one hand, it seems that seeking or refusing to study is not only a matter of money. The experiences from the education guarantee tailored for the long-term unemployed in the end of the 1990s show that there has been little increase in the willingness for studying for the little educated despite the inducement of a student financial aid the size of the unemployment benefit. According to a report by the Ministry of Labour only just over 1,000 long-term unemployed took part in training during the one-year experiment.⁴⁷

The effectiveness of education or its possibilities to create an effect vary especially for the unemployed. Particularly in the eldest working-age groups with a low level of education the general learning skills are weak. This can be assumed to affect their unwillingness for training. Among the unemployed job-seekers there are people for whom getting back in the working life is no longer possible due to illness and a decreased ability to work. Identifying them and guiding them to disability pension would be sensible both for the individual and the society.

We must look for the reasons for unwillingness for study from lifestyle and cultural factors as well. Adult education and training should be understood as something basically anchored to a certain culture that is not meaningful for

⁴⁶ Kokkila (2003)

⁴⁷ Järvinen & Vanttaja (2001, 105)

or suit the life policy of all groups of people. From a cultural standpoint it can be understood that often those who have acquired little education do not see their lack of education as problematic, at least as long as there is work. Their attitude toward education is coloured by the principle of getting by with a minimal education. According to this principle, training is sought only when it is absolutely necessary for securing one's place in the labour market. Education is not seen as an absolute value and the working life is not seen as an arena for competition where one must strive for success and ever better performance.⁴⁸

Previous learning experiences affect the participation as well. If the experiences of learning in school are negative and people feel they have learned more elsewhere than in school, participating in adult education and training is lesser than in those who have enjoyed studying at school⁴⁹. Especially in the case of little educated men in blue-collar jobs fear of failure and losing one's face might be behind not participating in training.

Compromised ability to work, especially due to illness or unemployment, is a heavy burden not only economically but mentally as well. The ideal of the "practical Finnish man" is strongly built on work and the professional identity. When this becomes, for one reason or another, impossible, a feeling of insecurity about the continuity of income and a need to redefine one's self again arise. Education and training is not seen as a possibility as it has for long been a rejected, even despised, form of taking part in the society. For example many surveys that qualitatively evaluate rehabilitation record this phenomenon.⁵⁰

The social consequences of accumulation

Education divides the working people into groups of different incomes ever more clearly. Those who have completed a higher university-level degree and those with a post-graduate education form the privileged group. The second group is formed by those with an upper secondary level degree or a higher polytechnic-level degree. Their comparative status has thus far not improved

⁴⁸ Tikka (2007)

⁴⁹ Mehtätalo (2005)

⁵⁰ e.g. Nikkanen (2006), Suominen (2006)

nor deteriorated significantly. The third group is comprised of those with only a basic-level education and who work without a vocational degree. Measured in real income, their status deteriorated despite the great economic growth in the end of the 1990s.

The wage benefit for those who with a post-secondary level degree has increased in comparison with both less and more educated. At the same time the wage benefit for those who have completed a higher-level degree in comparison with lower education has diminished and the wage differences inside education groups, i.e. the wage dispersion among those with the same level of education, have increased. The unevenly distributed adult education and training that accumulates mostly in the same groups enhances this divide and the separateness of the secondary and primary segments.

Despite its wide range the adult education and training system has not fully been able to guarantee its objective of combining the demand and supply of workforce set by the government. It should be possible to move people of the working age from shrinking lines of business into those that employ and grow. As the structural change speeds up, this can only be done through continuous education and training.

When adult education and training is often comprised of concise courses, the professional skills acquired through it remains patchy and do not form specific entities. The complexity of the system, many sources of finance and the variety of those who offer the services make applying for training difficult. It may be difficult for an individual to know what is offered and how to organise the participation in practice. The problem is increased by the difficulty of accrediting the acquired skills. It is difficult for the employers to get information about the relevance and content of the training if the training periods are very heterogenic.

The existence of labour bottlenecks costs jobs and prevents faster development of companies. As a consequence, economic growth slows down as well. A society that is penetrated by the culture of learning can be constantly ahead of change. The current educational system that limits people's professional development at a too early stage and answers to the further need of updating one's skills poorly is not able to do this.

6.



To common education and skills

INCLUSION GUARANTEE

The society must strive for a state where all of its members have the possibility to be sovereign participants in the labour market as well as in all other activities in the society. A truly democratic society cannot leave its members outside the means of participation through which the citizens can express themselves and further their own and the society's wellbeing. We must strive to ensure the possibility for a sovereign citizenship for all. We must commit to the objective of an inclusion guarantee.

The inclusion guarantee can be divided into two main components. All citizens must be able to fully function in the labour market as well as elsewhere in the society. Functioning in today's labour market calls for adequate skills so that people can safely develop their professional skills and plan their life on a solid foundation. The society must give its members a skills guarantee through which the society promises to organise all its members the education they need in order to actively function in the labour market.

The objective of education, like of life itself, must not be only in bread and material wellbeing. Education must strive for culture and a meaningful life. The society must commit to giving all of its members an education with the help

of which they have the possibility to understand the surrounding world and society, take part in social activities and lead a meaningful, conscious life. The society must give its members an education guarantee.

REMOVING INEQUALITY IS A MATTER OF BROAD-SCALE SOCIAL POLICY

Increasing wellbeing, possibilities and autonomy have been set as the objective of education from the point of view of an individual. To what extent are these objectives met? On whose terms and objectives does educational policy develop? Is education planned from the point of view of an individual's possibilities to build his/her life, advance in his/her career and maximise his/her chances, or do the boundary conditions come from somewhere else, from stronger groups in the society, serving their benefit?

The answer is not clear, as there are various aspirations in the Finnish educational policy, some of which can even be seen as contrary. Alongside with the change of the welfare society, the dependency on market conditions has increased. At the same time education is expected to produce equal learning possibilities for every citizen.

Education is still a key system in producing and reproducing social differences, both culturally and economically. One central conclusion of this report is that education policy cannot succeed in its emancipatory aspirations without the help of other social policy. Income distribution, labour market and housing policies are also needed. In the Finnish society, the income gap has grown⁵¹ and poverty has stayed on the level of the depression despite rapid economic growth⁵². Inevitably, this will reflect first in the situation of families and then in the situation of schools within a short timeframe.

A clear observation from the PISA surveys is the success of the comprehensive and publicly managed education system. The benefits of the lack of division and categorisation for the entire society are significant. In the most recent PISA survey, the country that had most rapidly increased its score was Poland where

⁵¹ *Kiander 2007*

⁵² *Ritakallio (2007)*

the previous division into ability groups ended in the end of the 1990s. To fully utilise the skills potential of a small country, future education policy must be shaped toward solutions that are open for all. The existence of blind alleys and creation of too rigid structures mainly for status reasons hinder the purposeful functioning of the education system and create inequality.

COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORMS

Emancipation must be set as an objective of the education system. The comprehensive school learning results have a great meaning for future life. Most problems related to learning and educational motivation appear or are ignored during the comprehensive school. Many studies have indicated that students' school satisfaction is poor. This is concerning as neglecting school assignments and unnecessary absence are often the first step in being left outside education. Intervening in problems only on the last form of the comprehensive school is not necessarily enough, as the adolescent who has succeeded poorly and has become allergic to school does not have enough time to improve his/her grades during just one school year. Supportive action must come early enough, especially if the target group is children whose socioeconomic background is unfavourable.

Special attention to prevention, controlled class sizes

To ensure a soft start to the school path and to recognise and intervene in possible problems fast, the group size in pre-primary education must be significantly smaller than it is now. The education providers must allow for an adequate number of school assistants in the first two years of basic education. At the same time, a clear and concrete limit must be set for group size in basic education. As a result of the broadening of education, the increasing student/teacher ratio in many fields of education is a clear problem in terms of concentrating on the young people's problems. Groups that grow too big mean that an

ever-decreasing amount of time is spent per student and teachers are unreasonably strained. Working well and productively is difficult in over-sized groups.

Cohesion, meaningful experiences and the integrated school day

The division of the organisation of teaching has been justified by “producing stars” and thus enhancing our country’s competitiveness. Offering top education for a small minority may, however, leads to narrowing the main population’s knowledge and skills. In the heat of the competition a temptation might occur to most reduce the possibilities of children and young people who are seen to benefit economic growth and enhance the country’s international competitiveness the least. Separating and defining “the stars” and “the risk youth” reinforce the young people in different target groups learning a different idea about themselves and their place in the society as well as their possibilities to influence their future.

Every citizen should be able to count on the society and on his/her success and to find the tools to influence both his/her status and the common boundary conditions. The mission of education is to give an individual the ability to criticise and take initiative, move away from hopelessness and being viewless. The part of the Finnish education system that produces civic skills has dilapidated in the shadow of the PISA success. The international Civic studies gave an unfortunately poor image of the participation of the students and the school’s success in increasing inclusion. Deficiencies have been detected in the teaching of civic skills and social studies. The meaning of civic abilities in creating a “positive motivation for change” must be underlined.

The school should be able to offer meaningful experiences and possibilities for success for those students, also, whose interests are in practical doing instead of theoretical subjects. At the same time, we must be able to reduce the aloneness and loneliness of children. One solution is to reform the structure of the school day according to the principles of the so-called integrated school day. During an integrated school day, studying, rest and nice hobby experiences alternate.

*During an integrated
school day, studying,
rest and nice
hobby experiences
alternate.*

In practice, this calls for supervised morning and afternoon activities and placing optional subjects between theoretical ones. Participating in activities outside the classes would be voluntary for the student. This arises from the families' scheduling needs, the purposefulness of various activities and the regularity of the school day. A fixed daily rhythm accustoms the student to regular habits, provides the feeling of safety for smaller children as well and supports favourable development.

Socially just education policy

Beginning from basic education, education should prepare people to face changes instead of a predictable and stable professional career. The preparedness for change calls for strong basic knowledge and attitudes that help to learn new skills throughout life. As a producer of basic knowledge, the Finnish school has a good basis, as our basic education has been noted to produce an evenly good learning outcome. The small differences in the skills levels of students in diffe-

FACT BOX 8:

GOOD PRACTICES IN SUPPORTING THE STUDENTS' SOCIO-EMOTIONAL GROWTH

The national experimental and research program MUKAVA (2002-2005) sought to develop patterns to support the pupils' socio-emotional growth and to increase the school's social capital.

A part project of the programme sought the best practices for the integrated school day in different municipalities and schools. The basic structure of the integrated school day in the experimental schools comprised of three parts: (1) morning activities, (2) a "breathing" school day which included classes, hobby activities and a long lunch break, and (3) afternoon activities after school. According to the teachers' and parents' assessments the school satisfaction of the students increased, bullying decreased and the cooperation between the school and the parents evolved during the experiment. Also the job satisfaction of the teachers improved. The students' participation in the hobby circles was related to their study motivation, the desire to continue their studies, lesser smoking, lesser bullying and lesser truancy.

Source: <http://www.mukavahanke.com/>

rent schools have, on their part, lead to good results in the PISA surveys. Typical for the countries that are less successful in the survey are great differences in skills between schools. If schools diverge into “good” and “bad” schools in their resources and student material, the Finnish result is endangered as well.

Schools are important engines of regional development. Failing or unsuccessful schools, on the other hand, rapidly radiate their problems to the environment. Especially in large cities and their suburbs, clear regional effects on the comprehensive school learning outcome have been seen.⁵³ There are many different ways in striving to steer the regional effect on the school. One key target for development is the school district division. The school districts should be divided so that the school gathers students from all socioeconomic groups as evenly as possible. Social problems that concentrate on certain regions and schools quickly show in the learning outcome.

The existence of unofficial ranking lists of schools and their use in choosing a school can probably not be avoided; it might not even be worthwhile. Instead, the current, often stigmatising and simplifying, assessment practices should be reformed so that the schools’ performance level would be measured with clear and valid criteria. This information should be public and not only available for those who can get information through their own contacts.

A common, national framework must be created for the possible assessment of the schools’ performance level and the publicity of the results of the assessment. If such assessments are carried out, it must arise from producing added educational value. This means ranking the schools according to how the students succeed in comparison with their socioeconomic background. Schools where also students whose families are not educated or well off succeed deserve recognition.

⁵³ *Bernelius (2005)*

Schools as engines of development in local communities – options, incentive and cooperation

By ensuring that the variety and richness of the social domain is represented in the school we also attend to many quality factors in basic education. Adequate social variety ensures the educational objectives for those, too, whose home background does not support a successful educational path. To actualise educational equality and to reduce regional inequality we need specific and targeted measures alongside general solutions. The education providers must be obligated to strive for a high level of performance and quality of teaching everywhere. At the same time, teachers must be encouraged by salary and qualitative benefits to go to schools where the job is especially challenging.

FACT BOX 9:

GOOD PRACTICES IN SUPPORTING THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY AT SCHOOL

The For School and Life project coordinated by the Helsinki Polytechnic Stadia experimented with new methods to support the sense of community in schools. The project took place in the Myllypuro comprehensive school in Helsinki.

The key actors in the project were bachelors of social services who provided personal support service in the school and organised community supportive activities during breaks and integrated with classes. Increasing inter-student tolerance, settling conflict situations and supporting the positive self-image of students was the central idea of the project. The participation of parents in the school work was encouraged through happenings organised at the school and parent groups.

The project was seen to have supported and eased the work of the teachers and the student welfare team, improved the school's atmosphere and calmed the everyday life of the school. Especially students in danger of becoming socially excluded and students with immigrant background who needed special support benefited from the project. However, a more positive learning atmosphere did benefit all students and they themselves estimated that the project had limited bullying significantly. The school's atmosphere had, in the teachers' opinion, improved and parents had given them good feedback about the work of the bachelors of social services.

Sources: <http://www.urbanfinland.info/Resource.php/urban/hankkeet.htx.html>
Rautiainen, Asta (ed.) (2005). *Koulu yhteisöllisenä toimijana*. Publications of the Helsinki Polytechnic Stadia B: 4 130 p.

Schools face the diversifying Finnish society in e.g. increasing cultural and economic differences. We are in a situation where soon the entire population growth of the Helsinki region is comprised of immigrants. Such discriminatory factors that already have an effect among Finns (social background, inheritance, lack of inclusion) will be accentuated among immigrants. In preventing social exclusion, schools and the school district division are, in many respects, on the front line. Building communality is also a matter of cooperation between the school and home. Connecting homes more tightly with the school work increases not only safe adult relationships in the lives of children and adolescents but also increases local cooperation.

Too many immigrants drop out of school early or suffer from learning difficulties. Often the reasons for this are inadequate language skills and the difficulty for children from a different cultural background to adopt the school's values and practices that are obvious for Finns. The adaptation difficulties of immigrants begin at the level of housing policy. There should be an equal number of immigrant students in all schools so that they would become a natural part of the local community. Learning Finnish would also become easier when knowing it would be necessary both at school with friends and in the neighbourhood.

OVERHAUL OF THE UPPER SECONDARY LEVEL

Also the basic structures of the education system must be looked at critically. Our current education system divides the educational paths too early and ranks them differently. The adolescents finishing the comprehensive school often have insufficient requirements to make decisions that influence their entire future professional career and life, and supporting the transition to further education does not seem to be on an adequate level in schools. This leads to choices of educational paths that are not in the interests of individuals or the society.

A strong cultural value structure that prefers the general upper secondary education is linked with the upper secondary education in Finland. For highly educated parents, their child taking the vocational path may be an undesired option. The inequality of the educational paths is also maintained by the ones choosing vocational training being insecure and making their choice passively.

Compulsory education must be extended and ways of completing a degree diversified

The education system must be reformed so that the compulsory education is extended to cover upper secondary education. The current age of compulsory education is from an era when people were seen able to adopt the skills needed to independently function in society by the age of 16. Considering the constantly increasing complexity of the society, the technological advancement and the growing skills requirements, setting a specific age limit cannot be seen similarly purposeful anymore.

Approximately 3,000 adolescents annually do not begin upper secondary education. The education system should be able to hold on to these young people, as being outside of the education system for over a year makes it significantly more difficult to return to it. The education system should be developed so that young people could not choose themselves out of the educational path in practice until they have a vocational degree or a degree that makes them eligible for further studies.

Expanding the compulsory education would, in practice, mean that the education providers would ensure the adequacy and availability of vocational upper secondary education and training, voluntary additional basic education, or workshop activities as well as necessary support activities for the entire age group. For a majority of young people, expanding the compulsory education is not significant as such, as they apply to continue their studies after the comprehensive school anyway and also are aware of the demanding requirements of the working life. The reform should thus be seen as support for those adolescents who, for one reason or another, have had difficulties in completing the comprehensive school studies and have motivation issues in applying for upper secondary education.

Together with expanding the compulsory education, the ways of completing a degree should be examined. The ways of completing a degree must also be diversified. Completing a degree through, for example, workshops and apprenticeship training must be increased so that also those young people, to whom school itself is not a tempting option, can educate themselves.

The education system should be developed so that young people could not choose themselves out of the educational path

Improvement to the upper secondary level student financial aid

The parents' income limits that affect the upper secondary school students' financial aid must be eradicated at the beginning of the reform. The student financial aid must be elevated to the level of that of the students in higher education institutions and it must come in the form of study grant and housing supplement during the compulsory education. The current structure groundlessly discriminates the young people studying in vocational institutions who often come from financially more underprivileged families and are forced to move away from home because of their studies more often than students in general upper secondary education.

Upper secondary level cooperation must be increased – flexibility and freedom of choice is our objective

Rapid changes in the working life call for flexible specialisation and rapid changes also in educational structures. The traditional vocational education and training that lasts for many years cannot react to the changes in business and profession structures and at the workplace. It is no longer sensible to try to attach people to one profession or job for their entire life through formal training during their youth.

One way to adapt to the future unpredictability of educational needs is to strive for a more universal education instead of special vocational training especially in the upper secondary level. Increasing instability should make decision makers take a critical stand to employees or vocational skills being directed at a certain, too specific a direction.

It is more important than before that children and adolescents learn to learn instead of learning certain skills. The education system should prepare them for a lifelong employability rather than a lifelong employment. The task of vocational training must be to enable general learning skills and a flexible transition from one line of business into another. The education system must not feed a situation where future employees are trained precisely to uncertain fields and left to be dependent of one employer.

One key issue will be how the assets of the vocational and general education traditions are harnessed to support and enrich one another. The new basic skills in the working life are, among others, IT skills, foreign languages and encountering other cultures, technical education, entrepreneurship and social skills. These skills are the foundation of an active citizenship and employability. These general skills that are needed in the working life and in life in general are not adequately represented in the curriculum of any Finnish educational institution neither in general upper secondary schools or in vocational education and training.

The strict division between the vocational education and training and the general upper secondary education, alongside with the current age of compulsory education, are from the past and maintain the unhealthy cultural gap between general and vocational educational institutions and their students. Rigid structures both create two unequal classes of citizens, and also inhibit choosing sensible subject combinations. Especially in the future, vocational experts need many such skills and knowledge in their work for the obtaining of which the general upper secondary education would be useful. This is also connected with the ethos of constant education and training and adopting the culture of learning as a part of life. Also, a general upper secondary school student should be able to study, say, construction when s/he so wishes. The strict division of general upper secondary schools and vocational institutions mainly serves the cultural interests of those who guard the status value of the matriculation examination.

At first, the objective must be in increasing cooperation and bringing down boundaries. In the future, the development can move toward joint upper secondary institutions where students can complete the matriculation examination, vocational training or both. All courses of the regional upper secondary educational institutions should be gathered as one array of courses from which students then choose their study content. Completing the matriculation examination or a vocational degree would still require complying with the minimum requirements of the particular degree and completing a final examination.

The new system would allow combining subjects easily. The question is, in particular, about increasing the students' own possibilities to choose and about an equalising change within the education system. Short-term experiments with joint upper secondary level schools were, in many ways, encouraging. Approximately a third of the students both in general upper secondary schools and in vocational institutions chose studies in other educational institutions or from other fields of study.⁵⁴ Studies can also be carried out, for example, as module teaching when the student has the possibility to combine work and studies without it impeding the completion of a full upper secondary degree.

Clear orientation options to support professional identity

The number of study programmes within vocational training must be cut down and study content for particularly specific professional skills must be moved to the adult education and training system. Vocational upper secondary qualifications must be understandable for young people and guarantee not only good basic skills for a particular vocation but also general learning skills for further studies. In addition to practical training and periods of work experience, introductions to vocational training must be organised.

Degrees that concentrate on too narrow themes leave individuals in a weak position in the labour market, as their skills are limited and only relevant to few employers. Together with expanding the study schemes of vocational training, attention must be paid to the working conditions of teachers. Resources must be targeted especially in the basic function, i.e. teaching, instead of short-term projects. Building the professional identity of an adolescent who is beginning his/her vocational training is persistent work. Vocational teachers who work at the lowest level of the current system have a poor chance of inspiring a future professional.

⁵⁴ *Memorandum of the joint upper secondary school evaluation group (2001)*

Vocational education and training and adult education and training are separate entities

There are many reasons for which resources should be joined at the upper secondary level instead of combining vocational education and training and adult education and training. Combining adult and vocational education and training would create large factories of vocational qualifications that would, especially culturally, further dissociate from the general upper secondary school. This would create an accentuated divide between young people from an early stage. Similarly, making a very crucial career choice would still remain an unnecessarily early decision. Close cooperation of the upper secondary level and adult education and training is, in many respects, justified but because of their different basic functions they should be kept as distinctly separate structures.

Strong medicine against dropping out

The Finnish education system must be made to function more efficiently so that young people move to the working life earlier than at the moment. Compromising the level of student financial aid forces students to a sparseness of livelihood that increases working alongside studies and dropping out. In the past few years the Social Insurance Institution of Finland has paid the student loans of approximately 5,000-6,000 people (approx. € 25 million/year) to the banks as a result of lack of loan management. The reason for financial difficulties has often been unemployment or a poor financial situation, behind which, then, are discontinued studies.

Even though dropping out is, on average, lesser in Finland than it is in most other countries, it is still a real problem in many fields of study. The intake must be scaled overly large in comparison with the labour market's needs because of the poor passing rate. By increasing the passing rate the intake could be reduced and re-directed. Thus extra resources would be freed to increase the quality, efficiency and productivity of education. The reduction of the student age groups, tightening international competition and the increasing need for

labour force put pressure to further reducing dropping out rates. The society cannot afford to lose a single young person.

Adolescents dropping out is often explained through their own life: failing to find an educational path results from the young person's own background and own problems in life. In this explanation model, the school can easily withdraw from responsibility. There is rarely just one reason behind dropping out. It is most often the result of a long-term development where the individual's qualities, personal life situation as well as factors related to the school, i.e. what the school culture is like, teaching methods and internal interactions are like, come together.

Lately a social-pedagogical take that crosses the boundaries of traditional labour policy education and labour policy objectives and means has been developed to help those dropouts who are socially excluded or threatened by it. Teaching life control abilities, initiative, cooperation skills and responsibility have been attached to vocational training. Extending the compulsory education together with multidisciplinary cooperation in schools support achieving these objectives.

PRECISE SKILLS AND CAPACITY FOR CHANGE THROUGH ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reacting to the rapid changes of the working life requires a clear division of labour between the vocational training of young people and adult education and training. Vocational education and training provides basic skills for functioning in working life whereas adult education and training is for precise training. Very flexible possibilities to complement and continue previously completed studies and combine them with work are required from the education system. The model also calls for a change of attitude among the employers who expect to get specifically trained workers with work experience from the particular field straight out of school.

To enable lifelong learning and create a culture of participation and learning we must abolish the idea according to which studying ends at getting a degree. Currently especially workers in a weaker socioeconomic position do not take

part in education and training. Studying often begins only once losing one's job either as a result of restructuring or for health reasons. Finding a study routine in such a situation may become mentally hard.

A new beginning from adult education and training – cultural hurdles must be overcome

The education discourse should cover qualitative matters in the sense that educating oneself would empower and inspire people. The system must encourage people to “flexible specialisation” and keeping up and developing their own professional skills. Vocational skills must be built and people's own skills must be valued, not just the existing jobs.

All of the central interest groups in the working life (the national government, employers, employees) have their own and, to some degree, different views on the numbers of those who need education, target groups, contents, organisational forms, teaching methods etc. According to studies, over-educating is limited in Finland even though from the point of view of an individual employee “too high” qualifications may, in some cases, even complicate getting a job.

However, the blame does not lie in education alone. It lies also in the rigid structures of the labour market that are not able to utilise the contribution of highly educated people. In a recruiting situation, employers may be doubtful toward a job seeker whose qualifications are higher than those required for the job. A high level of education should, however, be seen firstly as an asset that gives the individual and the society new possibilities for development. Broadening higher education raises the status of many professional groups and democratises the working life. From an individual standpoint, education provides skills to adapt to the changes of the working life.

The accumulation and dispersed nature of adult education and training form a significant problem not only for equality but also for efficiency and purposefulness. The part of the labour force that most often would need the education for their own good participate in it rarely. The reasons for this are often both in the employer as well as in the employees themselves. They do not know about

The system must encourage people to “flexible specialisation” and keeping up and developing their own professional skills.

the possibilities, cannot find the time or the financial support for the studies or it is a question of a cultural practice. Increasing willingness to learn is also a clear matter of wellbeing. When the society's services move to an Internet environment more and more, the oldest generations who are afraid of technology are left aside from even the basic services.

Special measures for risk groups

Activation and development measures of vocational further education and training are needed especially in order to increase the advancement possibilities of agricultural and other entrepreneurs, personnel in small or medium sized businesses, those with a low level of prior education, people over the age of 55 and those with a short employment history or in atypical employment, immigrants and the unemployed. Of those with a higher education especially the ones who are in short and changing employment, the self-employed and entrepreneurs as well as those in the low-wage sectors of the public sector are the groups whose possibilities to participate in continuing education vary.

It has been said about immigrant education that it does not answer, for example, their language skills needs and thus it does not provide adequate capacity for employment. It is not easy to persuade the aging unemployed people from agriculture or industry in the periphery to centres of knowledge and service work to learn new vocations. An unemployed forest worker in his fifties will not turn into "Mr. Nightingale" easily. Becoming unemployed may be a difficult phase of life as such for an older worker who has been working for a long time. In such a situation, seeking education might be a threshold impossible to pass. Fixing the skills deficit of the aging unemployed with education requires special measures. It cannot be done merely through voluntary adult education and training but special educational possibilities of different lengths are needed. Further or re-education must be offered an organised in a way that respects the damaged work identity of the people while a new identity is slowly built. The current guidance and education system does not seem to support this enough.

For adults, the financial, social and psychological obstacles for vocational education and training may be significantly bigger than for younger people. Researching the population's education preferences and the factors that influence them is of utmost importance especially if we wish to direct education and training into fields that do not naturally attract students. Adults mention the lack of time and being busy at work as the most common reasons for not being able to participate in training, but also the expensiveness of the education does come up. Long-term studying inevitably lowers the income level of an adult student. Adults who live and support their family of their income do not generally want to make uncertain investments in educating themselves. Individual market-based education supply will increase the educational inequality in adult education and training, as when the education supply is based on the buyer's capability to pay, the poor are left outside education.

Employers and the society can influence overcoming financial obstacles and those related with the use of time if lifelong learning is seen as the right of every citizen. This requires financial support for studying and institutional responsibility for education as well. Adult education and training should be developed into a system that would support alternating between work and studies in all fields and professional levels. This also requires adequate support services for example to enable studying outside the working hours. In practice, this means for example child care possibilities in the evenings for those who are studying

Clarity to the financing

To enhance the educational supply for those population groups who do not participate in adult education and training, a long-term plan should be drawn up and with it a permanent financing system. In organising and financing adult education and training, cooperation between different parties, such as the employer and employee organisations, labour and education authorities and possibly social services authorities, is needed.

Liberal adult education has a central mission in striving for quantitative growth of adult education and training; it does reach over 1.1 million adults annually as is. However, the current financing system of liberal adult education

hinders development of the operations toward getting the underrepresented groups to studying. The performance-based statutory government transfer system does not support outreach work or investments in guidance. On the contrary, the basic financing encourages educating those who are easiest to reach and whose studies do not involve extra costs from, for example, learning difficulties. In financing the liberal adult education, the costs of development, outreach work and guidance counselling should be taken into account.

With the help of a permanent financing system, tasks of educating citizens under the threat of social exclusion and strengthening active citizenship and social inclusion can be given to the liberal adult education institutions. Activating the underrepresented population groups to participate in training requires a more clearly defined division of labour and networking across the boundaries of educational institutions between the education providers.

Employers finance the continuing education of their personnel if they organise it. However, nothing obligates them to educate their staff. In practice, employers educate employees at the management level the most even though the need for education and training is greatest at the performing level. In terms of lifelong learning, atypical employment creates a problem. Employees in part-time or temporary jobs or employed through staffing agencies have hardly any possibilities for continuous training or self-improvement. They often belong to peripheral workforce for the education of which the employer does not care. On the other hand, those in atypical and discontinuous jobs must constantly market themselves so it is difficult to find time for independent education and training.

From the point of view of lifelong learning, employment should last at least so long that employees would have the time to familiarise themselves with their jobs and learn something new in them. Then they can see their job as meaningful for and supportive of their own professional development. A solution to the problems that especially temporary workers face can be sought from companies that rent workers for regular work. Educational inequality is, thus, partially a result of the current organisational models and structures of work. Only by changing them is it possible to stop the polarisation development of the working life.

In Finland, the principle in educating the unemployed has for long been that full-time studying is not possible without losing the unemployment benefit. It has only been possible to get a subsidy the size of the unemployment benefit for education financed by the employment authority. Often unemployed people have been sent to be educated more as an order from the authorities than of their own will. This has labelled the labour policy education as forced education.

The possibility for those receiving the unemployment benefit to participate in voluntary education also in vocational institutions, adult education centres and open universities should be enhanced and the criteria of full-time studying revised. Doing, for example, academic studies does not usually obstruct seeking and accepting a full-time job, as the studies are rarely in the form of a course or bound to a schedule. Studying that leads to a degree must be made profitable.

The skills guarantee idea must become practice – toward employment security

We must move from education offered as protection against unemployment to continuous education during the career. The purpose is to maintain study skills and provide new skills to employees and enhance their chances of either staying at work or changing their occupation. For this purpose, a system that takes the skills guarantee to the practical level must be created; a system that provides every employee an annual training period.

This system must be financed jointly. The society, employers and employees alike participate in the expenses, the labour market parties through the social security costs. As an example, the accumulation of annual leave could be used. For every working month one day of entitlement to education is accumulated. In addition to this, the society guarantees a certain amount of education to each citizen and, through estimating the education deficiency, special entitlement to education for those who cannot accumulate it in the working life.

The studies do not have to be related to the current job; one could get training for an entirely new vocation alongside work. Especially employees themselves would benefit from the jointly financed system, as their skills capital would grow. Another beneficiary would be the small and medium sized

companies whose possibilities to offer their employees productivity enhancing training are smaller than those of larger companies.

To one place

The current adult education and training system is, all in all, confusing and it is not easy for those wishing to update their skills to find training that suits their needs from the jungle of courses and educational institutions. Adult education and training needs a complete reform, the basis of which could be that anyone planning adult studies would get all the information and services concerning the education from one place. The basis of adult education and training should also be built on a logical financing system that gives equal opportunities and creates real incentives that are not dependent on the seeker or provider of the education.

Skills must be recognised – immigrants to the working life

The foreseeable reduction of workforce requires a more efficient employment of those outside the existing workforce reserves, i.e. the unemployed, students and those outside the workforce. We must also recognise that the talent reserves of a small country will not suffice for everything. The most critical problem in the long run is related to the most capable workforce's willingness to settle in Finland.

To ensure capable workforce, Finland needs a more active and systematic immigration policy than before, the objective of which is to take the workforce needs into account better than before. In order to attract foreign students, study programmes must be better planned and marketed and the financing system developed. Potential tuition fees from students arriving from outside the EU must be compensated through tax reduction schemes that encourage staying in Finland. Utilising the immigrants' skills potential requires systems for recognising previously learned skills so that the employees' skills can largely and easily be put to the use of the labour market.

Key propositions in a nutshell

1. The development of inequality and division between schools must be fought against with active social policy. School districts must be divided so that the neighbourhood school reaches children and adolescents from many different socioeconomic groups.
2. The attractiveness of schools in trouble is increased through particularly targeted support actions, e.g. wage incentives for teachers and popular optional courses.
3. Class size must be regulated by law.
4. Wider school assistant services are provided to pupils in the first and second grades.
5. The integrated school day is implemented and thus creative subjects and hobbies are included in the school day.
6. Art and physical education is increased to ensure diverse experiences of success for all.
7. The skills of bachelors of social services and youth workers is utilised more regularly in the school work.
8. The structures of upper secondary education are reformed to provide as wide options for choice as possible and to flexibly combine vocational and general studies.

9. Compulsory education is expanded to cover the education in the upper secondary level.
10. The ways of completing the upper secondary education are diversified.
11. The orientation possibilities of vocational education and training are cut down and concentration on broad subjects and general vocational skills is increased. Education that produces specific, situation-bound skills is concentrated in the adult education and training system.
12. Modular teaching, where work and studying can be flexibly interlaced, is made possible.
13. The culture of lifelong learning is implanted: education and training must be available and people must be encouraged to participate in it also after completing a degree.
14. We move from the idea of unemployment security to the idea of employment security. Education and training supports people in challenges and reduces their dependency from one employer.
15. The inclusion guarantee is implemented. It consists of a skills guarantee and an education guarantee. Everyone must have the possibility, when they so wish, to improve their labour market and social skills throughout their lives. Support services must enable studying in the evening for those who work and have families.
16. Working must accumulate a right for education and training similarly to the days of annual leave. For those outside the labour market the state guarantees education and training on the grounds of the education deficiency.
17. Adult education and training is gathered to one place; the services and information must be easily and comprehensibly attainable.
18. The recognition and acknowledgement systems for skills obtained elsewhere are developed.

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