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3. FINNISH TEACHERS AS 'MAKERS OF THE MANY'

Balancing between Broad Pedagogical Freedom and Responsibility

ABSTRACT

Finnish teachers have been the focus of interest of the international media, public decision makers and politicians as well as researchers into teaching. The results of Finnish pupils in PISA have encouraged many people to inquire about the characteristics and atmosphere of Finnish schools, especially the working conditions, as well as the enthusiastic, committed orientation of Finnish teachers. This chapter describes the work of Finnish teachers, their pedagogical responsibilities and freedom related to their role as well as their pedagogical thinking at the background of their everyday work in classrooms with pupils. Finnish teachers participate in the administrative and the pedagogical decision-making processes of their own schools as well as at the various levels of the Finnish school system; they are able to influence their work, and thus, they have broad pedagogical freedom and also broad responsibilities related to these role tasks. Finnish teachers manage their work as teachers and educators by negotiating, dialogue, a democratic way of pedagogical thinking and acting in challenging situations. These ways of working are based on a certain kind of ethos, which is mainly characterized by hope and trust among teachers, principals, and administrators. This kind of ethos provides additional support for successful teaching. Finnish teachers are committed to learning, participation and active agency in their pedagogy, in their collaborations with various people as well as active participation in questions related to schooling and education. Their academic, master's level teacher education as well as their societal role encourage them to act according to this manner. Although Finnish teachers are committed to their work, recent research and reports of teacher's trade organizations have shown that they also feel inadequate and exhausted by their work.

Keywords: teacher's role, pedagogical freedom, responsibility, negotiation

INTRODUCTION

A career in teaching is an appreciated and popular profession in Finland, and many young people are willing to choose it as their life career. There are several thousands applicants to teacher education institutions every year, and only 8–10% of the applicants will enter universities to start their studies (Statistics of VAKAVA, 2014,

H. Niemi et al. (Eds.), Miracle of Education, 41–55.

2015). The OECD report (2003), *Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers (Country Background Report for Finland)*, emphasizes "high social status" and "competitiveness for entry" as the well-known characteristics of a teaching career in Finland (OECD report, 2003; see also OECD, 2014). Consequently, the calibre of Finnish student teachers is high. As noted in the report, "entry to teacher education is still highly competitive from well-qualified candidates" (OECD Report, 2003).

This broad interest towards the teaching profession and the number of highly qualified applicants for teacher education programmes are naturally the starting point and fundamental prerequisite for successful teacher recruitment. Most Finnish teachers continue in the teaching profession for all their working lives and quite independently take care of their professional development (Webb et al., 2004). There is no precise data available on the extent of teachers' transition from school work to other labour markets. According to the OECD report (2003), it is estimated that approximately 10–15% of those who have completed teacher education programmes will move on to assignments outside teaching at some point in their careers. Some teachers progress to headmaster positions during their careers, and some move on to other educational professions, like publishing companies or personnel management positions. There is a growing need for continuous in-service teacher education and support for teaching work in order to retain effective teachers in schools. The intention is that teachers should remain in the teaching profession for as long as possible – even to the point of retirement. Both nationally and internationally, there is growing evidence (Boyd et al., 2011; Mancuso et al., 2011; Pyhältö et al., 2011) that management of educational institutions and schools is an effective way to support teachers in their work.

Although Finnish teachers have strong master's level education, pedagogical knowledge and theoretical understanding of their work, pedagogical action and decision-making in practical classroom situations is not an easy task. Current research on Finnish teachers has shown that interaction with pupils in socially and pedagogically challenging situations constitutes the core of teachers' pedagogical wellbeing. Success in both the pedagogical goals and more general social goals seems to be a fundamental precondition for teachers' experienced pedagogical wellbeing in their work. Also, teachers' pedagogical wellbeing is centrally generated in the challenging social interactions of their work (Soini et al., 2010). According to the teachers themselves, they do not necessarily have the relevant competences to do their work, and they are not always aware of the impact and possible consequences of their actions and decisions (Husu & Tirri, 2001; OECD, 2014). Teachers' working environments in Finnish schools have become more heterogeneous, and teachers feel that challenges related to their pupils' backgrounds, diversity, differences in schools, and the role of school have increased, and thus, the implications for their teaching and for their pupils' learning has become more significant (*cf*. Hautamäki et al., 2000; Jakku-Sihvonen, 2002). The emotional load and stress related to working conditions has affected teachers' wellbeing, and thus, there have also

been discussions in Finland about the rise in the numbers of teachers leaving the profession (*e.g*. Pyhältö et al., 2011; Heikonen et al., 2016).

This chapter describes the principles and structures framing Finnish teachers' work as well as the practices and challenges within this framework at the school level that these academically educated teachers have to face. In order to understand the comprehensive construction of Finnish teachers' work in schools, their pedagogical work is considered from the viewpoint of the role requirements for modern teaching work. The educational context within which Finnish teachers work is relatively open and is based on trust between political and administrative decision makers and teachers, but – at the same time – it sets rather demanding expectations and responsibilities for teachers. The teaching profession requires thoughtfulness, consideration, and tolerance in the midst of teaching and educational work, and teachers are educated for this way of teaching during their pre-service teacher education.

TEACHERS' WORKING SPACE IN FINNISH SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS

The working space of Finnish teachers is understood and defined at many different levels. The legislative and administrative frames of educational policy regulate the functions of educators on a more practical level. The Basic Education Act 628/1998 defines the main guiding principles concerning educational equality and equity. In the educational setting and practice, this means, e.g., the same comprehensive schools for all pupils, a very limited number of private schools, allowing a great heterogeneity of pupils, and fostering multicultural policies and practices in schools. The time allocation of subjects and the National Core Curriculum (2014) defined by the Council of State formulate the prerequisites for school-level instructional work. The local school curricula planned and constructed by the municipal authorities, principals and teachers regulate the pedagogical activities – principals' pedagogical leadership, teachers' teaching and pupils' learning – at the school level.

The guidelines for the formation of school operational culture and the learning environment are defined in the Finnish *National Core Curriculum* (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014), which emphasizes the uniform development of all official and unofficial school practices in order to support teaching and learning at schools. The aim is to create an open work culture that supports cooperation both within the school and with the home and rest of the society (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014, pp. 10–15, 66). Multiple learning environments promoting interaction and dialogue between teachers and pupils, as well as among the pupils, are explicitly outlined throughout the curriculum (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014). As Kumpulainen and Lankinen (in this book) point out, one of the major goals of Finnish basic education is to support the growth and development of all pupils, strengthening their opportunities and involvement in learning. It is important that this definition of equity is comprehensive in nature, meaning that all teaching to all pupils should take into account these factors. Thus, equity is measured both in

terms of good and appropriate teaching and supportive and individualized care being provided for the pupils.

The administrative regulations of educational policy outline the framework within which Finnish teachers work. Through these outlines, the norms, requirements and demands on the teaching profession and the *teacher role* in Finland are also determined and set. Teachers should act both directly and indirectly according to the public interests that are related to communal values. Teachers as professionals hold social role positions, which encompass expectations both for their behaviors and that of their colleagues (see *e.g*. Brophy, 1982; Buchmann, 1986; Beck, 2008). The teacher role embodies high aspirations, and in the school context it provides certain mechanisms and patterns for guiding action in its light. Teachers should act in a professional role in their work; this should apply regardless of their own personal opinions. Therefore, in order to fulfill their mandate correctly, teachers are not allowed to operate in an informal, ad hoc manner (*cf.* Lortie, 1975).

In Finland, teachers are expected to act according to prescribed educational aims and values. Their work is carried out within schools, where the given educational aims and values are contextualized. Naturally, all the criteria for teachers' pedagogical actions cannot be stated explicitly. The variety and pervasiveness of pedagogical situations is such that a great deal of teaching depends on the personal presence of teachers and their ability and willingness to do what is appropriate in teaching situations (Husu, 2002). Thus, making pedagogical judgments can be understood as an on-going aspect of teachers' daily work and all teacher action has an inescapable moral dimension (Tirri & Husu, 2002; Husu & Tirri, 2007; Tirri, Toom, & Husu, 2013). In addition to teaching academic skills, Finnish teachers are responsible for many other pedagogical tasks and duties found in their profession. A teacher's main professional task is to promote the full potentiality found in every pupil. This educational aim brings the concept and practice of care to the forefront of teachers' work in schools. In teaching, care is conveyed in many ways. At the institutional level, schools are organized to provide pedagogical continuity and support for trusting relationships between teachers and pupils. At the local and individual level, teachers do their best to show their caring for pupils through specific forms of attention, by co-operating with their pupils' parents, and by carefully guiding the growth of the pupils in their charge. As educational research has shown (see e.g. Noddings, 2002; Niikko, 2004; Juujärvi et al., 2010), these kinds of personal manifestations of care are crucially important and effective in pupils' lives. However, it should be emphasized that the concept of practicing caring is not confined to personal relations in schooling. Also, the curriculum can be selected and developed with caring in mind. Teachers can manifest their care in their choice of curriculum, and an appropriately chosen curriculum can contribute to the growth and development of pupils (Vitikka et al., in this book). Finnish teachers participate in the preparation of local school level curriculum and make choices related to it, participate in general pedagogical decision-making and distribution of resources at schools (Sahlberg, 2007; Niemi, in this book; Kumpulainen & Lankinen, in this book).

TEACHER'S RESPONSIBLE PEDAGOGICAL ACTION

The context of Finnish school presupposes and requires multidimensional and pro-active pedagogical action from teachers. This role makes demands on a teacher and the responsibilities and requests related to the task of teaching itself formulate the ground on which Finnish teachers work. Teachers are expected to act within the borders of their professional role. In addition to those role-oriented manners, their personal characteristics and preferences play a role in their professional work as teachers.

Finnish Teachers' Role Requirements

Finnish teachers are strongly involved in the construction of their own local school level curriculum that is based on the National Core Curriculum. The school level curriculum sets the concrete framework for teachers and guides their practical work by defining the aims, contents and methods for teaching and learning. This school level curriculum allows teachers to organize classroom activities quite freely and choose the teaching methods, teaching materials and assessment methods they use with their pupils. Teachers can also influence the grouping of pupils and their teaching schedules to some extent in order to optimize their pedagogical action. Finnish teachers teach those subjects that they specialized in during their teacher studies and they are able to make use of their personal strengths in choosing the methods they use to teach their classes. Most Finnish teachers use innovative teaching and learning methods, and materials as well as ICT and educational technology (e.g. Lakkala, 2010; Muukkonen, 2011; Ilomäki, 2008), but many of them still teach in a relatively traditional, teacher-centered manner. Interestingly, this may be one of the reasons behind the Finnish success in international PISA assessments. As Sahlberg (2007) and Simola (2005) have argued, ideas for improving teaching and learning in schools have usually been transferred from past good practices and teaching traditions in Finland. This kind of pedagogical conservatism has created "a pedagogical equilibrium between progressivism and conservatism through learning from the past and teaching for the future" (Sahlberg, 2010, p. 337).

Finnish teachers are encouraged to collaborate pedagogically with their colleagues, and they have opportunities to do this during their working hours. Teachers organize shared teaching periods, co-prepare teaching materials for pupils and even co-teach with colleagues (see Niemi, in this book). The school festivals and other special events related to specific profiles and school topics, like nature weeks, science projects, sports events, and the like are often organized collectively. Parents are actively involved in school-home partnerships, for example, through curriculum work, membership in a school's board, assessment discussions, parent events, school festivals and meetings. Finnish teachers also actively collaborate with other important institutions, companies and actors in their communities (see Vitikka et al., in this book). Finnish teachers are also intensively integrated in multi-professional

collaborations, which aim to support their pupils' wellbeing comprehensively during their time at school. In Finnish schools, the principal, teachers, special education teachers, school psychologists, public health nurses and social workers form a group, which takes care of every pupil in the school (Laukkanen, 2008). These relationships form the multiple networks and democratic, negotiating co-operative relations that are involved in Finnish teachers' working contexts.

Finnish teachers' relationship with their pupils can mostly be characterized as equal and democratic. Teachers aim to construct their pedagogical authority in an equal relationship with their pupils, rather than in an authoritarian top-down manner (*cf*. Harjunen, 2009). The guidelines for this approach to the treatment of pupils are in the Basic Education Act as a principle of equality in the *National Core Curriculum* (2014) and in the conception of pupils as active agents in the learning process (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014). The general aims and goals of learning as well as guidelines for assessment, both during the learning process and at its end, support, guide and encourage the pupils' learning. Added to this, the task of assessment is to help pupils form a realistic image of their learning and development. Pupils should be assessed in multiple different ways in collaboration with their peers and parents in a constructive and encouraging way. Furthermore, "the multiple ways of assessment and feedback for pupils are teachers' essential pedagogical practices to support pupil learning and development" (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014, p. 47). With the help of assessment, the teacher guides the pupils in becoming aware of their thinking and actions and helps them understand what they are learning. Besides the outlined principles, the democratic ethos of relationships between teachers and pupils is influenced by traditions that have been developed over time in Finnish schools.

Finnish Teachers' Personal Characteristics and Qualities

The teaching profession is highly appreciated in Finland, and this fact is shown in the huge numbers of applicants for places in teacher education institutions. Every year, over 7000 young people apply primarily for class teacher education to institutions around Finland, and less than 800 of them pass the entrance examinations and start their studies (VAKAVA Statistics, 2014, 2015). In subject teacher education, students apply first to their subject faculty and then to the pedagogical studies organized in departments of teacher education. This means that student teachers are talented young people who have done well in their upper secondary school studies. Both class teachers and subject teachers complete about 5 years of master's level studies at university in order to become qualified teachers and to be able to work in the lower or upper grades of comprehensive schools (*c.f.* Niemi, in this book). The courses for Finnish student teachers are designed to impart a research-based orientation towards their practical teaching work on the students. They are also guided to learn reflection as a way of thinking and as a tool for continuous professional development (Husu, Toom, & Patrikainen, 2008; Juuti, Krzywacki, Toom, & Lavonen, 2011). Finnish

student teachers and employed teachers are highly committed to their teaching work (Niemi, 2011) and involved with their colleagues and schools.

One of the central aims of teacher education is to support student teachers in discovering their personal strengths and constructing their professional identities based on these strengths. However, teachers only fully realize their own strengths and find their own ways to teach when they start to work as teachers. This is problematic because everyone likes to be told that "being oneself" or "a firm following of the code of ethics" is all right, even laudable. But what are teachers' personal strengths and their own ways to teach? Teacher autonomy and self-realization are indisputably one of a teacher's personal goods. However, as Buchmann (1986) emphasizes, schools are for children, and children's autonomy and self-realization depend in part on what they learn in schools. Thus, "self-realization in teaching is not a good in itself, but only insofar as pursuing self-realization leads to appropriate student learning" (p. 538). Teachers are persons, but being one's self in teaching is not enough. The person must be paired with the obligations contained in a teacher's role.

Both through the terms of action outlined in National Core Curriculum as well as through the Finnish academic teacher education, Finnish teachers are able to make use of and act in an authentic way in their teaching practice (see *e.g.* Tirri & Husu, 2002; Tirri, 2003; Husu & Tirri, 2007; Hanhimäki & Tirri, 2009; Gholami & Husu, 2010). This means that a teacher's *role, obligations and personal prescriptions* can be combined (Sockett, 2009), and then the concept and practice of *authenticity* (Halliday, 1998; Kreber, 2010) constitute a crucial link between teaching and the achievement of students' complex educational and learning outcomes at the classroom level. Authenticity consists of pedagogical actions that are routinely performed by teachers; it involves working with students, promoting knowledge of the practice of teaching, prompting teacher self-reflection, and serving formative purposes (Iverson et al., 2008). When practicing authenticity, teachers balance their actions and thinking both with situationally appropriate role demands and personal preferences. Teachers' authentic way of action entails a disposition to act on reasons, and this is especially emphasized and practiced during Finnish research-based teacher education as a form of teacher's pedagogical thinking (*cf.* Kansanen et al., 2000; Husu, 2002; Toom, 2006). It is exercised in making decisions and built up by constant deliberation.

EDUCATING WITHIN A SOCIETY – THE MINDSET OF THE FINNISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Explaining the general high level of the schools in Finland is an extremely complex task: it involves good infrastructure (modern school buildings and facilities), qualified and well-trained teachers, state-of-the-art technology etc. – but the list does not explain everything. The way of organizing educational policy into pedagogical practice does not solely make good things happen in schools. Behind this foreground, there is also a background in Finnish educational policy that paves the way for

success in schoolwork: our democratic and consensus-seeking ethos in political decision-making. We call this the mindset of the Finnish educational system. This mindset of educational policy and educational thinking can be seen in attitudes and assumptions held by the majority of Finnish people. This mindset functions interdependently on all levels of educational decision-making and teaching practice, and between all civic and professional participants: major politicians, educational administration and governance, teachers, and parents – even pupils share it to some extent. It (tacitly) creates a powerful incentive within these people to continue to adopt or accept certain behaviors and choices in their actions and in their educational decision-making (*cf.* Bruner, 1996; Bonnet, 2002).

This tradition dates back at least a century to a respect for learning and education as a core of Finnish culture and the statehood of a developing nation (*cf*. Niemi, in this book; Simola, 2005). In modern times since the 1960's, political authorities from left to right have seen comprehensive education as the key to survive and thrive in our increasingly competitive world. All governments over the past four decades have emphasized economic growth as their primary goal, with comprehensive education as its critical driver. The phrase "*investment in people is the best investment*" summarizes this educational consensus and political aim. Consequently, educational policy in Finland has not been polarized either between major political parties or their supporting citizens. This may have proved to be one of the key factors behind the continuity of Finnish education policy – and the success of our schools (*cf*. Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2004; Sahlberg, 2007). Next, we will briefly characterize the Finnish educational mindset through which all parties involved – politicians, administrators, teachers, students, and parents – conduct their reflection of educational issues. We have defined two central interdependent facets of this Finnish educational mindset: *trust* and *hope,* through which we consider the context and background of Finnish teacher's work.

Trust in Education

Trust between individuals and groups provide the basis for social order and it is a foundation of solidarity and integration within societies (Durkheim, 1956). A normal and routine life would not be possible without both an explicit and an implicit and unconsidered trust. Hence, trust facilitates stability, co-operation and cohesion (Elster, 1989). Trust is the most basic premise upon which different approaches to educational policy and educational practice can rest (see *e.g*. Spiecker, 1990; Troman, 2000*;* Curson-Hobson, 2002*;* Cook-Sather, 2002). The educational institutions and practices that have prevailed in Finland both historically and currently reflect a long-standing trust between the partners in the educational system (Rinne, Kivirauma, & Simola, 2002; Simola, 2005; Sahlberg, 2007).

In Finnish society, the public's trust of professionals (including teachers) and public institutions (including schools) is seemingly high. Schools are given almost

full autonomy in developing their daily delivery of education services. This positive situation paves the way for a kind of democratic professionalism (Dzur, 2008; Husu & Toom, 2010), where teachers, while still valuing the specialized knowledge of their profession, can work collaboratively with lay people, enabling them to deliberate and make decisions on issues that affect them and their children. Teachers can be seen as democratic professionals, like "bridge agents" who connect the school institutions in which they work with the lay public of parents and their children to deliberate over important social issues. Schools can provide a sort of "middle democracy" and a "ground-level network of lay participation" between institutions and individuals (Dzur, 2008, p. 38). Here, teachers as professionals act as some of key players who create opportunities for citizen participation and deliberation in public issues within their community. It is difficult to evaluate the actual meanings and consequences of these pedagogical and social processes. However, the development of the teaching profession towards a "democratic profession" can be seen as an essential shift in the teaching profession in our society and our schools to one based on trusting, listening to, and respecting the opinions of all participants in schooling.

It is commonly acknowledged that educational relationships cannot be established and maintained without a strong bond of trust existing between teacher and pupils (Troman, 2000). In teaching, there is a basic need for trust because teaching is an "emotional practice" that involves trustful relationships between all partners (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 5). Trust is of prime importance in teaching: it ensures that participating individuals at every level of the educational system can be allowed greater freedom and afforded greater autonomy (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 4). Also, trust is a pre-condition for co-operation (Gambetta, 1988). In pedagogical encounters, high levels of trust are required among participants (teachers, students, parents) for the development of *"communitas"* marked by a strong feeling of camaraderie, a sense of common destiny, [and] mutual support (Woods, 1995, p. 93). We especially consider important the trust relations between persons (administrators, teachers, students, parents) at all levels of schooling. These experiences of trust (and distrust) in daily schoolwork have deep and lasting impacts on individuals and their communities.

Hope for a Better Society and (Individual) Life

Hope most generally refers to a desire for positive futures that are considered possible, but not guaranteed. The term consists of understandings of future-oriented thought, feeling, and action (Amsler, 2008). Even if there have been serious attempts to systematize the definition of hope (see *e.g.* McInerney, 2007; Singh & Han, 2007; Renner, 2009) the concept remains discursively diverse. In the social sciences, hope is commonly associated with problems of subjectivity, agency, and social and political change. In other fields, it is related to motivation and self-esteem (psychology), imagination (creative arts), and pedagogy (education). The concept and practice of hope has been variously described e.g. as "an element of human

nature, a way of knowing, a form of action or behavior, [and] learned orientation to the future" (Amsler, 2008). As Inglis (2004) states, "a society's education entails (in all senses) its future" (p. 4). Hope is premised on the idea that human beings are capable of shaping the forces that structure their lives.

While not wanting to naïvely praise educational hope, we use the term in a 'good sense' (Coben, 2002) for its provision of legitimate optimism and anticipation about the meaning of education for the future of young people in particular, and for the Finnish society in general. These themes connecting education and hope are echoed by many authors (*e.g*. Albert, 2006; Giroux, 2002; Thrupp & Tomlinson, 2005) in the educational literature. Also, this literature connects education and hope with a particular vision of democracy (Giroux, 1989, 1997, 2005; Halpin, 2003) – one that renews a focus on justice and equal opportunities. Halpin (2003), for example, declares the aims of education as being "a more equal and more democratic education system and society" (p. 5). This kind of an optimistic vision provides a "vocabulary of hope" (Halpin, 2003, p. 34) – a notion that echoes what Giroux (1989) calls the "language of possibility" (p. 31). The stance is based on democratic ideals, because democracy itself, as Giroux (1997) conceives it, is a utopian project for the public good, a "project of possibility," an ideal end in itself (p. 223).

These idealistic tones are closely related to education's tasks and ability to promote social hope in societies. In Finland, the socio-political project to create a welfare state, where basic social services, including education, have become public services for all citizens, has promoted the social role of education (Sahlberg, 2007; Castells & Himanen, 2002). The welfare state can also be seen as an educational project where one of the main tasks of the educational system is to increase the level of social capital among citizens: i.e., improve their opportunities and willingness to learn. Carnoy (2007) calls this state-generated social capital that is expressed in social contexts for education. The efforts to make our schooling institutions and our civic attitudes stronger have been manifested in the development of social hope (*e.g.* Rorty, 1999; Green, 2008; Westbrooke, 2005). It aims to ground democratic institutions (*e.g.* schools) more deeply in the everyday living of our democratic societies. Also, promoting social hope means encouraging abilities to achieve more deep participatory democracy in society and in its institutions.

As presented, within the context of Finnish education, the language of hope is a powerful tool to move teachers and students in their educational settings. Teaching as a teacher's primary work can also be seen both as a practice and as a "discipline of hope" (Kohl, 1998). Conceptualizing education as a resource of hope (Amsler, 2009, p. 1191) gives us an insight into the power it can have for people in Finnish society in general, and people in educational institutions in particular: the hope that education can promise brighter individual and societal futures. Uncovering this idea allows us to better recognize how emotions such as hope (and fear) work to orient people's social action – in this case, shaping the character of educational practices and its outcomes.

DISCUSSION: NEGOTIATING FOR A HOPEFUL CURRICULUM AND SCHOOL PRACTICES

Finnish schools, like all schools globally, are more and more intensively understood as socio-political arenas (Dzur, 2008; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2010), where teachers, pupils and parents in collaboration with public administration and other citizens participate in the definition of school education and teaching as well as its practical implementation. Finnish teachers work in this Finnish context of education and schooling, which has its own characteristics, possibilities and challenges at every one of its levels. An interesting question is what would happen if one of these factors were shaken, changed or even removed from the context of action? What would happen, if actors on all levels lost their trust in education and hope for a better society and individual life? What kinds of pedagogical practices – teacher's teaching and pupils' learning – would emerge at the school level? Would it turn out to be a survival game in the classroom? As Sahlberg (2010) reminds us, there are future challenges to be met: (i) the Finnish educational authorities are also tightening their controlling grip over schools and the abilities of teachers to make autonomous decisions about schooling practices; (ii) the governmental Education Sector Productivity Programme (Ministry of Education, 2005) calls for schools and teachers to do more with less, proposes major changes in school networks and increasing class sizes; (iii) productive gains are sought by reducing special education and counseling services in schools and so on. In sum, these developments "may turn out to be harmful for the high social capital of Finnish schools" (Sahlberg, 2010, p. 345).

The unity of the entire educational system sets high demands and continuous challenges for all actors on all its levels. It requires shared views of education as well as continuous work and negotiations towards these aims. In the Finnish context, these negotiations are mostly concretized through the continuous processes of the National Core Curriculum and local school curricula. Renner and Brown's (2006) idea of a "hopeful curriculum" including the facets of *community*, *praxis*, and *courage* come close to the present Finnish way of action, which could be even more dynamic in many parts. Even more critical action and reflection among teachers, pupils, principals and parents in schools could be encouraged. Meaningful learning can take place in schools and classrooms only through a connectedness to the material contents of teaching and learning, an authentic connectedness between these and the world outside classrooms, and, most importantly a connectedness between pedagogical actors, teachers and students (Renner & Brown, 2006).

The hopeful curriculum aims at the thorough development of schooling and education through *praxis*: teachers' and students' action and reflection upon the world. The stance of praxis connects action with reflection and strives to craft new lenses on the world. These lenses provide us with a more nuanced and complex vision of the tasks facing our schools, and the teachers and students who tackle them (Renner, 2009). With a more critical understanding of their world, teachers

and students can work together to figure out how they can become transformative agents to deal with the problems facing us in our society. In this venture, *courage* is an essential element of pedagogical thinking and action (Renner & Brown, 2006; Renner, 2009).

In many aspects, the Finnish teachers' way of action within the framework of pedagogical freedom and responsibility are (still) well functioning and reasonable. A more difficult question is, how will Finnish teachers, principals, policy makers and researchers be able to maintain this united supporting and promising situation for the future generations?

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