
Dynamics in Education Politics

Dynamics in Education Politics: Understanding and Explaining the Finnish Case introduces a new theoretical framework characterised as Comparative Analytics of Dynamics in Education Politics (CADEP). Albeit the topicality of comparative research is obvious in the current era of global large-scale assessment, with its concomitant media visibility and political effects, comparative education is still suffering from certain methodological deficits and is in need of robust theorisation. Focusing on relational dynamics between policy threads, actors and institutions in education politics CADEP seriously considers the phenomena of complexity, contingency and trans-nationality in late-modern societies.

In this book CADEP is applied and validated in analysing the “Finnish Educational Miracle” that has been attracting attention in the educational world ever since they rocketed to fame following the PISA studies during the 2000s. This book will open up opportunities for mutual understanding and learning rather than just celebrating the exceptional circumstances or sustainable leadership.

Areas covered include:

- Analytics of dynamics in education politics
- Dynamics of policy making and governance
- Dynamics of educational family strategies
- Dynamics of classroom culture.

It is vital for humankind to be able to learn from each other’s successes and failures, and this applies in education too. This book is thus a valuable read for anyone interested in the education system and wanting to shape the learning environment.

Hannu Simola, PhD, is Professor in Sociology and Politics of Education, at the Universities of Turku and Helsinki. His research interests are currently focused on socioanalysis of teacherhood, contextual analytics of educational innovations and local educational ethos. His most recent book is *The Finnish Education Mystery* (Routledge 2015).

Jaakko Kauko, PhD, MSocSc, is Associate Professor in Education at the Faculty of Education, University of Tampere. His research is situated in the fields of politics of education and comparative education. He is interested in the questions of power, contingency, and complexity.

Janne Varjo, PhD, is Lecturer at the Institute of Behavioural Sciences, and more particularly within the Research Unit focusing on the Sociology and Politics of Education, at the University of Helsinki. His research interests include sociology of education, history of education and administration, economy and planning of education.

Mira Kalalahti, Dr SocSc, MA, is Post-Doctoral Researcher in the Research Unit Focusing on the Sociology and Politics of Education at the Department of Teacher Education, University of Helsinki. Her research interests involve the sociology of education, especially questions concerning the equality of educational opportunities and educational transitions.

Fritjof Sahlström, PhD, is Professor in Education at Åbo Akademi University in Vasa. His research has focused on the organization of interaction in educational settings, on developing ways of documenting and analysing classroom interaction relying on conversation analysis, and on the relationships between interaction, participation and social reproduction.

Dynamics in Education Politics

Understanding and explaining
the Finnish case

Hannu Simola, Jaakko Kauko,
Janne Varjo, Mira Kalalahti
and Fritjof Sahlström



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Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	vii
<i>List of tables</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
Introduction	1
1 Comparative analytics in the dynamics of education politics	4
<i>Comparative education as a contested terrain</i>	4
<i>A proposal for a more systematic, flexible and vivid approach: CADEP</i>	16
2 Orienting to the Finnish case	21
<i>A history of political situations</i>	21
<i>A history of political possibilities</i>	23
<i>A history of politicking</i>	27
3 Dynamics in policymaking	33
<i>Late but enduring structures reflecting a belief in schooling</i>	34
<i>Middle-class liberalist equity meets factory- and farmland-based equality</i>	39
<i>Equality enhanced by the recession and PISA</i>	43
<i>Conclusion: buffering and embedded egalitarianism</i>	47
4 Dynamics in governance	49
<i>From strict centralisation towards New Public Management and decentralisation</i>	49
<i>Punctuated trust</i>	54
<i>Non-materialised QAE</i>	58
<i>Conclusion: redistributing but punctuated trust</i>	67

5	Dynamics in families' educational strategies	69
	<i>Leaving the Peruskoulu monolith behind</i>	69
	<i>Contradictory school choice</i>	75
	<i>Local politicking for soft school choice</i>	82
	<i>Conclusion: diverging but civic parenthood</i>	87
6	Dynamics in classroom cultures	90
	<i>From Herbart-Zillerian and social pedagogy to Peruskoulu didactics</i>	90
	<i>Individualised Peruskoulu pedagogies since 1970</i>	93
	<i>A hybrid of tradition and progress</i>	98
	<i>Conclusion: consolidating but paternalistic progressivism</i>	111
7	The dynamics of Finnish basic-education politics: From understanding to explanation	113
	<i>Dynamics in policymaking</i>	114
	<i>Dynamics in governance</i>	116
	<i>Dynamics in families' educational strategies</i>	118
	<i>Dynamics in classroom cultures</i>	119
	<i>Comparison?</i>	120
	<i>From understanding discursive dynamics to explaining success and decline</i>	122
	<i>Actors?</i>	124
	<i>Futures?</i>	127
	<i>References</i>	132
	<i>Index</i>	155

Figures

2.1	Public trust in institutions	26
2.2	Changes in agricultural employment among the working population in the Nordic countries, 1880–1970	28
2.3	Changes in industrial and service employment among the working population in the Nordic countries, 1880–1970	28
2.4	The timing and rapidity of the changes in occupational structure in three Nordic countries: the period during which the agrarian labour force decreased proportionately from 50 to 15 per cent	29
2.5	Public employment in the Nordic countries, 1970–1985	29
2.6	Growth of the work force in the public sector in the Nordic countries, 1963–1987	30
3.1	The expansion of schooling in Finland	35
3.2	Two Nordic population cohorts aged 55–64 with at least an upper-secondary education	35
3.3	Percentage of days in office of Secretaries of State for Education in the post-war era, 1944–2015	44

Tables

1.1	The effects of a power mechanism (m)	15
1.2	A framework for the analysis of dynamics in politics	18
6.1	Comparisons of teaching in grade 8 of comprehensive school, 1973 and 1995	99
6.2	Engagement with school: “My school is a place where. . .”	108
6.3	Disciplinary climate: “How often do these things happen in your ‘test language’ lessons?”	108
6.4	Teacher support: “How often do these things happen in your ‘test language’ lessons?”	109
7.1	Four constitutive discursive principles in our three-dimensional analytical framework	114
7.2	Explanations of the Finnish success and decline in basic-schooling politics	123

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Introduction

The authors of this book propose a fresh, theory-rich and systematic approach to education politics in one country. As is our normal, more or less conscious practice, our case studies are comparative in a sense: while doing research in one country, region or locality, we have others in mind. In fact, this is more than conscious: it is the point of our book. We claim that further case studies based on our approach might radically enhance mutual understanding among education researchers as well as policymakers and other colleagues interested in developing their systems. It is our belief that comprehension is the basis of all reasonable and meaningful comparison, explanation and forethought – however difficult that might be to achieve in a complex, contingent and relational issue such as education.

We are serious in our response to the call of Harvey Goldstein, an eminent British statistician in education, to resist strict and measurable target setting as advocated by UNESCO in its ambitious ‘Education for All’ (EFA) programme:

Each educational system can develop different criteria for assessing quality, enrolment, etc. and instead of monitoring progress towards an essentially artificial set of targets [,] EFA could concentrate the resources that it is able to mobilize towards obtaining the necessary understanding of the dynamics of each system. This would then allow constructive policies to be implemented. The emphasis would be on the local context and culture, within which those with local knowledge can construct their own aims rather than rely upon common yardsticks implemented from a global perspective.
(Goldstein, 2004, 13)

A number of experiences shared by the authors of this book, and briefly outlined below, serve to set the scene. Some of them relate to our comparative empirical research, and the final one concerns the political use of global rankings.

In 1998 Simola became involved in a three-year, eight-country research project, *Education Governance and Social Integration and Exclusion in Europe* (EGSIE; see e.g., Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2002), funded by the European Union. One of the main findings was that all the countries under investigation shared the

reform rhetoric of New Public Management in their education governance, although its application on the national level varied substantially. There was no answer to another question that came up at the same time regarding the need to understand the differences between the countries involved. It is a question that has remained open and has pervaded the sequential comparative studies in which we have been engaged during the past decade.

In 2000 we reported on a three-year, four-country study, *Decentralization and Professionalism: the Construction of the New Teacher in the Nordic Countries* (NOS; see e.g., Klette et al., 2000), funded by the Joint Committee of the Nordic Social Science Research Councils – regardless of the similarities, the Nordic countries differ substantially in their decentralisation policies. Again, we wondered why but could offer no satisfactory answer.

In 2009 we finished a four-year, five-country study entitled *Fabricating Quality in Education: Data and Governance in Europe* (FabQ; see e.g., Ozga et al., 2011), funded by the Academy of Finland and other EUROSCORES funding agencies. The conclusion was similarly dissatisfactory: we identified and analysed the essential features of quality assurance and evaluation, but the question of how to go beyond listing similarities and differences still tormented us. How could we formulate, if not a rule, at least a conceptualisation that could make sense of the findings, make them understandable?

In 2010 we launched the fourth comparative study focusing on policies and politics in basic education: *Parents and School Choice* (PASC), specifically *Family Strategies, Segregation and School Policies in Chilean and Finnish Basic Schooling* (see e.g., Seppänen, Kalalahti et al., 2015), funded by the Academy of Finland and the Comisión Nacional de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica de Chile. Here the basic challenge was to understand the two very different cases. We had the egalitarian and uniform Finnish public education system on the one hand, and the strongly privatised and completely segmented Chilean basic education system on the other. Comparing these two extremes gave us a unique opportunity to develop an analytical framework for understanding the complexities of educational policy comparison (Kauko et al., 2015). We were still hungry after this attempt, wondering how we could conceptualise this constellation of facts and interpretations to arrive at a comparative understanding.

A further experience served to refine this haunting question. Media visibility and the political use of global rankings have highlighted the topicality and relevance of comparative studies in education. We are warned, and not without reason, that success in education strongly depends on deep cultural factors, demography and individual opportunities. It has also been stated, rightly again, that comparing more or less artificial common yardsticks implemented from a global perspective does not necessarily make sense.

Therefore, and in order to reach the level of political importance, comparative education needs a strong and ambitious theory-rich framework with the potential to incorporate the socio-historical complexity, relationality and contingency of the research subject under examination. Without a strong

theory-driven approach it is hard to go beyond merely listing the similarities and differences that facilitate the rankings but blur the processes and contexts.

In the early 2010s, within our *Research Unit Focusing on Sociology and Politics in Education* (KUPOLI)¹ at the University of Helsinki, we formulated a new conceptualisation and launched an ambitious research plan we called *Comparative Analytics of Dynamics in Education Politics* (CADEP). In addition to the analysis of Finnish basic education politics presented in this book, we have two major research projects² under way. Our standpoint is that in order to progress beyond the state of the art and arrive at a comparative understanding of educational systems, we have to focus on the *dynamics* with a view to grasping the complex, fluid and mobile nature of the subject.

Our aim in this book is to reproduce and present the constitutive discursive dynamics that make the Finnish educational success story understandable and empirically comparable to other regional, national or local cases. Success and failure in basic education appear to be relative and to reflect the intertwining of discursive dynamics in four fields at least: *policymaking*, *governance*,³ *families' educational strategies* and *classroom cultures*, thereby emphasising the contingent, relational and complex character of political history.

The main actors in these fields are policymakers, officials, parents and teachers. The key institutions are governmental and non-governmental organisations. Given the relentlessly manifold nature of the reality, the essence of all social research is simplification through reduction. Our foci in these fields represent well-informed and justified choices that constitute various *policy threads*: *equality*, *evaluation*, *school choice* and *pedagogical practice*. We thus claim that the dynamics of Finnish basic education politics could be understood through a careful analysis of these fields, actors, institutions and policy threads, which also structure the presentation of this book.

Notes

1 <http://blogs.helsinki.fi/kupoli-unit/>

2 “Transnational Dynamics in Quality Assurance and Evaluation Politics of Basic Education in Brazil, China and Russia (2014–2017)”, headed by Jaakko Kauko, and “Dynamics in Basic Education Politics in Nordic Countries (2014–2018)”, headed by Janne Varjo, both funded by the Academy of Finland.

3 We are well aware of the problematic nature of making a distinction between policymaking and governance, which are becoming increasingly inseparable in late-modern societies in which politics has veered toward governance and vice versa. However, our justification here is analytical bracketing rather than substance or content related (see e.g., Gearing, 2004).

Comparative analytics in the dynamics of education politics

In this first chapter, we present our theoretical approach and trace our strategic footsteps. We discuss the intellectual problems, based on both the political use of comparison and the theoretical deficits of research, and outline our suggested solution: comparative analytics in the dynamics of education politics.

Comparative education as a contested terrain

Depending on the interpretation, in terms of theory and method, comparative education is either in deep trouble or it is in its heyday. It is understood as a discipline, a complex multidisciplinary field (Crossley & Watson, 2003), a method (Peterson, 2007 [1964]), a collection of theories (Paulston, 1999), a means for systemic cross-country comparison (OECD, 2012) or as riddled with methodological deficits (Cowen, 1996). Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal (2003) called more than a decade ago for a temporal and spatial re-understanding of comparative education as a ‘historical journey’ to avoid its dismissal as a mere ‘mode of governance’. We argue in this book that there is, indeed and still, a need for re-understanding comparative education, especially in terms of allowing more degrees of complexity (see also Kauko & Wermke, submitted) while holding on to a clear and systematic analysis. In our view, contemporary concepts of comparative education reflect efforts to describe a complex world using metaphors that are applied to describe a more stable reality. We argue for a better understanding of relationality and the contingency of reality, and for a clearer focus on action. In the following we develop these three principles – relationality, contingency and action – as a focus for further research.

Media visibility and the political use of global rankings have highlighted the topicality and relevance of comparative studies in education. This popularity has not entailed the development of theoretical instruments in the field, however. Conversely, non-historical and decontextualised concepts such as *efficiency*, *accountability* and *quality* are colonising the educational world undisputed and uncontested, largely due to the fact that they have been internationally advocated. Comparative education is still suffering from certain methodological deficits and serious under-theorisation (see e.g., Marginson & Mollis, 2001; Schriewer, 2006; Epstein, 2008; Cowen, 2009; Dale, 2009; Simola, 2009).

There is not a very strong theoretical tradition in the research on comparative education, which may be one reason for the success of the ahistorical and decontextualised conceptualisations in the field. Likewise, functionalistic comparisons based on different system models have become the mainstream among transnational organisations such as the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the EU. This rather mechanistic kind of paradigm has been the bane of comparative research in the past.

There has also been heavy criticism of the solely quantitative, comparative type of research, and case-study methodology has found its place. One of the pioneers in this context was Charles Ragin (1987, 1989, 1992), who tried to put right the antinomies of the quantitative and qualitative approaches through so-called analytic induction, taking into account the diversity of the causes and the reasons for social change in different nations. One of the most interesting approaches in comparative research is the so-called patterned mess – suggested by Michael Mann (1986, 1993), among others, in his comparative analysis of sources of social power.

Indeed, António Nóvoa and Tali Yariv-Mashal's observation of a few years ago still seems to be valid:

The problem is that the term comparison is being mainly used as a flag of convenience, intended to attract international interest and money and to entail the need to assess national policies with reference to world scales and hierarchies. The result is a 'soft comparison' lacking any solid theoretical or methodological grounds.

(Nóvoa & Yariv-Mashal, 2003, 425)

The problem is not restricted to the field of comparative education, of course. Susan Strange (1997), a prominent representative of the approach known as international political economy, sharply criticised 'neo-institutionalists' and 'comparativists' for reiterating policy agendas aiming at national success in the global struggle for competitiveness. This 'unbearable narrowness of the national view' (Kettunen, 2008) could be seen as a professional illness emanating from the comparative policy studies of our times.

Roger Dale (2009, 123) refers to three fundamental problems in comparative studies in education: methodological nationalism, methodological statism and methodological educationism. The nation and the nation-state are still seen as the only real and final policy unit, and the very concept of education is taken for granted. Instead of 'models' and convergence or divergence among them, we should be more interested "in the webs of structural power operating throughout the world system than in comparative analysis of discrete parts of it, bounded by territorial frontiers dividing states" (Strange, 1997, 182). Education is still generally seen only in terms of increasing competence and qualification levels among nation-state citizens in the face of global competition among knowledge-based economies. Decades ago John W. Meyer (1986, 345–346) warned of 'functional blinders' that permit us to take schooling as a self-evident

rational system and create a moralist discourse – not only among educationalists but also including sociologists of education.

This narrowness of the national view easily creates a blind spot in terms of how interactions and comparisons reconstruct the national and the local: how transnational interactions and crossings constitute the national parties of these relationships, and this points to the crucial role of comparative practices as a mode of reflexivity that (re)shapes individual and collective agency (Strange, 1997). It is vital in pursuing an understanding of a complex phenomenon such as the relationships among the global, the regional, the national and the local in education policy formation to consider the theoretical conceptualisations from a ‘both/and’ rather than an ‘either/or’ perspective. A good and illuminating example here is the controversy among researchers of nationalism and the frequently observed confrontation between understanding nationalism as ‘the invention of traditions’ by the elite (e.g., Hobsbawm, 1990) or as creating prerequisites and limits for ethnic identities (e.g., Smith, 1995). From the perspective of comparative research, nationalism as an elite strategy and nationalism as a socio-cultural frame are both valid approaches. Comparative actions (such as the Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA] studies) should be analysed *both* as economic, political and cultural practices (see e.g., Nóvoa & Yariv-Mashal, 2003) *and* as international exhibitions of national competitiveness in the global educational market place.

Pauli Kettunen, a Finnish researcher of modern history, points out that critics of the nation-state-centred view on globalisation should do more than simply declare it out-dated; they should rather take it seriously as an influential mode of thought and action and recognise how it is embedded in the structures of globalised economic competition (Kettunen, 2011). Such ambition requires going beyond the train of thought that contrasts the profound internal permanence of national agency with the drastic change in the external environment. Historicity refers to the temporal multi-layeredness of institutions and discourses that constrain and enable agency, and to the contingency of each action situation in which the actors have to handle the tension between experiences and expectations. Making comparisons and making histories are crucial modes of reflexivity in social action, and this also applies to constructions of collective agency, not least those evolving in the framework of the nation-state society and influencing the making of the welfare state.

In sum, at least four major problems can be identified in the field of comparative education. First, there is a *lack of theoretical ambitiousness*, which is one reason why politically motivated investigations such as OECD country reviews and assessment studies are determining the state of the art. The increasingly sophisticated collection of apparently useful data has taken the place of ontological and epistemological interpretation. It is still typical in standard research to construct arguments based on interpretations of the relatively stable characteristics of different subjects rather than analysing the attributes of relations

(see e.g., Cowen, 2000, 2009; Schriewer, 2006; Munck & Snyder, 2007; Steiner-Khamsi, 2010): the need for theory is more acute in times of expanding data proliferation.

Second, the focus of the studies tends to be on *end products rather than processes*, which makes it possible to create countless rankings but reveals little about specific and shared developmental mechanisms in educational systems. Technically well executed, these studies undoubtedly amass interesting information on different educational systems, and the resulting database will facilitate further sophisticated and fruitful analysis. The ranking and benchmarking indicators, separately and in combination, might indeed reveal something essential about ‘how far students near the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in society’, as stated in the well-known PISA studies. This information does not necessarily enhance understanding of the development and dynamics of a specific educational system, however (see e.g., Schriewer, 2000; Mulford, 2002; Goldstein, 2004).

Third, although *problems of complexity* in the social world are widely accepted on the general level, they appear seldom to reach empirical studies. Despite the heavy criticism in theoretical discussions, an all too common means of analysis is via simple explanatory models such as taxonomies, stage heuristics and periodisation. Such means represent a perspective from which phenomena can be explained clearly and understood with certainty, and human endeavours (such as policymaking) can proceed in a straightforward manner and be continuously controlled, evaluated and/or improved (see e.g., Emirbayer, 1997; Scheurich, 1997; Nóvoa et al., 2003; Biesta, 2010; Dahler-Larsen, 2012).

Finally, and paradoxically enough, there is a form of *intellectual nationalism* that inhibits the conceptualisation and understanding of the relationship between trans-national processes and nation-states. ‘Hyperglobalism’ has lost its position, and the role of national states has been reconsidered. Methodological nationalism, methodological ‘statism’ and methodological ‘educationism’ make it difficult to go beyond the ‘unbearable narrowness of the national view’ in understanding how the national is constituted by its interconnections, meetings and crossings with the trans-national (see e.g., Nóvoa & Lawn, 2002; Held et al., 1999; Conrad, 2006; Werner & Zimmermann, 2006; Dale, 2009; Kettunen, 2011).

An uncertain, glocal and temporal subject

Werner Heisenberg presented his first conception of the uncertainty principle in 1927, claiming that it was impossible to accurately measure both the velocity and position of an electron (Heisenberg, 1927). If you choose a specific time, you cannot observe the position of the electron, and vice versa. Ilya Prigogine (1997), in turn, argues in his book *The End of Certainty* that both classical and modern physics ought to concentrate on probabilities rather than certainties to bridge the gap between them. Differing from some post-structural and post-modern theories, which refer to uncertainties in ontology,

we follow ideas expressed in complexity theories (Bates, 2016) and understand uncertainty as an exclusively epistemological question, although we accept that the world is complex and full of contingency.

A rather well established way of conceptualising space relies on terminology such as local, national, international and global, which also reflects the traditional way of understanding comparative and international research on education as the study and development of educational systems (Crossley & Watson, 2003, 19). These ideas have been challenged with the emergence of more relative understandings such as the ‘glocal’ and the ‘glonacal’ (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002), which underline the transnational (Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006) nature of each space, the discussion of fluid scales instead of pre-fixed areas (Robertson, Bonal, & Dale, 2002) and the observance of similar spaces and their use in different cultural contexts (Lahelma & Gordon, 2010).

Temporal aspects, usually understood as historical processes, have also attracted varying views in comparative research. Classically understood, time is chronological, as in David Phillips and Kimberly Ochs (2004), in which change is understood as happening in set phases. However, time may also be qualitative, giving an opportune moment for change, an idea that has long featured in political science (Kingdon, 2003; Baumgartner & Jones, 2009) and which we theorised in our earlier analysis of politics and comparative education (Kauko et al., 2012; Kauko, 2013). Time could also be understood in terms of chaos theory as non-linear (Schriewer, 2000) and used in a historical comparison of transitologies (Cowen, 2002), or as in Theda Skocpol’s (1979) classic study as asynchrony, making it possible to compare similar events in different times.

These ideas provide a rich theoretical tradition on which to draw. We nevertheless argue that there have not been sufficient theoretical tools with which to analyse the contingent and relational aspects of the world, which would allow more space for paradoxes and random events, not to mention path dependency and actorhood (see Kauko & Wermke, submitted). As we see it, time should be understood as probabilities built on historical trajectories and discursive constructions. All policy spaces should be considered transnational, albeit taking into account the limits imposed by history and the context. The question reverts to how change is understood and how it should be re-understood in current comparative theories of education.

Change, fluency, movement, animation

A key prerequisite for broadening the theory base is to develop a sound perspective on change. In the case of comparative education, the theory base boasts a couple of theoretical models as benchmarks, the disputes touching on the questions of convergence and divergence, and the relevant levels of analysis.¹ Analyses on the macro level range from (1) the notion of borrowing and lending (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004) summarised in the ideas of

legitimising and standardising reforms (Waldow, 2012) to (2) transnational flows in world cultures in which global carriers diffuse scripts enabling isomorphism within different nations (Meyer & Ramirez, 2003; Ramirez, 2012) and the identification of global functional equivalences and configurational patterns (Schriewer, 2000; Schriewer, 2003).

These different traditions have their discrepancies, ideas of globalisation in borrowing and lending being “diametrically opposed to neoinstitutionalist explanations of isomorphism”, for instance (Steiner-Khamsi, 2010, 332).

Another disputable point is whether a world-cultures approach takes local adaptations and reformulations of world cultures into account (Waldow, 2012) or is a retrospective, teleological and nation-state-obsessed viewpoint (Nóvoa, et al., 2003, 14–15).

Both traditions hinge on the question posed in post-comparative criticism (Lawn & Ozga, 2012) pointing out that research should not be too embedded in the context to see key similarities and differences on the macro level, and not dislocated in the way that an all-encompassing explanation of global education policy is used. In other words, the disputes arise from the capacity in the different traditions to cope with complexity (Kauko & Wermke, submitted). These benchmark frameworks have all given researchers essential tools for analysing the general features of global change, yet we feel that it is possible to go a little further if we refocus our attention on the restraints on and possibilities of action.

There is impressive evidence charting how political reforms never succeed as planned. Two eminent US historians of educational reform, David Tyack and Larry Cuban (1995), emphasised the underrated influence of teachers, or as they put it, of ‘street-level bureaucrats’, in educational reforms. In this sense they concluded that there should be much more research on how schools change reforms rather than vice versa. Another conclusion was that school reforms in the US have always brought about change, but rarely the change that was intended.

In the context of higher education, Ladislav Cerych and Paul Sabatier (1986) found that the combining factor in policy implementation was complexity, and neoinstitutionalists have repeatedly pointed out the institutional continuities (March & Olsen, 1989). Path dependency (Pierson, 2000) and different restrictions due to the nature of the political process (Lindblom, 1959; Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1993a, 1993b; Kingdon, 2003) are all strongly identified.

This fits well with Stephen J. Ball’s eminent semi-classic characterisation of the distance and controversies between the writing and implementation of policy:

National policy-making is inevitably a process of *bricolage*; a matter of borrowing and copying bits and pieces of ideas from elsewhere, drawing upon and amending locally tried-and-tested approaches, cannibalising theories, research, trends and fashions, and not infrequently a flailing around for anything at all that looks as though it might work. Most policies are

ramshackle, compromise, hit and miss affairs that are reworked, tinkered with, nuanced and inflected through complex processes of influence, text production, dissemination and ultimately recreation in contexts of practice. [. . .] In short, national policies need to be understood as the product of a nexus of influences and interdependencies, resulting in ‘interconnect- edness, multiplexity and hybridisation’ [. . .] that is, ‘the intermingling of global, distant and local logics’.

(Ball, 2001b; Amin, 1997)

In the same spirit, Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak (2008, 112) character- ise the processes to be studied as

a complex and interrelated series of relationships between strategies and their contingent implementation in structures, imaginaries and their con- tingent operationalisation in practices and institutions, and implemented/ operationalised strategies/imaginaries and ideologies and legitimations.

One of the most interesting questions referred to in recent discussions² con- cerns the relationship between *path dependence*, *convergence* and *contingency*. The first two are among the most conventional conceptualisations of transnational and national policy relations, whereas the third stems from more recent social theorisation. Path dependence and convergence are often seen as a simplistic dualism in comparative studies: the former covers major national specificities and the latter refers to international tendencies. The approach essentially under- estimates both the insecurity and the openness of the horizon of expectations, and the relative freedom of more or less conscious and informed actors.

This deficit is even more assuredly fatal, and possibly even more apparent, in these global and late-modern times characterised as the ‘Era of Contingency’ (Joas, 2008; Joas & Knöbl, 2009), in which the difference between the already- done and the yet-to-be-done is crucial and things are increasingly not neces- sary or impossible. Contingency is one essential element in creating *Spielraum* for ‘politicking’ – in other words room for action (Palonen, 1993; see also 2003). Pauli Kettunen (2008, 21) suggests that at the crossing of these two dimensions – path dependence and contingency on the one hand, and path dependence and convergence on the other – we might find histories and comparisons as forms of reflexivity in social practices. Relating the past, the present and the future, or experience and expectation, and recognising and interpreting differ- ences and similarities are inherent aspects of human agency.

Convergence and path dependence

Despite increasing international interdependence, which seems to generate pressures toward convergence, advanced industrial societies continue to exhibit differences in their institutional practices. Despite the growing number of independent state-funded educational solutions (Charter Schools in the US,

Academies in the UK and Free Schools in Sweden), Andy Green's (1999, 56) notion of the state's role in a transnational environment still holds:

As regards education, there is very little evidence across the globe that nation states are losing control over their education systems or ceasing to press them into service for national economic and social ends, whatever the recent accretions of internationalism. In fact the opposite may be true. As governments lose control over various levers on their national economies and cede absolute sovereignty in foreign affairs and defence, they frequently turn to education and training as two areas where they do still maintain control. The argument in relation to educational convergence is, however, more complex, for whilst education systems remain essentially national they may nevertheless be experiencing a degree of convergence under the impact of international forces.

According to Green (1999, 69), there is evidence of policy convergence within Europe around a range of broad themes, including the decentralisation of regulation and governance and the increasing use of quality-assurance and evaluation mechanisms. This does not appear to have led to convergence in structures and processes, however.

Convergence may be strongly controversial and hotly disputed as an analytical concept, but path dependence is somewhat stronger. Paul Pierson (2000, 265) supports the idea of increasing returns in the context of path dependence, which could help to enhance understanding of why some junctures in time are relevant in terms of analysing political change, and he also acknowledges the need for better theoretical framing in doing this. He concludes, (Pierson 2000, 265) interestingly enough:

This need not pose particularly acute problems for studying outcomes when it is possible to generate many cases (e.g., the formation of interest groups). Collective action and the development of actors' mental maps of politics seem to be promising areas of study. The 'few cases, many variables' problem does pose difficulties, however, for increasing returns arguments that operate at a more aggregated level. The need to generate more cases helps explain why comparative politics has always been a field that emphasizes critical junctures (Collier & Collier, 1991). Counterfactual analysis is also emerging as an important tool for such studies (Tetlock & Belkin, 1996). Furthermore, analysts can use our growing theoretical understanding of path dependent processes to generate more observable implications, for instance, by focusing on intermediate stages in the processes.

(Pierson 2000, 265)

It is noteworthy that these features stand in contrast to general modes of argument and explanation that attribute 'large' outcomes to 'large' causes, and emphasise the prevalence of unique and predictable outcomes, the irrelevance

of timing and sequence, and the capacity of rational actors to design and implement optimal solutions (in accordance with their resources and constraints) to the problems that confront them (Pierson, 2000, 251).

There is, of course, no single definition of path dependence. William Sewell (1996, 262–263) refers to the causal relevance of preceding stages in a temporal sequence, and describes path dependence in a very broad sense as meaning “that what happened at an earlier point in time will affect the possible outcomes of a sequence of events at a later point in time.”

Margaret Levi’s (1997, 28) definition is narrower, and highlights the difficulty of leaving the chosen path:

Path dependence has to mean, if it has to mean anything, that once a country or a region has started down a track, the costs of reversal are very high. There will be other choice points, but the entrenchments of certain institutional arrangements obstruct an easy reversal of the initial choice. Perhaps the better metaphor is a tree, rather than a path. From the same trunk, there are many different branches and smaller branches. Although it is possible to turn around or to clamber from one to the other – and essential if the chosen branch dies – the branch on which a climber begins is the one she tends to follow.

From a complexivist perspective it is also possible to claim that choices made are irreversible (Prigogine, 1997). In fact, any new political act, be it politicisation or setting up a new institutional arrangement, changes the nature of an education system, for instance, and attempts to reverse it will also have to happen in the context of this new politicisation or institutional structure (Kauko, 2014). All in all, the research on path dependency facilitates understanding of the role of history in the formation of education policy.

However, happenings are contingent . . .

German sociologist Hans Joas (2008) characterised the current era as the “Age of Contingency.” It seems plausible to claim that the concept of contingency captures something essential in our society in that it carries attributes such as post-traditional (Giddens), postmodern (Bauman) and risk (Beck).

Following in the footsteps of Niklas Luhmann, Joas defines contingency as follows:

A fact is contingent if it is neither necessary nor impossible – something that is but does not have to be. I think this definition is useful because it makes clear at the outset that the best way to understand the meaning of contingency is to see it as a counter-notion to another idea, namely ‘necessity’. Thus the precise meaning of the term ‘contingency’ depends on the precise meaning of the term ‘necessity’ that it presupposes. If ‘necessity’

referred, as in pre-modern philosophy, to the idea of a ‘well-ordered cosmos’, ‘contingency’ referred to the incompleteness and imperfection of the merely sensual and material world on the one hand, and to the liberty and creativity of God’s unrestrained will on the other.

(Joas, 2004, 394)

The concept thus carries a double meaning: it signifies *coincidence* or *conjunction* on the one hand, and *free will* or *volition* on the other (Joas, 2008, 209). In the former sense, it refers to uncertainty and ambivalence, and in the latter sense to possibilities and the *Spielraum* of the actor.

The former sense, the uncertainty side of contingency, so to say, emphasises the fact that history and living are essentially haphazard and random: things often happen by accident. Nevertheless, as US sociologist Howard S. Becker states:

[S]ocial science theory looks for determinate causal relationships, which do not give an adequate account of this thing that ‘everyone knows’. If we take the idea of ‘it happened by chance’ seriously, we need a quite different kind of research and theory than we are accustomed to.

(Becker, 1994, 183)

The freedom aspect of contingency, on the other hand, implies the ability to handle and face the contingent characteristics of reality; ‘the art of playing with the contingency’, as eminent Finnish political scientist Kari Palonen puts it:

Polity and policy refer to attempts to regiment (polity) or to regulate (policy) the contingency characteristic of politics as action. As opposed to them, politicization refers to opening new aspects of contingency in the situation and thus expanding the presence of the political in it. Politicking may be interpreted as the art of playing with the contingency, using it both as an inescapable moment of the situation to be considered in any case and as an instrument against opponents less ready to tolerate or make use of the presence of the contingency.

(Palonen, 1993, 13)

According to Palonen (2007), two classic approaches in political science have rather different perspectives on the basic construction of politics. Carl Schmitt (1985 [1922]) understands the starting point of any state as an exceptional moment when the sovereign defines the legal basis. Max Weber (1978 [1922]), in turn, describes the world in more contingent terms, focusing on the *chance* dimensions of politics. According to Palonen (2007, 73), Schmitt represents a stable view of politics, the starting point being ‘something that is more than politics’, whereas ‘Weber, by contrast, attempts to conceptualise the passing, fluid, fragile and contingent activity of politics itself, without reducing its

contingency.’ The latter is closer to our understanding of a fluid, vivid, and contingent world.

... and both relativistic and relational

We use the same label as Mustafa Emirbayer, ‘relational’, which he defines as “the very terms or units involved in a transaction derive their meaning, significance, and identity from the (changing) functional roles they play within that transaction. The latter, seen as a dynamic, unfolding process becomes the primary unit of analysis rather than the constituent elements themselves” (Emirbayer, 1997, 287).

There is nothing new in relativity as such. The famous English mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), the figurehead of the philosophical school known as ‘process philosophy’, described any entity as in some sense nothing more and nothing less than the sum of its relations to other entities – its synthesis of and reaction to the world around it. A real thing is simply that which forces the rest of the universe to conform to it in some way: that is to say if, theoretically, a thing made absolutely no difference to any other entity (i.e., it was not related to any other entity), it could not be said to exist in reality. Relations are not secondary to what a thing is: they are what it is.

Finnish sociologist Risto Heiskala (1997, 2001) made a significant contribution to the theorising of power in bridging resource theories with the structural approach. Relationality plays the key role here. According to resource theories, power has both distributive functions, as Max Weber illustrated, and collective functions, as Talcott Parsons showed. Michel Foucault in his structural approach refers to power not as a resource but rather as a network of relations. Resource theorists consider the poles of the power relation, the actors and their resources important, whereas the focus in the structural approach shifts from the poles to the relation that connects them, which Heiskala calls the *mechanism of power*. Heiskala’s contribution was to show that these theoretical viewpoints should not necessarily be seen as enemies and combat zones, but should rather be considered as a means of creating a possible field of co-operation and a peaceful division of work.

Rather than going into the details of Heiskala’s formulation, it is enough here to note that the two constitutive elements of a power relation, apart from the power mechanisms ($m_1, m_2 \dots$), are actors ($a, b, c \dots$) and the specific relations produced by the power ($R', R'', R''', R'''' \dots$). In tracing the effects of a certain power mechanism (m) one could cross-tabulate the horizontal and the vertical dimensions as follows (Table 1.1; see Simola, 2009; Rinne et al., 2011 for recent examples of its application).

The main elements of power relations as formulated by Heiskala are on the horizontal dimension. According to the resource–theory approach (Weber, Parsons), they are individual or collective actors. The respective focus in structural theories (Foucault) is on the relations (Simola, 2009).

Table 1.1 The effects of a power mechanism (m)

Political level	Elements of power	Actors a, b, c . . . (cf. Weber, Parsons)	Relations R, R', R'' . . . (cf. Foucault)
'Politics' or 'the political-interest level' (cf. Weber, Parsons)		Resources e.g., salary, working conditions, time budget, social support	Position e.g., among colleagues, in the web of power, in the field of education, career, record
'The political' or 'the deep political level' (cf. Foucault)		Self-governance e.g., academic autonomy	Identity e.g., professional self-concept

There is a school of sociological thought characterised as 'relational sociology' (e.g., Donati, 2011; Dépelteau & Powell, 2013). Pierre Bourdieu, for example, could be described as a sociologist of relations given his strong focus on social, structural and power relations. The notion of the relational was so central in his thinking that he preferred not to speak of his theory and rather referred to a system of relational concepts: 'the real is relational'. In his view the very term distinction represented nothing other than difference: a gap, a distinctive feature, in short, a relational property existing only in and through its relation with other properties. This relational turn has a particular meaning that distances it from the inter-subjective, however. The relations Bourdieu positions at the centre of social analysis are objective relations rather than interactions between agents and inter-subjective ties between individuals. Hence, for example, social position depends "not on the intrinsic properties of groups or locations ('substantialism'), but on the configuration of relations which link and give them their significance."³

In order to reach the level of political importance, comparative education needs a strong and ambitious theory-based framework with the potential to incorporate the socio-historical complexity, relationality and contingency of the research subject under examination. If theories of comparative education were to be developed to take more account of the processes of decision making, a good starting point would be a conceptual analysis of what is political. As Palonen (2003) points out, the English vocabulary has two spatial and two temporal words covering different aspects of politics. The spatial words, "policy" and "polity", limit the area: policy represents an attempt to set a direction for activities, whereas polity demarcates the political sphere in terms of institutions and discourses. The temporal words, "politicking" and "politicizing", shape and direct the spatial concepts: politicking makes it possible to change policies, to steer their direction inside the polity, whereas politicisation opens up new political possibilities and shapes the existing discursive formations (Palonen, 2003; Kauko, 2014). Focusing on the processes of politicisation and politicking

in future comparisons could pave the way for creating a new perspective on comparative education, which would focus more on relationality: the changes in relations and their use in action.

A proposal for a more systematic, flexible and vivid approach: CADEP

The main point here is that without a *strong theory-driven approach*, it is hard to go beyond merely listing the similarities and differences that facilitate the rankings but blur the processes and contexts. Our thesis is that in order to progress beyond the state of the art and arrive at a comparative understanding of educational systems, we have to focus on *dynamics* with a view to grasping the complex, fluid and mobile nature of the subject. We therefore define dynamics in the education politics of a specific social field as the formulation of constitutive regularities or principles in interactions between the *actors*, *institutions* and *discursive formations* (Kauko et al., 2012; Kauko, 2011, 2013, 2014; Simola, 2015).

It is curious that although on the conceptual level the dynamics of a system is constantly referred to as being among its key attributes (see e.g., Emirbayer, 1997; Prigogine, 1997; Välimaa, 2005; Biesta & Osberg, 2010), there has been little progress on the analytical level in the case of education. It is commonly acknowledged that understanding change (i.e., explaining variance) is one of the basic aspects of any type of research (Capano, 2009), and there have been attempts to build frameworks for analysing dynamics in education (see Maassen & Olsen, 2007).

Dynamics, as we understand the term, is about changing relations. Pitrim Sorokin (2010 [1957], 14) describes the understanding of interconnections in culture in terms of logico-meaningful thinking: “The essence of the logico-meaningful method of cognition is [...] in the finding of the central principle (the ‘reason’) which permeates all the components, gives sense and significance to each of them, and in this way makes cosmos of a chaos of unintegrated fragments.” More recently, Edwards (2012) described dynamics as “being attentive to the elements which comprise the constitutive interactions that give life and shape to [international processes of education policy formation]”, in other words as concerning the regularities and irregularities in the complexity of interaction between actors.

Our heuristic starting point echoes relativistic dynamics in physics (see e.g., Fanchi, 2005; Laudisa & Rovelli, 2008), characterised as a combination of relativistic and quantum theories describing the relationships between the principal elements of a relativistic system and the forces acting on it. In our case of actors in politics, institutions and discursive formations⁴ could be seen as the equivalent principal elements, the policy field as the relativistic system, and power as the main force. Both individual and collective actors are included, and

despite the pressures of structures and contingencies, there is always space for creative action. Institutions constitute the very basis of non-discursive practices (see e.g., Bourdieu, 1990a; Jepperson, 2002; Meyer & Rowan, 2006).

First we refine the theoretical ideas behind dynamics in politics and re-submit a specific social field of education to scrutiny in an analysis of the relations between the main actors and institutions and essential discursive formations and practices. We assume that, given its connection with relations and movement, the word “dynamics” would not reduce a mobile and fluid subject of study to a stagnant and inanimate object.

Second, we grasp the nettle of complexity and contingency in late-modern societies: we aim to “throw fully into relief the complexity” and “rely on theoretical orientations and conceptual systems that are capable of incorporating the considerable array of methodological points of view and analytical perspectives” (Schriewer, 2000, 328). In emphasising both the insecurity and openness of the horizon of expectations and the relative freedom of more or less conscious actors, the approach offers a reasonable solution to the perpetual but fruitless juxtaposition of the historical roles of actors, institutions and structures.

Third and finally, we highlight the need for a socio-historical analysis of the *transnational and the inter-crossing* from the perspective of political history in order to shed light on the essential relationships among the global, the regional, the national and the local, thereby fostering a comparative understanding and, even more importantly, a mutual exchange of experiences. It is not enough in this late-modern world (if ever) to study dependence and interaction among national states, or the border-crossing transfer of ideas and concepts. We should be more interested in the webs of structural power operating throughout the global system than in the comparative analysis of discrete parts of it, bounded by territorial frontiers that have been auspiciously opened up in comparative political history (see e.g., Strange, 1997; Nóvoa & Lawn, 2002; Altbach, 2004; Kettunen, 2006; Siegrist, 2006; Werner & Zimmermann, 2006).

The focus in this book is on discursive formations, which we see, to quote Michel Foucault (1972, 49), as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.” Although these verbal acts are the products of individuals, they somehow project anonymity (especially when circulating as legal texts, administrative orders and state documents). Inherent in this kind of text is the guarantee of the state as the “geometrical locus of all perspectives”, as “the holder of the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence” (Bourdieu, 1990a, 137). As such, it also has coercive force in relation to the reality of schooling. The main focus, however, is not on the ideas, paradigms or premises presented in intentional or explicit forms, but rather on something from the ambiguous area between words and things, which tend to be taken for granted or are self-evident. Thus our approach could be characterised as an “archaeological stance”

or a “history of truth” in the Foucauldian sense. We aim to formulate some kind of *discursive principles* that define, steer and guide the dynamic relations or relational dynamics in four fields of basic education politics in Finland: policymaking, governance, family educational strategies and classroom cultures.⁵

A three-dimensional framework

Any meaningful research in comparative historical sociology and politics must be based on “the unique nature of a variety of situations in time and space, and the cultural resources available in these situations” (Hedström & Wittrock, 2009, 8). Elsewhere (Kauko et al., 2012; Kauko, 2014), drawing on a conceptual history project initiated by Kari Palonen (2006), we have presented a three-dimensional framework for analysing contingency in an attempt to incorporate the historico-structural, discursive and action-related dimensions: the political situation, political possibilities and the political *Spielraum*, or politicking (see Table 1.2).

Politics as a situation connotes the idea of the opportune moment, or *kairos*, at which politics can be changed and historical rupture is visible. In shedding light on the changes in the socio-historical situation, we aim to go beyond the ‘unbearable narrowness of the national view’ to comprehend how the national is constituted of its interconnections, meetings and crossings with the transnational. Political possibilities concern how actors find and create the different alternatives for acting “otherwise.” If the political situation is a structural dimension of political change, this could be seen as a discursive perspective on the *problématiques*. Framed by the political situation and possibilities, a major element of the dynamics in politics is the *Spielraum* for ‘politicking’. This refers

Table 1.2 A framework for the analysis of dynamics in politics⁶

Dimension	Questions
Political situations	What is possible in a specific socio-historical and transnational situation; the dimension of structural opportunity and change; the unique nature of a variety of situations in time and space
Political possibilities	What is possible within existing discursive formations; what is politicised and what is not; <i>problématiques</i> ; the dimension of discursive conditions and resources; the cultural resources available in these situations
Politicking	How the relevant actors and institutions act and react, or do not act or react; how they exploit existing situations and possibilities; space for policymaking, the political <i>Spielraum</i> ; the art of playing with the contingency

to the potential of actors to ‘play with contingency’ and to capitalise on existing situations and possibilities in the complexities. The interplay between these three dimensions, which may vary considerably across countries and contexts, is the basis on which dynamics are analysed. It provides the framework for orienting the empirical research.

The first dimension in the framework, and an underlying theoretical hypothesis to be tested, is that changes occur at opportune moments, when politics is open to change and when an historical rupture is apparent (cf. Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). To make change happen, policymakers have to be aware of this political situation, or offer a radical re-interpretation of the status quo in order to seize such a moment (Palonen, 2006). Jaakko Kauko (2013, 2014) claimed in another study based on the same dynamics framework that the occurrence of an opportune moment is dependent on how the institutional structure of the education system fits together with external developments in the political system and in society. Hence, we consider the general features of society and the political system. Our main argument is that the country’s agrarian and centrist history is reflected in the building of the Finnish political and education system.

Possibility, the second dimension of political dynamics, reflects the potential for political action. The idea here is that political actors create room for action through politicising issues (Palonen, 1993, 2003), and if these issues are not politicised, things happen in a consensual or routine manner. In other words, politicisation creates new possibilities: it re-interprets an issue as a conflict or re-configures an existing conflict (Palonen, 1993, 2003). Over time, the discursive formations shape the essential questions and *problématiques* related to a policy issue. The focus in this dimension is on discursive formations, but we still need to answer the question, ‘What is politicised and what is not?’ (Kauko et al., 2012).

The third dimension concerns concrete policymaking, the use of political space, and in connection with this we find the ideas from the multiple streams model useful: the key question is why some issues appear on the political agenda and why some policies become respectable alternatives, whereas other issues and policies find their way into the garbage can of history (Kingdon, 2003). The model explains this process in terms of three different streams: problems, politics and policies. A politicised possibility is created when the first two or all three streams are connected. Those making such connections are policy entrepreneurs, who tend to have a favourite solution to hand for which they attempt to find a suitable problem (Kingdon, 2003). In other words, politicisation and the politico-historical situation create the frame for political action; they determine the political room of action in which the policy entrepreneurs operate, in other words the *Spielraum*. In this regard we analyse some concrete policymaking situations in history and argue that change towards market-liberal thinking has been blocked by contingent events as well as conscious equality-based policy decisions. We should come back to Peter Hedström and Björn Wittrock’s (2009) idea of the use of resources available in different historical situations and

ask, 'How do the relevant actors capitalise on the existing situations and possibilities?' (Kauko, 2014).

Our objective in this book is to present a holistic and dynamic picture of Finnish comprehensive-school politics as they currently function. Focusing on discursive formations while taking the main actors and institutions into account, we aim to identify the dynamic relationships and relational dynamics that make the Finnish system tick.

Above we define dynamics in the education politics of a certain social field as a formulation of constitutive regularities or principles in interaction between the *actors*, *institutions* and *discursive formations*. Our conceptualisation of dynamics is a thought-provoking framework rather than a model or a theory.

Notes

- 1 This is discussed in more detail in Kauko and Wermke (submitted), and these two paragraphs follow the same reasoning.
- 2 See the *Journal of Education Policy*, March 2009 Vol. 24 Issue 2, and (Kettunen, 2006, 2011), for example.
- 3 <http://socialtheoryapplied.com/2013/05/16/bourdieu-and-the-problem-of-relations/>
- 4 We use the concept 'policy threads', referring to the thematic formation to be content-analysed. Policy-thread analysis is thus a first step in the discursive formations that are reconstructed through socio-historical discourse analysis in a Foucauldian sense.
- 5 On our discursive approach, see (Simola, 1998a; Simola, Heikkinen & Silvonen, 1998; Heikkinen, Silvonen & Simola, 1999).
- 6 We attribute the basic idea to eminent Finnish researcher of politics, Kari Palonen (2006); see also (Hedström & Wittrock, 2009, 8; Simola, 2011; Kauko et al., 2012).

Orienting to the Finnish case

Taking Hedström and Wittrock's idea and applying it to the field of education policy, we propose that any meaningful research must be based on "the unique nature of a variety of situations in time and space, and the cultural resources available in these situations" (Hedström & Wittrock, 2009, 8). By way of orientation and in an attempt to shed light on this apparently simple notion, we characterise Finnish history in terms of changing political situations, political possibilities and the use of the room of action, politicking. In line with the analytical framework introduced in the previous chapter (see Table 1.1). Thus our ambitious aim is to outline the general dynamics of Finnish political life, of which education politics is just a part and in which it should thus be framed and embedded. We should point out that the few notes presented here are meant to contextualise what follows in this book, especially for readers who are not familiar with the case of Finland.

A history of political situations

The very nature of Finnish politico-cultural existence could be characterised as peripheral, at least until the 2000s. After the ice age, people from the North (Sami), South (Finnic), East (Karelian) and West (Swedes) gradually populated the Finnish peninsula. The Uralic language¹ effectively distinguished the Finns from their Western neighbours, as well as from the Slavic East. According to recent research, three-quarters of the country's genetic substance is of western and southern origin, whereas in terms of linguistic structure the eastern influence has been stronger. The southwestern part of the Finnish peninsula was already strongly culturally coupled with both Scandinavia and continental Europe during the Viking era (between the 700s and the 1000s) (Klinge, 1984; Helle, 2003). The Scandinavian agglutination was confirmed during the eleventh and fourteenth centuries when Finland (i.e., the southwestern part of the Finnish peninsula) was incorporated under the Swedish Crown and the Christian religion through three Crusades. This new province was called simply *Osterland*, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The name Finland was established, although it originally referred only to the coastal area in the

southwest of the peninsula.² At this point Finland became a barrier or a bridge between the West and the East.

Sweden lost Finland to Russia in the Finnish war of 1808–09. For a century, until national independence in 1917, Finland was an autonomous Grand Duchy under the Russian Tsar. It is noteworthy that, in spite of its Nordic roots, the Finnish nation–state developed and matured within the Russian Empire during the nineteenth century. The Eastern flavour was most strongly embedded culturally in the east and north of the country, where slash-and-burn agriculture and patriarchy were still dominant in the nineteenth century, whereas field cultivation and a class society already characterised the west and the south (Sarmela, 1984). It is not an overstatement to conclude that, at least until the mid-nineteenth century, Finland was a poor and backward country moulded by famine, poverty and war (Voutilainen, 2016). During half a millennium under the Swedish Crown there were 53 wars in which Finns were involved: every generation lost men on the battlefields, although in every case the initiative came from the Swedish or the opposing side. This hard legacy of misery was manifested in two major disasters that struck one generation around the time of independence – the famine of 1866–68 killed 15 per cent and the Civil War of 1918 killed 1.5 per cent of the population.

Only two decades after the Civil War, however, the nation was able to create an astonishingly effective front against the Soviet offensive. On the eve of the Second World War, there were 17 dictatorships and 12 democracies in Europe. Among the countries involved, only Great Britain and Finland remained democratic and were never occupied. In the case of Finland, a rather rare phenomenon occurred: just eight years after the Civil War, in 1926–1927, the moderate wing of the beaten Reds, the Social Democratic Party, formed a minority government and joined the majority government in 1937–1939. What must have helped to facilitate peace between the Finns was the historical slenderness of the upper social strata and the relatively small income inequalities among the great majority until the 2000s. Finland has traditionally been socially flat as a nation, a strong indication of which is the low social background of three recent Presidents of the Republic: Urho Kekkonen (1900–1986) was born in a chimneyless hut in a northeastern province, the anthem of which is the “March of the Hunger Land”; Mauno Koivisto (1923–) was a dock worker at the Port of Turku; and Tarja Halonen (1943–) was the daughter of a single mother from a working-class neighbourhood in Helsinki.

A social fact that should not be underestimated is that Finland belongs to the group of European nations that have most recently left behind their agrarian society and lifestyle. The processes of industrialisation and urbanisation were quite sluggish until the Second World War. Finland, together with Poland, Bulgaria and Rumania, was among the least industrialised nations in Europe in the 1930s (Feinstein, Temin & Toniolo, 2008) and thus economically more resembled an East European agrarian state than a prospective Nordic welfare state. Seventy per cent of the Finnish population lived in rural areas in 1945, and

almost 60 per cent were employed in agriculture and forestry. Following the great migration in the 1960s, half the population lived in cities in 1970, and 32 per cent were employed in industry and construction (cf. Alapuro & Stenius, 1987).

In sum, the political situation – in other words the “specific socio-historical and transnational situation, the dimension of structural opportunity and change and a unique nature of a variety of situations in time and space” – has been full of contradictions and paradoxes in the history of Finland. It is easy to find utter misery, famine and violence, but success, prosperity and affluence are also apparent. It is somewhat typical that Finland was recently characterised on the one hand as Europe’s weakest nation in terms of economic development, and on the other as the world’s most sustainable nation in terms of social, economic, political and military indicators.³

A history of political possibilities

Let us now turn to the political history of resources and capacities in Finland. Although a remote and poor country with a sparse population, Finland acquired its Nordic civilising institutions just a little later than its neighbours: the first major castles were built at the turn of the thirteenth century, as was the first institution of higher education, Turku Cathedral School. The Academy of Turku (later the University of Helsinki, to where it was moved in 1828) was established in the seventeenth century, at about the same time as the Universities in Uppsala and Tartu, at that time under the Swedish Crown. Some Finns studied at centres in Europe and beyond, one of the results of which was the publishing of the first ABC book and the New Testament by Mikael Agricola, the founder of literary Finnish, in the sixteenth century. Similarly one consequence of the long study trips to Sweden, Denmark, the German States and Switzerland undertaken by Uno Cygnaeus, the founding father of the Finnish public school system, was the establishment of elementary schooling.

However, the building up of these institutions for “national capacity building” does not explain why Finland did not follow in the footsteps of East European agrarian nations as they were in the 1930s. Two constitutive, distinctive intertwined facts are relevant here: the Nordic politico-administrative culture and a strong tendency towards societal consensus.

First, although part of the Russian Empire for over a decade, Finland retained its Swedish political and administrative culture. Russia’s main strategic interest when it conquered Finland in 1809 was, and has remained, to secure St Petersburg, the former political and later cultural capital, and by implication the sea route through the Gulf of Finland to the Baltic Sea and out to the Atlantic Ocean. In helping itself to a large slice of the Swedish empire, Russia was forced to make certain concessions, which was one of the reasons why Finland was granted the status of an autonomous Grand Duchy. Not only was it able to retain its Lutheran religion, Swedish as its official language and its old Swedish

system of civil and criminal law, it was also allowed to keep its Gustavian form of government and central administration headed by a Senate and, in principle, its own Diet with its four Estates. Eventually, the progressive Czar Alexander I proclaimed Finland's "elevation to national status" in the Diet held in 1812. This was not exceptional, however, given that the Russian Empire was not a united centralised state, and a similar policy was in force in the Baltic States and Poland, for example. This opened to Finland the way to national awakening and construction of a nation-state.

The cost was high, however. If Finland had been able to construct its nation-state in the "normal" way, as its Nordic neighbours did, it seems unlikely that the bloody Civil War would ever have broken out. The right-wing victory also distanced Finland further from Soviet Russia and contributed to its differentiation from East European countries. The Civil War killed almost 40,000 people from a nation of less than 3 million inhabitants. Three-quarters of the dead were Reds, and three-quarters of them did not die in battle but in prison camps, or were executed or murdered. This is still a "collective trauma" (Ylikangas, 1993, 521) to be overcome, and only recently have there been proposals to establish a Truth Commission for working it through. The Second World War against the Soviet Union and partly in alliance with Nazi Germany claimed the lives of 2.6 per cent of Finns. From a psycho-historical perspective, cognisance of Finland's sense of being a border country on the one hand and of its collective carrying of the trauma of the Civil War (and the celebrated consensus during the Winter War) on the other may shed light on the peculiarities of the Finnish drift to social consensus (cf. Alapuro, 1988; Klinge, 1997; Vehviläinen, 2002).

Second, the strong pursuit of societal consensus is strongly related to the Nordic culture. It is rather strange that in spite of its warlike history and events in other Nordic countries, rebellion has been very rare in Finnish history. In fact, there have been only two real rebellions, apart from a number of local, parish-level rows that were rather easy to settle: the "Cudgel War" (*Nuijasota*) of 1596–1597 and the Civil War⁴ of 1918. According to Finnish historian Kimmo Katajala (2002), who has specialised in rustic rebellions in Finland from the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries, two very basic facts explain these exceptions to the rule.

First, the prerequisites of rebellion include, apart from experienced injustices, an active connection with political happenings beyond the local level. *Nuijasota* was strongly connected to power struggles over the Swedish Crown in Stockholm, and in the case of the Civil War to the October Revolution in St Petersburg. Finland was parochial and poor and had little interest in the political intrigues at the two centres.

Second, and in line with the other Nordic countries, the tendency since the seventeenth century was to progress from violent rebellion to peaceful, legislative and political manoeuvring. There was no lack of exploitation, oppression or injustice in society but there were also the means, routes and institutions to fight for one's rights in socially more acceptable ways. At the same time, societal

control became more sophisticated. Katajala concludes that both increasing cooperation among different societal strata and the development of state apparatus to subjugate subjects drove the peaceful approach in the Nordic countries: both interaction and subordination.

Katajala also points out that the peasants in Sweden and other Nordic countries were in a much stronger position in the corporative system than their brothers and sisters in Europe and elsewhere. Nordic peasants had virtually no experience of serfdom, and the proportion of freehold farms in Sweden in particular appears to have been more than 50 per cent since the early Middle Ages (Helle, 2003). Here, then, are the origins of peaceful rebellion and the pursuit of social consensus: on the one hand was the extremely ghastly experience of war and violence, and on the other a rather advanced approach to civil rights and reasonably functioning legal systems.

The main educational institutions were also products of the post-war period of reconstruction, a period during which the alliance of various political forces and the emerging state bureaucracy further strengthened the old tendencies. It could be said that the Finnish education system aligned itself with the state, expanded, universalised, and increased its presence throughout the country between the 1960s and the 1990s. These principles of education policy resembled the general steering principles in the build-up of the welfare state (Kauko, 2013; Kauko et al., 2015; Simola, 2015). The state and its education system became a vehicle for gaining societal status and wealth.

From here it is not a big leap to a peculiarity that explains much of the political dynamics in Finland. It is a question of trust, especially of confidence in social institutions (Kouvo, 2011; Kestilä-Kekkonen & Söderlund, 2016). Social reforms were, and still are, carried out via centralised authority, planned by state authorities and clergy and controlled strictly through state legislation, and thus far this bureaucratic model has worked. Perhaps this “state rationality” is deeply incorporated into the national mentality: this would basically explain why the welfare state is still seen, even in times of economic depression as in the 1990s, as the legitimate representative of people and of the common good, whereas the state as an apparatus of power is often ignored. A European Commission study is illustrative here (Figure 2.1).

The Economist issued a special report on the Nordic countries in 2013, in which the Nordic model was described thus:

The World Values Survey, which has been monitoring values in over 100 countries since 1981, says that the Nordics are the world’s biggest believers in individual autonomy. The Nordic combination of big government and individualism may seem odd to some, but according to Lars Tragardh, of Ersta Sköndal University College, Stockholm, the Nordics have no trouble reconciling the two: they regard the state’s main job as promoting individual autonomy and social mobility. Any piece of Nordic social legislation – particularly the family laws of recent years – can be justified in terms of

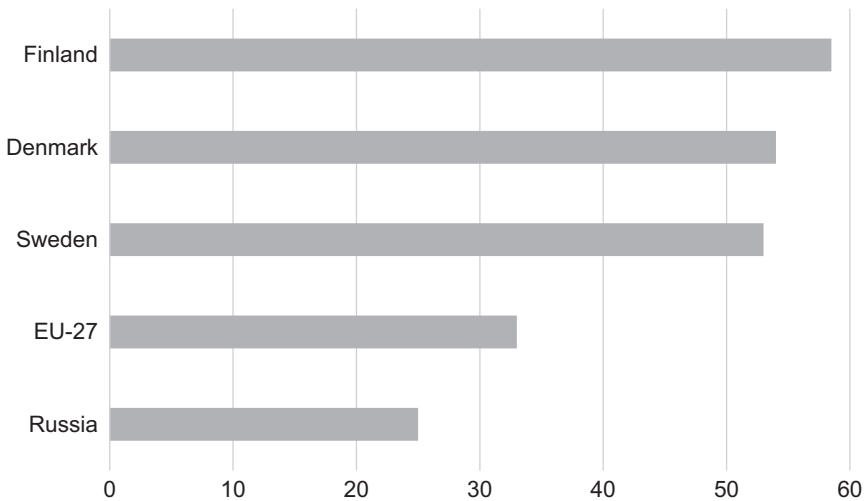


Figure 2.1 Public trust in institutions*

Source: European Commission, adapted from “Northern Lights”, 2013, *The Economist* (2 Feb).

individual autonomy. Universal free education allows students of all backgrounds to achieve their potential. Separate taxation of spouses puts wives on an equal footing with their husbands. Universal day care for children makes it possible for both parents to work full-time. Mr Tragardh has a useful phrase to describe this mentality: “statist individualism.”

(*The Economist*, February 2, 2013)

The concept of corporatism (Rust & Blackmore, 1990) would seem fruitful in terms of analysing the Finnish welfare state in the field of education. Governments recognise the value and political legitimacy of interest groups, granting them a representational monopoly to rule their own fields. Corporatism in the welfare state is characterised by tendencies towards co-operation and stability rather than political competition, by relatively covert forms of decision making and the inclusion of some and the exclusion of certain other interest groups in the processes. According to Rust and Blackmore, in terms of education, not only do professional groups in a corporate system work to gain sectional advantages, but they also help to maintain the system’s authority and legitimacy as a whole.

History has left its mark on Finnish society, which – controversial as it may be – could be described as archaic, authoritarian and obedient. However, another side of this coin is the very quick and fundamental change to a post-industrial and late-modern culture that is apparent in society, science and technology in

particular. The late process of industrialisation and the simultaneous growth of the service sector brought exceptionally rapid structural change. The transition from an agricultural to an industrial society, and further to a post-industrial society, took place within such a short period of time that one could almost say the three societies currently coexist in a very special way in the country. The Finnish welfare state could be seen as a product of this historical turbulence: on the one hand industrial and individualist, and on another agrarian and collectivist.

It is also difficult to overplay the fact that the birth of the Finnish nation-state was realised under the Russian Empire during the nineteenth century. It is no exaggeration to say that Eastern elements are in evidence throughout Finland, from its administrative traditions to its genetic heredity. The fact that Finnish Social Democracy retains an Eastern authoritarian, or even totalitarian, flavour, compared with the versions in other Nordic countries, is just one indication. At least heuristically, there is nothing strange in finding Finland aligned with nations such as Korea and Japan in some international comparisons (cf. e.g., Lakaniemi et al., 1995; Siikala, 2002; Simola, 2005, Simola, 2015, 209–210).

A history of politicking

As mentioned above, Finland belongs to the group of European nations that has most recently left behind an agrarian society and lifestyle. The process of industrialisation and urbanisation was sluggish until the Second World War, compared with Central Europe and the other Nordic countries. In 1945, 70 per cent of the Finnish population lived in rural areas, and almost 60 per cent were employed in agriculture and forestry. Following the great migration in the 1960s, by 1970 half were living in cities and 32 per cent were employed in industry and construction (Figure 2.2; cf. e.g., Alapuro & Stenius, 1987). Figures 2.3 and 2.4 contrast the late but rapid change in the Finnish occupational structure with the changes in other Nordic countries.

Whereas the demise of agrarian labour took place over 80 years in Norway, and over 50 years in Sweden, it happened within 20 years in Finland. No wonder, then, that the construction of the welfare state began a decade later than in the other Nordic countries. Figure 2.4 gives a compressed view of the different lengths and timing of the changes. The close-knit nature of the delayed agrarian society is evident in the rare but robust trident division of political parties. Finland boasts not only a political Right and Left, but also a Centre, in other words the Agrarian Party that thus far has played a vital role. The result has been a curious consensus whereby two of the three main parties have formed the government and the third has represented the opposition. Whereas the “Red-Soil” (Left and Centre) governments dominated the period from WWII until 1987, since then the most typical coalition has been between Right and Left, although nearly as often the Centre has headed the government with the Right or Left almost as frequently. No

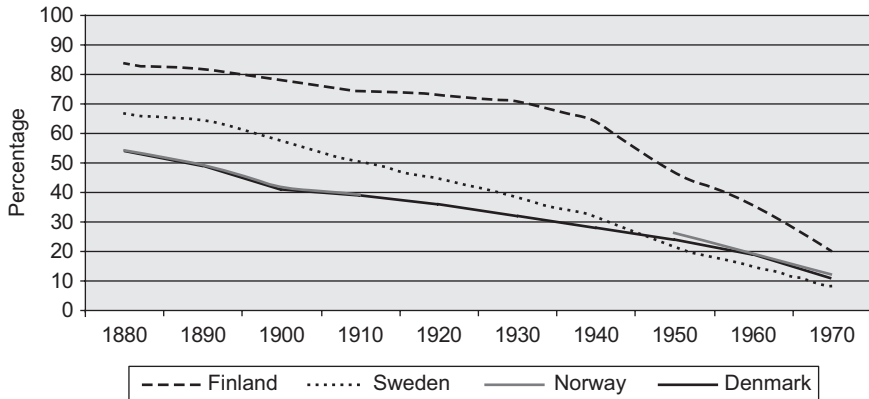


Figure 2.2 Changes in agricultural employment among the working population in the Nordic countries, 1880–1970

Source: Pöntinen (1983, 46). N.B. The changes in Norway and Denmark during the period in question were very similar (exactly the same in 1880–1910) and are difficult to decipher in the table.

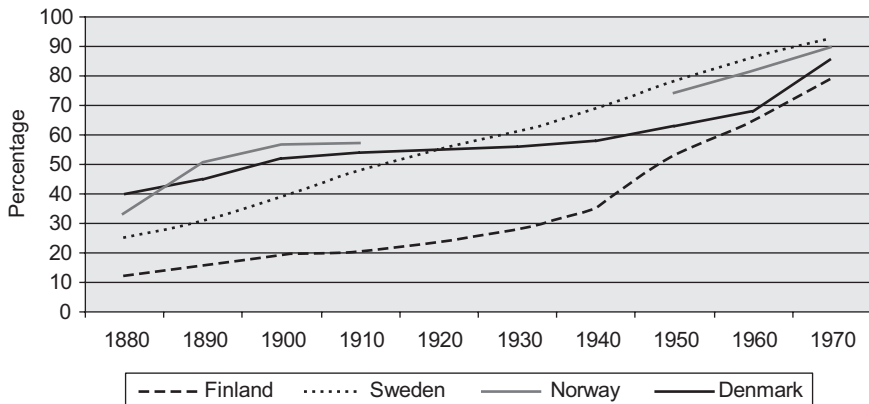


Figure 2.3 Changes in industrial and service employment among the working population in the Nordic countries, 1880–1970

Source: Pöntinen (1983, 46)

wonder that the late 1980s has been seen as the borderline between the Second and the Third Republics (Alasuutari, 1996; Simola, 2004).

The post-WWII expansion of the welfare state caused an upheaval in the Nordic labour markets. Public-sector employment in Finland grew from 20 to over 30 per cent between 1970 and 1985, and again as was typical of the Finnish model, the growth began later but continued longer than in the other Nordic countries (Figures 2.5 and 2.6).

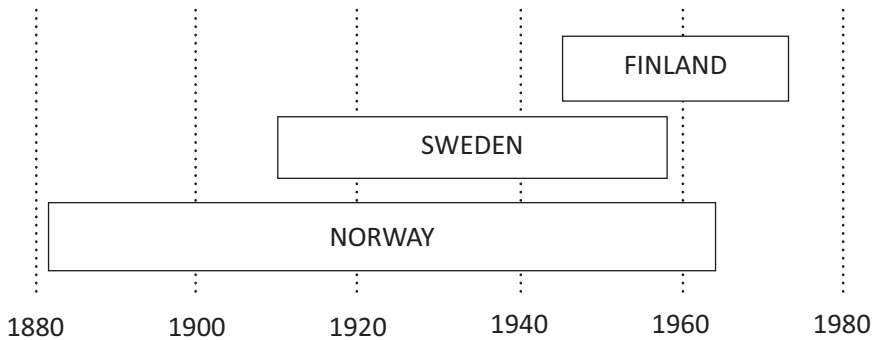


Figure 2.4 The timing and rapidity of the changes in occupational structure in three Nordic countries: the period during which the agrarian labour force decreased proportionately from 50 to 15 per cent

Source: Karisto, Takala and Haapola (1998, 64); adapted from Carrasco et al. (2015, 59)

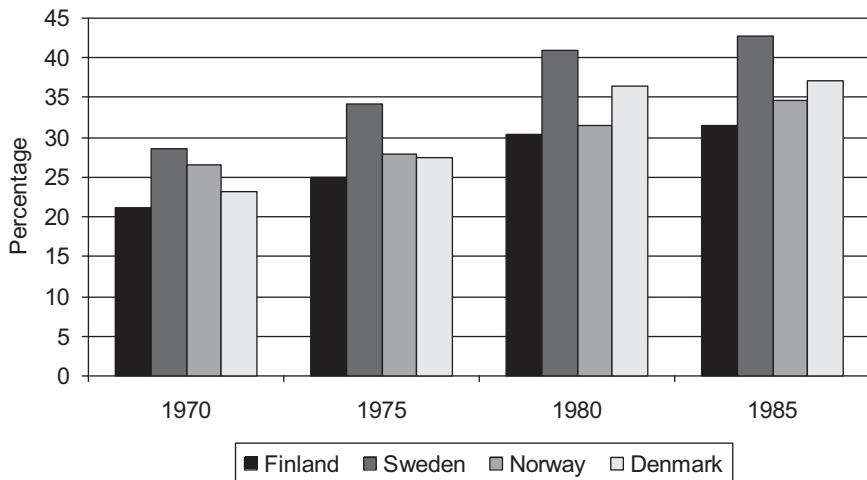


Figure 2.5 Public employment in the Nordic countries, 1970–1985

Source: Kosonen (1998, 152)

European welfare states have been classified into four models: the liberal (e.g., the UK), the corporative (e.g., Germany, France), the social-democratic (e.g., Sweden) and the peripheral (e.g., Greece, Ireland). Finland exemplifies the social-democratic Nordic model, although serious doubts about this conclusion have been expressed (Kettunen, 2006, 2011). Even though the history of its welfare state is quite short, Finland has a much longer tradition of state-sponsored social reform.

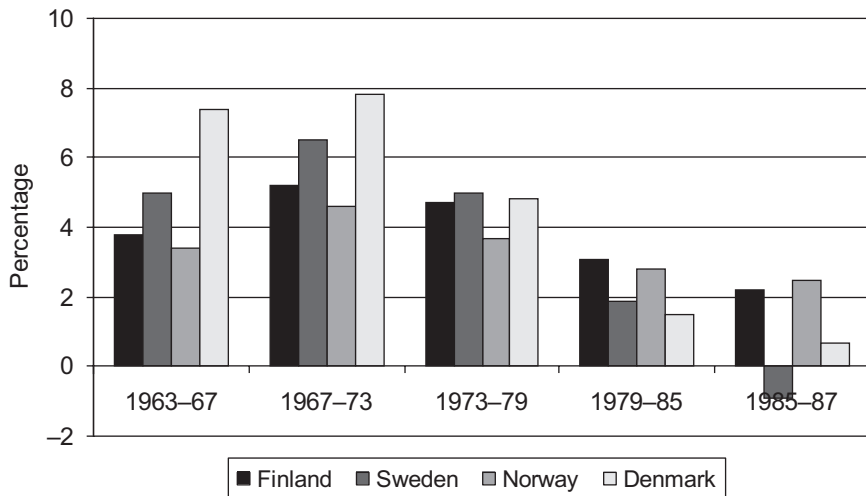


Figure 2.6 Growth of the work force in the public sector in the Nordic countries, 1963–1987

Source: Alestalo (1991, 8)

The tradition of strong centralisation is another aspect of the Finnish political culture that differentiates the country from its Nordic neighbours. This relationship between a strong state and a weak civil society has prevailed for centuries. It persisted during the later nation- and state-building processes in independent Finland, leaving relatively limited space for a “free” civic society. Civic movements and the state have evolved in tandem since the nineteenth century, working together towards common aims rather than as rivals on opposing sides (Alapuro & Stenius, 1987).

Finnish history after centuries of misery seems like an unbelievable success story. The Second Republic⁵ (from the Second World War until the late 1980s) progressed through industrialisation to post-industrialisation more quickly than most other European countries. Finland built its welfare state in the Nordic way, falling slightly behind its Western neighbours. Free and comprehensive education was established up to university level. A special relationship was built with the Eastern winner of the war, the Soviet Union, which limited Finnish sovereignty but also bestowed some major benefits in foreign trade.

The Third Republic witnessed the rapid opening up of Finland’s closed economy and introverted culture. Negotiations for accession to the European Union began immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ironically, and somehow typical of Finland, this coincided in the early 1990s with the deepest economic recession experienced in Europe. The small national economy based strongly on forestry and the metal industry but also on Soviet bilateral trade had

to face the global challenges of new-world capitalism tinged by neoliberalism and US hegemony. The gauntlet was successfully taken up, led by Nokia surfing the first wave of digitalisation.⁶ The crisis also speeded up the adaptation of the Finnish economy to open and globalised markets (Meinander, 2014, 300). However, disaster struck less than two decades later: Finland has been in an economic crisis since 2008 that seems more grievous and tenacious than in other European countries.

It is impossible to discuss societal changes in Finland without referring to the economic depression of the 1990s: the Third Republic faced its first tribulation. A number of coincident problems beset the country. The international economic recession, an overheated national economy, the collapse of trade with the Soviet Union, the unsuccessful and badly timed inauguration of the monetary policy and, finally, a grave bank crisis all contributed to bringing about an economic crash comparable only to the Great Depression of the 1930s. According to many indicators, the Finnish crisis was the sharpest and deepest among the advanced liberal countries facing economic problems at that time. In the period 1990–1993, GNP went down 7 per cent, the unemployment rate increased from 3 to 16 per cent, and unemployment among 15- to 24-year-olds increased from zero to 34 per cent (Statistics Finland, 1999).

However, in terms of societal development in Finland, it is impossible to ignore the astonishing emergence of the country from deep economic recession during the second half of the decade. According to the statistics, GDP rose by as much as 8 per cent a year. Annual productivity in enterprises grew by 4 per cent, and total productivity by 5 per cent in the years 1993–1997 (Tuottavuuskatsaus, 1998). By the turn of the century, the Finnish export industry, especially the vital information and communications technology sector, seemed to be running better than ever and the economy to be well balanced. The country achieved EU membership in 1995 and was part of the first wave into the European monetary union in 2002. According to various authorities, Finland seemed to have effected a successful change of pace as part of the new globalised economy.

One could, and should, ask about the price of this economic success story. It is worth noting that the political initiative shifted clearly to the Right as early as in 1987 when the conservative National Coalition Party assumed governmental responsibility after a long period on the sidelines. What is odd, however, is that governments have been very broadly based since then. The two ‘rainbow governments’ (Lipponen I, 1995–99 and Lipponen II, 1999–2003), headed by a Social Democrat, included all the main parties from Right to Left, excluding only the former agrarian Centre Party. Thus and ironically enough, one could conclude that the political shift to the Right in Finland happened in accordance with wide societal consensus, at least among the political elite (see e.g., Kantola & Kananen, 2013).

The creditors and debtors in this political and economic shift are apparent. Groups of the very rich and the very poor have made their presence felt in the country. Differences in income are on the increase, being wider than in the 1970s (see e.g., Blom et al., 1996; Jakku-Sihvonen & Lindström, 1996;

Karvonen et al., 2000; Ruotsalainen, 2000). According to a review (Lehtonen & Aho, 2000), every year between 1991 and 1999, cuts in the state economy repeatedly and without exception were directed at the least privileged and politically powerless sectors of the population: the poor, the sick and the unemployed. Education as a whole coped better, but this hides the fact that creditors are to be found among the 'elite' sectors in the field. Primarily, certain areas of university and polytechnic education and training have benefited, whereas resources for comprehensive schooling decreased by 13 per cent, and for vocational training by 20 per cent between 1990 and 1994 (OPH, 1996). These figures are exceptional and extreme among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, even among those facing high educational cuts (cf. Education at a Glance, 1996, 2000).

Immediately after the depression, many social-policy researchers (e.g., Heikkilä & Uusitalo, 1997; Haataja, 1998; Hjerpe et al., 1999) lost no time in celebrating the fact that the Finnish social-security system had proved to stand up well in the hard times. It was nevertheless noted (e.g., Kosunen, 1997) that the depression seemed to continue in social security and health, although it was over in the economy. Finally it has been admitted that the Finnish welfare state seems to have essentially changed; it is not what it was before the depression (e.g., Lehtonen & Aho, 2000). More and more people are coming to the conclusion that the restructuring of the Finnish welfare state was already on the agenda during the late 1980s. The depression created a general 'consciousness of crisis' that made even the most radical cuts and savings acceptable and easy to realise without any political resistance. In other words, the depression could be seen as Heaven's gift to those aiming to reconstruct the Finnish welfare state and to make it a model for the new globalised market economy driven by international actors such as the OECD, the EU and the World Bank.

Notes

- 1 Finnish is a member of the Finnic group of the Uralic family of languages, which also includes Estonian and a few minority languages.
- 2 The province was later named *Varsinais-Suomi*, Finland Proper: apart from the Finns, the population of the peninsula was equally divided among the *hämäläiset* and the *karjalaiset* (referring to the provinces of Häme and Karelia).
- 3 Fragile States Index 2015 <http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/rankings-2015>
- 4 Typically enough, the Reds referred to the Civil War as the Revolt (*Kapina*) against illegal government, as they saw it, whereas for the Whites it was the Liberation War (*Vapaussota*) against the Russians allied with the Finnish mob or riff-raff.
- * November 2012, percentages responding "tend to trust": includes the press, political parties, national government, the EU and the UN.
- 5 This periodization is rather conventional in history and the social sciences. The task of the First Republic (from independence in 1917 until the end of the Second World War in 1945) was to establish an independent and parliamentary republic after the Civil War.
- 6 The electronics industry achieved a 16 per cent share of the GNP in 2001 (Meinander, 2014, 300).

Dynamics in policymaking

As we point out in Chapter 1, the political situation and political possibilities are relational in that the latter can change the former and the former restricts the latter. In the case of Finnish education policymaking, the institutional build-up during the Second Republic significantly restricted the exploitation of political possibilities during the Third Republic. Vice versa, the new political possibilities created during the Third Republic have started to take effect inside the pre-existing structures, and little-by-little are changing the political situation in terms of changing the roles of the institutions. Indeed, the constitutive policy drift of political possibilities in Finnish basic schooling could be traced to the *equality policy* and how it was manifested in the political situation after the Second World War. Political action, or politicking, has played a role here at key moments in terms of interpreting a contingent array of possibilities. The key actors range from policymakers and institutions in Parliament and the Ministry of Culture and Education to the Confederation of Finnish Industries and Employers (CIE).

In what follows, we show in more concrete terms that dynamics in policymaking operate between the social-democratic agrarian tradition of equality and the new market-liberalist version of equity that emerged in the late 1980s. The former emphasises the similarity of pupils and everybody's right to receive decent schooling and is based on the belief that it is possible to run schooling that is 'good enough' for everybody. This was also the framework on which the regional and seemingly equal basic structure of schooling was built, reflecting the notion of absolute value with regard to the provision of common compulsory schooling for the offspring of people from every socio-cultural stratum of society. This could be called social-equality discourse. Market-liberalist thinking emphasises difference among pupils and everybody's right to receive schooling that fits his or her capacities, needs and individuality. It is no longer assumed that one and the same school is good for everybody. This discourse dates back to the pre-comprehensive era and the distinction of parallel schools, and could be characterised as individual equality. This view eventually lost the battle over the large-scale changes in the education system characterised by comprehensive schooling, only to re-emerge during the right-wing governments of the 1990s.

Late but enduring structures reflecting a belief in schooling

There is a strong national consensus that, by international comparison, Finns highly appreciate education, or schooling to be more precise. It thus seems that a belief in schooling as an agent for social equality and a cornerstone of continuity and consensus in Finnish education policy has remained stronger than in many other Western countries.

It may be that the high belief in schooling stems from the contingent conjunction of three social changes that occurred exceptionally late in Finland: the expansion of schooling, the modernisation of the occupational structure and the construction of the welfare state.

Finland was among the last countries in Europe to establish compulsory education. Six-year elementary education was not made compulsory by law until 1921, the same year as in Thailand, whereas the legislation was already in place in Denmark in 1814, Sweden in 1842 and Norway in 1848. In addition, primary schooling expanded slowly even after the law came into force, and compulsory education was not fully functional and did not cater to all children across the whole country and among all social groups until just before the Second World War (Ramirez & Boli-Bennett, 1982; Rinne, 1984; Rinne & Salmi, 1998, 27; Simola, 2015, 252–272).

The Finnish comprehensive-school system was developed only in the 1970s. Compulsory schooling was lengthened to nine years in all the other Nordic countries during the 1960s and 1970s, when comprehensive schooling was accepted as the main principle of education. This happened in Sweden in 1962, and in Norway in 1969, whereas Finland, Iceland and Denmark followed suit only some years later.

All of this is indicative of the fact that the Finnish success story in terms of education is historically very recent. Whereas almost 70 per cent of the younger generation nowadays aspire to a higher-education degree, in their grandparents' generation about the same proportion obtained the full elementary-school certificate. Figure 3.1 clearly illustrates the late blooming of Finnish education.

Figure 3.2 clearly shows the late expansion of the educational system to the secondary level and the low percentage participation in secondary education compared with the other Nordic countries. As late as 2001, only about half of 55- to 65-year-olds in Finland had the secondary-education qualification (51%) compared with between 65 and 72 per cent in the other Nordic countries, and the differences were still significant at well over 10 per cent in 2005. Because of the late historical formation and the expansion of the educational system, the gaps in educational levels between older and younger generations are among the widest in Europe.

One might well assume that the high belief in schooling in Finland stems from the contingent conjunction of its late expansion, the late modernisation of the occupational structure and the late construction of the welfare state (see

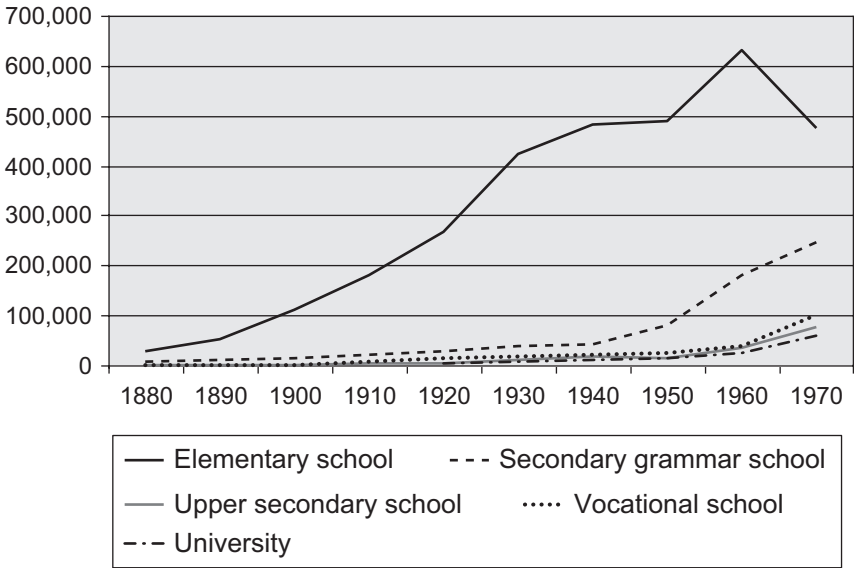


Figure 3.1 The expansion of schooling in Finland

Sources: Kivinen (1988); Kivinen, Rinne & Ahola (1989); Pekkala Kerr (2012).

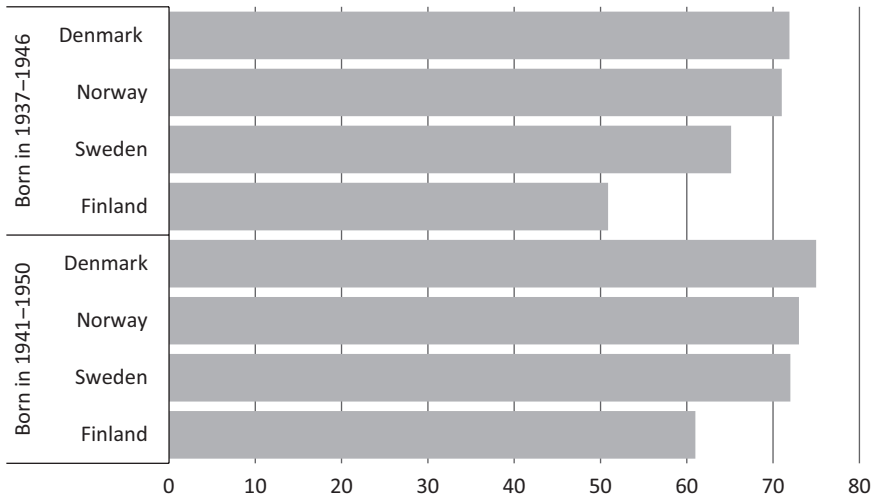


Figure 3.2 Two Nordic population cohorts aged 55-64 with at least an upper-secondary education

Source: Education at a Glance (2002 [2001], 37); (2007 [2005], 37)

Chapter 2 in this book for more details). These social changes happened in most countries successively rather than one at a time. It may be that this rare conjunction created a strong collective experience of causality between progress in formal education and simultaneous social advancement. With regard to education, the Finnish case could also be seen as an accelerated, compressed version of the global process of mass schooling (see e.g., Meyer et al., 1992; Simola, 1993).

On account of the long transition periods and the popular formats of itinerant and reduced schools in rural areas, it was not until 1957 that every child went to primary school. The division between education for common people and the gentry was strongest in the Nordic countries: whereas the proportion of pupils in secondary school was the highest, the general level of education was the lowest (Rahikainen, 2011; Tuomaala, 2011).

As mentioned above and shown in Figure 3.1, the change after the 1960s was dramatic. The large-scale build-up of basic education happened in the 1970s, a period that has been referred to as the ‘Golden Era of Educational Reforms’ (Simola, 2015, 3–26). Three major reforms were carried out, which set the political scene in which later developments took place.

First, the Comprehensive School Reform (1972–1977) replaced the dual-track system of eight-year compulsory schooling and a parallel grammar-school system with the single, mixed-ability comprehensive school in which all pupils are schooled for nine years.

Second, the Teacher Education Reform, which was put into practice between 1973 and 1979, radically changed the training of primary school teachers (those who teach at the lower level, from grades 1 to 6, in comprehensive school). The training was transferred from teacher-training colleges and small-town ‘teacher preparation seminaries’ to new university faculties of education, established as part of the reform, and was raised to the master’s degree level in 1979. This dramatically increased the role of educational studies in the training, and education as an academic discipline expanded rapidly.

Third, the General Syllabus and Degree Reform in Higher Education (1977–1980) abolished the Bachelor’s degree (although it returned in 1994): since 1977, all those wishing to become teachers require a master’s degree (Simola, 1993).

After fervent political struggles in the 1960s and early 1970s, a wide consensus was achieved in basic education policy rather quickly. The early *Peruskoulu* still included streaming in mathematics and languages, but it was noticed in the 1980s that it excluded too many boys from lower-secondary studies. The decision to abolish streaming by legislation was probably the peak of the consensus, and only six MPs voted against it in 1982 (Simola et al., 2015, 88). It is fair to say to suggest that a kind of ostensible consensus has been predominant in Finnish basic education policy ever since. An influential policymaker even joked about it in a parliamentary discussion in the early 1990s: “The parts of the addresses concerning education policy, and its importance and needs for

development, could be written by one and the same person” (Hirvi, 1996, 42). This consensus could be characterised as *silent*, based on antipathy rather than conscious and articulated principles. The struggle for cultural capital, and hence for educational and social position, did not vanish, however (Rinne & Vuorio-Lehti, 1996, 161).

The state-centred system of education was questioned during the 1980s and 1990s, largely due to the economic recession of the 1990s that forced a rethink of public governance, and to increasing international influences. The omnipotence of central management came to an end at the end of the 1980s, to be replaced with a new myth promising higher efficiency, in other words more economical and productive services, through the decentralisation of authority to local management and schools (CR, 1996, 4, 23). The aspiration was to increase the quality of education by “increasing flexibility and choice” and introducing new evaluation mechanisms. The educational-policy documents of the 1990s repeated time after time the strong belief in progress through the continuous development of education (Ministry of Education, 1995, 8; CR, 1996, 55, 82–85, 106–107). Whereas it was previously believed that the goals of education could be achieved through adherence to strict norms, it was now considered necessary to set national core goals and to evaluate the achievements afterwards.

The changes in education were part of a general wave of decentralisation and deregulation in Finland and internationally. The process started in the late 1980s with the Free Municipality Experiment, which gave local authorities in certain municipalities more freedom to make independent decisions about their own organisation. In the end, the Act on Central Government Transfers to Local Government (Law 707/1992) and the Local Government Act (Law 365/1995) radically increased local autonomy and strengthened the judicial position of the municipalities. The new state-subsidy system granted funding according to annual calculations per pupil, lesson or other unit, thereby liberating the municipalities from the former detailed ‘ear-marked money’ budgeting through the introduction of lump-sum budgeting for schooling. In general, municipal practices such as budgeting, accounting and the auditing of administration and finances were changed to accord with the New Public Management (NPM) doctrine (see e.g., Haveri, 2000, 36–38).

The economic recession of the mid-1990s was exploited to legitimise continuing cuts in the education sector. The Ministry of Education’s budget was cut by 13 per cent during the 1990s: between 1990 and 1994 expenditure for comprehensive schooling was cut by 15 per cent, for senior-secondary schools by 25 per cent, and for vocational institutions by 23 per cent. Enrolment increased, however: in senior-secondary schools by 22 per cent and in vocational institutions by 28 per cent (Hirvi, 1996, 65). The increasing class sizes and cuts in remedial teaching were among the results of the cost-cutting programmes on the school level. Remedial teaching was reduced by about 43 per cent between 1991 and 1994 (Jakku-Sihvonen & Lindström, 1996, 24). There was only a

4 per cent decrease in expenditure on special education between 1988 and 1995, but this hides the 63 per cent collapse of school and classroom special education for socially maladjusted pupils, who now find themselves in other special-education settings (Virtanen & Ratilainen, 1996, 57; cf. Hirvi, 1996, 68).

Quite apart from the recession, a totally unexpected event was the Finnish success in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) studies. Finland used to do well in traditional school-performance assessments such as IEA, but was never a top performer. It is curious and also symptomatic that nobody in Finland predicted the Finnish success before the publication of the PISA studies, and not afterwards either with the benefit of hindsight. Until the 2000s, the great majority of both specialists and laymen thought that *Peruskoulu* worked reasonably well on a good average level, as evidenced in various international school-attainment comparisons. As far as parents, the elite and the media were concerned, it was generally considered good enough, but far from excellent.

These structural changes, the creation of *Peruskoulu* and its change in governance under the NPM reform, created the space in which different policymaking possibilities were considered relevant. In the case of basic education it is worth mentioning the attempt of Juho Saari, an influential Finnish sociologist, to explain the relative success of the so-called Finnish model. He attributed it, first, to the institutions established in the 1970s and 1980s on the one hand, and to the reforms of the 1990s and later on the other. Second, the changes were focused on ideas and interests rather than on the institutional basis of public-finance structures. Finally, the international competitiveness that dominated official discourse did not achieve such an indisputable position in political praxis. He concludes:

The decision-based expansive welfare state and its institutional structure, which existed before the recession of the 1990s, seem to be one central explanation of Finland's success. [. . .] In favour of the Finnish model, it is possible to state that its present institutional structure in itself has been rather adaptable.

(Saari, 2006, 328, 336; translation ours)

One might conclude that the high belief in schooling resulted from the contingent conjunction of its late expansion, the late modernisation of the occupational structure and the late construction of the welfare state. In fact, eminent Finnish sociologist of education Ari Antikainen (1990) was referring to the very same phenomena when he wrote that the overall rise in student enrolment brought increasing numbers of students from the lower classes, even though their proportion of the total number remained low. This could have been “a shared experience among the common people”, who also had their own experience of education as a real resource in the rapid transformation of Finnish society, not least as a channel of migration from rural areas and agriculture to the cities in the period of the ‘Great Migration’ in 1960–1975.

Middle-class liberalist equity meets factory- and farmland-based equality

The changes in educational policy during the 1990s were linked to changes in the cross-national environment of action on the one hand, and in Finnish politics on the other, which in combination had an epoch-changing impact on the kind of possibilities that were opened up in the political debate. As reported in recent research, a large number of interviewees within the education-policy elite thought that increasing international competition required added investments in the education of the gifted. The rhetoric of “nurturing the gifted” became popular in Finnish school administration – meaning that the comprehensive system had played its part, in other words had raised the educational level of the entire nation, and now it was time to invest in the best.¹

And perhaps this international development is another thing, I mean that we saw the economic competitiveness of Finland as the most important thing, and that in the internationalising world Finland couldn't get by with the masses, but that we should give the gifted a chance to get ahead according to their abilities. That's it, really, that we should stop holding the best back but support them, too.

(EGSIE interview, 1998)

Policymakers cited globalisation and internationalism in general, either as abstract forces or in connection with the EU, as axiomatic sources of change in educational policy: no other reasons were needed. The only interviewee from outside the field expressed a very interesting view on the influence of the international environment. In his opinion, the strength of the Nordic welfare state was that it offered the possibility of a third way between the two big world systems: socialism and capitalism. Now that socialism was buried, at least on the national level in Europe, the third way was no longer needed, but the Nordic welfare states were in difficulties emanating from the market forces of capitalism, and under tremendous pressure to dismantle their structures. In this sense, the age of the welfare state was over (Rinne, Kivirauma & Hirvenoja, 2001):

Now we're getting into some really big questions. . . . [I]f we think about the competition of two world systems, socialism and capitalism, well then there was the third way, and this third way was clearly, you know, a kind of social-democratic, Nordic model. Now the competition is over. And so we, aah, no longer need to, you know, make our way between the two . . .

The political initiative shifted clearly to the Right during the late 1980s and 1990s, the conservative National Coalition Party assuming leading governmental responsibility in 1987 after a long period on the sidelines. Changes affecting the growing interest in education-evaluation policies were realised in the context of the changing political atmosphere and the deep economic recession of

1991–93. Prime Minister Harri Holkeri's Right–Left coalition cabinet of 1987 aimed to bring about an essential change in Finnish politics. As far as education was concerned, this marked the end of the deal between the Central and Social Democratic parties in the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) and the National Board of Education (NBE), and the Right wing was set to dominate state educational discourse. The post of Minister of Education also fell to Right-wing politicians for more than a decade.

Redefining equality in the frames of path dependencies

To mark the beginning of the new era in 1987, Prime Minister Holkeri gave an historic address in which he redefined the central concept of Finnish education policy thus far: people were different in terms of capacity, and equality meant the right of every pupil to receive education that corresponded to his/her prerequisites and expectations rather than the delivery of universal *Bildung* for everybody regardless of socio-cultural background. It is clear that this definition refers to equity rather than equality. It is symptomatic of the symbolic power of equality in Finnish educational discourse that there is no analogous concept for equity, even though it would be easy to find one (*oikeus, oikeudenmukaisuus, reiluus*).

Thus the concept of equality is used in two potentially contradictory ways, which were connected in a curious way in the first document published by the newly established Educational Evaluation Council:

The economic and social welfare of Finnish society is based on an egalitarian public system of schooling. Its mission is to guarantee for every citizen *both* educational opportunities of good quality regardless of his/her sex, dwelling place, age, mother tongue and economic position [equality] *and* the right to tuition accordant with his/her capabilities and special needs and his/her self-development [equity].

(FEEC, 2004, 15; translation ours and emphasis added)

One could claim that this formulation crystallises one of the strengths of Finnish basic-education policy: Red-Soil (social-democratic and agrarian parties) equality and market-liberalist (usually conservative) equity are perceived as complementary rather than antagonistic.

The introduction of equity as a concept was not coherent with the comprehensive school that was built in the 1960s–1980s. In accordance with the extreme interpretation of the equity discourse, representing a noisy minority, the Finnish school system was described as a catastrophe. The influential and powerful CIE, which had been fiercely critical of *Peruskoulu* since the early 1980s, organised an autumn seminar at Finlandia Hall, one of Helsinki's main conference venues, just two weeks before the publication of the first PISA 2000 report on 24 November 2001.² Key players from business and industry once again criticised Finnish comprehensive schooling for its mediocrity and

ineffectiveness, with reference to international evaluations of its quality and efficiency. This time they argued in particular for more competition and better conditions for private schools. When the first PISA report was published on 7 December 2001 the CIE became completely mute about *Peruskoulu*.

What ran contrary to the critical CIE campaign was that *Peruskoulu* apparently enjoyed the trust of the general public as well as of the political and even economic elite, which is not the case in many countries. Before the first PISA reports came out, the leading business magazine in Finland (*Talouselämä* 3/2001) published a cover-page article on comprehensive schools, advocating the need for more resources to protect the Finnish school system from serious deterioration in quality. Similarly, one of Finland's leading periodicals (*Suomen Kuvalehti* 34/2001) made clear in its cover-page article entitled "On the Strong Pupil's Terms" that recent market- and competition-oriented school reforms had resulted in "increasing differences, leaving the weak in the shadow of and in competition with the well-off."

However, the discourse of the relationship between education and individuals also changed a lot in the 1990s. From the end of the 1960s until the end of the 1980s it implied that the main duty of education was to produce citizens for the benefit of society. This changed in the 1990s, emphasising the "production of services that take into account citizens' needs" (CR, 1996, 4, 23, 55). In sum, it now seemed that education existed to serve the citizen, whereas earlier individuals were educated as citizens to serve society. The state-education discourse in the legislation of 1999 verifies this position of citizens in relation to society in the form of various individual "rights" concerning education (Rinne et al., 50).

Finnish decision makers in the field of educational policy were unanimous in standing behind the change: in our research, not one of them questioned its justification on the grounds of principle. The feeling that there was no alternative also came out strongly in the interviews. The present age, and in particular globalisation, increasing competition, the rise in the educational level of the population and the emphasis on individuality, demanded this type of educational policy, even in Finland.

One indication of the political change, according to many of the state-level interviewees, was the emphasis on the value of the individual, as opposed to the former idea of collective equality: the value of the individual as a social actor had increased, which was reflected in the educational policy. The respondents felt that highly educated citizens would no longer tolerate governance from above, but would insist on making their own educational decisions. Changes in policy were also explained as changes in general cycles, ideological values, attitudes and the general atmosphere, all of which had become individual-centred.

Politicking: more choice within the Peruskoulu framework

The emphasis in the education politics of the 1990s was to increase 'free choice' at every level. The development plans at the beginning of the decade referred to increasing the choice between subjects as well as in the number of subjects

studied at comprehensive school. One of the most intensely discussed new practices introduced during the 1990s, however, was that of free parental choice of school at the comprehensive level. There had been no mention of school choice in the discourse of Finnish state education since the introduction of the comprehensive school in the 1960s and 1970s: school enrolment was defined in accordance with school districts or intake areas. The role of parents was rarely mentioned before the 1990s, and then mostly only as supporting the work to be done at school. Contrary to this tradition, pupils and parents came to be seen as active and rational subjects and choice makers.

Following an amendment to the law in the early 1990s, the principle of separate school districts, which dated from 1898, was abolished, making it possible for an entire city to function as one school district. Thus, the old principle of the neighbourhood school was threatened (Ahonen, 2001, 167). The economic recession of the early 1990s changed the course of educational policy, and in 1996 the multi-party 'Parliamentary Committee on Total Reform of the School Laws' (1995–97) presented a bill that emphasised the 'viewpoint of social solidarity'. The new Basic Education Act (1999) confirmed parental free choice throughout the country, but the municipalities retained the right of restriction in a provision stating that such a choice must not supersede the right of other children to attend the school designated by the municipal authorities. The parliamentary education commission formulated this as the right to attend one's neighbourhood school (Basic Education Act, 172–173, 175). In other words, schools were able to enrol 'outsiders' only if there was room after accommodating 'local pupils'.

Finland has also remained on the sidelines with respect to privatisation. The Basic Education Act rejected the use of private pedagogical services at the comprehensive-school level and limited the freedom to establish private schools. Nonetheless, private comprehensive schools have been operating with special permission from the government for quite some time, although very few in number.³ It is worth noting that there have been, and still are, political aspirations in this direction. The idea of introducing private school services and the freedom to establish private comprehensive schools was rejected in the parliamentary debate during the preparation of the Basic Education Act (Ahonen, 2001, 173).

The creation of quasi-markets for schooling is still rather rare in Finland, although the power of the market was apparent in Piia Seppänen's research (2001, 2003, 2006) in three large cities from the early 2000s on the flows resulting from the exercising of school choice among pupils transferring to the upper level of comprehensive school (seventh grade). Parents ranked between 20 and 40 per cent of the local comprehensive schools in these cities as "strongly rejected" (Seppänen, 2003). Pupils in a third or even half of these schools requested a transfer. On the other hand, two of the three cities had "extremely popular" schools, situated in such small districts that they took in as many as 75 per cent of their pupils from the outside. The most popular schools

were older grammar schools in the city centre, whereas the unpopular ones were lower-secondary schools built in the suburbs in the 1970s (Seppänen, 2001). There was also a clear tendency for parents from upper-level social strata, compared with working-class parents, to choose another school.

Despite the growing demands for competition and the developing equity-oriented approach to the functions of schooling, the comprehensive system has succeeded in fulfilling the main functions of the egalitarian system. The key here is the tendency to accept compromise and hybrid solutions: neither the 'egalitarians' nor the 'equitarians' have been able to achieve political hegemony, rather being forced into cooperation. What is possibly the strongest evidence of this was the setting up of the Educational Evaluation Council (see above, FEEC, 2004, 15) in which both social and individual equality were canonised as missions of *Peruskoulu*.

Equality enhanced by the recession and PISA

During the Second Republic the political constellations in Finland supported the building of an egalitarian and regional education system. The Third Republic has seen the increasing capitalisation of the political possibilities for introducing more market-driven solutions. In fact, in line with the idea of politicking in the space provided by historical contingencies, one could sum up some of the historical trajectories of Finnish education policy by merely looking at the political colour of the Secretaries of State for Education in the post-war era (Figure 3.3). A member of the Agrarian or Social Democratic party occupied the position during the period of growth and regional policy in the 1950s until the 1970s. A Conservative Secretary of State implemented radical changes during the economic depression, whereas a Social Democrat was in the office for the highest number of days during the 2000s and 2010s. The period of 2000–2015 was rather calm in terms of education policy, at least partly because of the PISA success. The calm ended when a new government took office in 2015, but further analysis is beyond the scope of this book given the recency of the events.

The changing coalitions in Finnish governance and governments affected the field of education, generally reflecting the stronger position of conservatives and their policies. The long period of co-operation in educational policy on the authority level between the Social Democrats and the Centre Party ended in 1991 when Dr. Vilho Hirvi, representing the Conservative Party, became the head of the NBE. It marked the end of a 20-year tradition of having a working-class representative from the Social Democrat Party heading the NBE and a representative of the agrarian population from the Centre Party as head of the Ministry of Education. Further confirming this historical change, Hirvi was elected Chief Secretary at the Ministry of Education in 1995, succeeding Jaakko Numminen (Centre Party), who held the post for 30 years. Thus Hirvi secured his permanent position as the keynote speaker in the field and as the

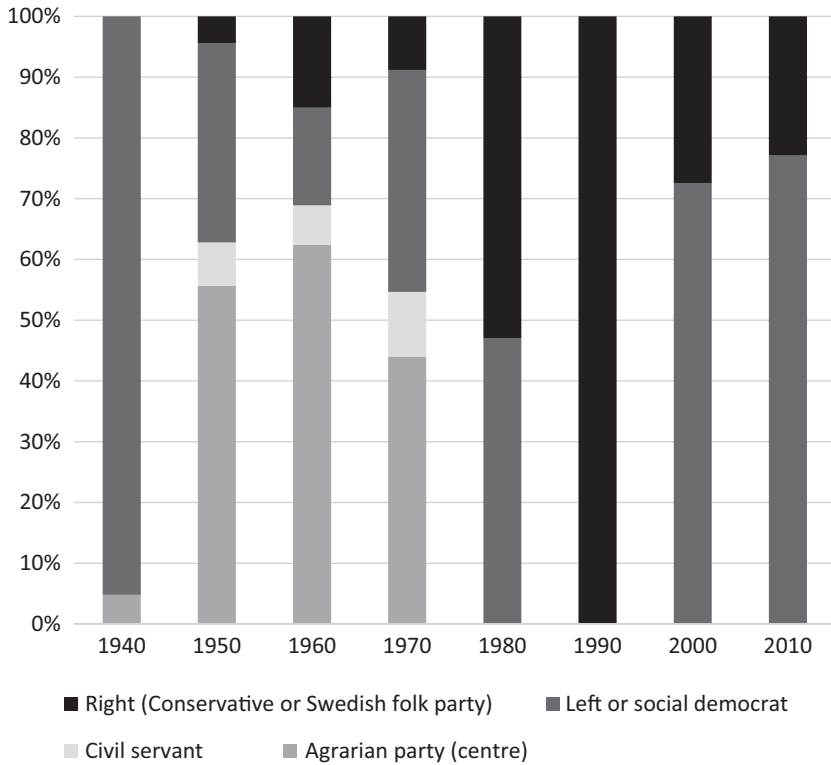


Figure 3.3 Percentage of days in office of Secretaries of State for Education in the post-war era (1944–2015)

leading officer of Finnish educational policy. His position was further strengthened by the fact that later Ministers of Education were conservatives (Riitta Uosukainen, Olli-Pekka Heinonen).

According to the declaration of the new era, the *Proposal of the NBE for a Structural Programme of Education*, the development of the Finnish comprehensive school would be characterised by concepts such as ‘decentralised and consumer-based accountability’, ‘results-based public funding’ and ‘self-responsible individual learning’.

The essential political shift to the right was also reflected in Finnish educational policymaking during the following years. The leftist parties had no say in education policy in terms of holding high positions in the field. Since the Holkeri Government of 1987, the only time a Social Democrat occupied the post of Minister of Education was in 1999. Most of the non-Right politicians

we interviewed referred to this invasion of the Right as one of the most significant factors behind the prevailing educational policy. The same interviewees were ready to admit, however, that there was surprisingly extensive political consensus in favour of the reform, and a feeling that there was no real alternative.

The Social Democratic ex-chair of the National Board of Education characterised the realised policy pertinently as a '*hidden education policy*', which brought about a major change in small and gradual steps involving shifts in funding, curriculum planning and the definition of school districts, none of which were taken explicitly. It is also curious that none of the politicians we interviewed who supported the new education policy of the 1990s was willing to characterise it as 'neo-liberal'. Instead they used paraphrases such as 'the renaissance of individualism', 'the ethos of freedom and free choice', 'market-based thinking', 'liberal optimism', 'dynamism' and 'educational policy that emphasises the student's responsibility'. It seemed important to articulate the change in Finnish educational politics as a gradual, consensual shift to the Right, without openly using neo-liberalist vocabulary. Among the major changes that were brought about on the primary and secondary levels during the 1990s, the following four stand out: the introduction of free school choice, the build-up of the extensive evaluation system, the imposition of budget cuts and the moving of the decision-making power to the organiser of schooling, i.e., the municipalities.

Very few education officials and politicians supported the publication of ranking lists or the transparent comparison of schools in terms of average performance indicators. The Education Committee of the CIE was virtually the only body openly to back English-type league tables and national testing (CIE, 1990). The Standing Committee for Education and Culture of the Parliament of Finland stated first in 1998 and then again in 2004:

The publicity concerns only the main results of evaluations. The purpose of the new Basic Education Act is not to publish information directly linked to an individual school or teacher. Publishing the evaluation results cannot in any case lead to the ranking of schools or the categorisation of schools, teachers or pupils as weak or good on unfair grounds.

(CEC, 1998; translation ours)

This stand against educational league tables was tested in court in two separate appeals in 2000 and 2003 in two cities, Turku and Vantaa. The appeals were made to the regional administrative courts following the decision of the two municipal education authorities not to publish school-specific information on comprehensive schools. The focus of the appeal in both cases was on school-specific performance indicators that, it was argued, parents needed in order to make their school-choice decisions. In its final decision in 2005 the Supreme Administrative Court ordered the municipal educational authority to hand over the school-specific evaluation results to the appealing party. Our

interviewees gave some vivid descriptions of the shock, on both the central and the municipal level, caused by this “horrifying decision.” Despite the 2005 court order, however, the Finnish media only published the school-specific evaluation results related to the Vantaa case. The silence here was meaningful, and probably conveyed something about the Finnish ethos concerning league tables and school-specific evaluation results in general. We were told informally that the municipalities were in strong agreement about not evaluating schools in such a way that the results could be used to produce ranking lists.

Our interviewee⁴ from the NBE compared the reception of marketing discourse in schools and other public services:

The schools and other educational institutions were clearly the stickiest of all. And the discussion was about this terminology, for example this issue of customership: who is the customer of the school? And that was very foreign to the school people.

(EGSIE interview, 1998)

Antipathy towards ranking lists has been clearly articulated (see Chapter 4 for more details). It is symptomatic that a Conservative Minister of Education in 2009 described them as ‘purposeless’, even for upper-secondary schools. The informal consensus on the municipal level not to analyse information on schools in a way that would enable the results to be used to produce ranking lists is a good example here. On the national level, the sample-based thematic studies on learning achievements implemented by the NBE could be seen as a genuine element of a Finnish quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) model. One could say that this innovation essentially counteracted both external and internal pressure in favour of national testing, and thereby also against ranking lists. Paradoxically, what may have strengthened this antipathy to ranking was bureaucratic tradition (see e.g., Tiihonen, 2004; Pekonen, 1995, 2005), according to which administrative innovations should support the system and its development rather than opening it up or informing citizens about it.

Even though free school choice (see Chapter 5 for more details) has been an option for families in bigger cities since the mid-1990s, its effects have been rather moderate, with the two exceptions of Turku and Helsinki. However, as the former and contemporary capitals of Finland, respectively, they should be taken seriously. Social selection, divergence and segregation in schools are on the increase, and there is no reason to assume that such tendencies will weaken in a late-modern society such as Finland. The prevailing impression seems to be that we are living in a decisive period in terms of division and inequality among schools. There is a genuine call for decisive and wise politics, and the tendency is clearly towards the Turku and Helsinki models.

Conclusion: buffering and embedded egalitarianism

Three special Finnish features should be taken into account in explaining the kind of embedded egalitarianism that is connected with a strong belief in schooling. First, three modernisation trends that took hold successively in most countries reached Finland, although very late on the European scale, during the 1960s: the expansion of popular education, industrialisation and the construction of the welfare state. This rare conjunction created a strong collective experience of causality with regard to progress, informal education and simultaneous social advancement, which clearly lay behind the exceptionally strong Finnish belief in schooling as the vehicle for social ascent.

Second, the late but rapid move from an agricultural to a post-industrial society may explain the exceptional strength of social-democratic/agrarian egalitarianism. It seems plausible, however, that this egalitarianism would not have withstood the challenge of market-liberalism if two contingent events had not provided a buffer: the revival of trust in the egalitarian *Peruskoulu* among the middle classes during the deep recession of 1991–93, and the PISA success since 2001, which no Finnish educationalists predicted.

Third, even though Finnish educationalists are traditionally open to pedagogical influences, especially from the Anglo-American world, there is still ample evidence of a stubborn sense of national exclusivity, especially in the context of egalitarianism. One could also say that *Peruskoulu* basked in its self-confident and visionary but sustainable leadership from the 1960s until the mid-1990s. Thus far, embedded egalitarianism has had the edge over travelling market-liberalism, largely due to its contingent buffering not least from the PISA success. The past two decades without ‘sustainable leadership’ has corroded its buoyancy, however.

The dynamics in the policymaking field has fluctuated between the social-democratic/agrarian tradition of equality and the market-liberal equity that emerged in Finland during the late 1980s. This development led to a reformulation of the politics of education. The pouring in of market-liberalist reforms was supported through making the national institutions more receptive to influences. The institutions created in the 1970s appeared rather resilient, however, but also reflective. The main institutional vehicle for change, free school choice, has gained momentum only recently. The dynamics created in interaction between these two discursive formations could be characterised as *embedded egalitarianism buffering* against the travelling policies of market-liberalism.

Ever since the mid-1990s, when the combined effects of economic stringency, New Public Management, and conservative governments and Secretaries of State for Education started to fuel the change in direction to an equity-oriented education system with the potential of attracting more interest from industry, contingent events have legitimised the old system. Indeed, embedded egalitarianism has had the edge over travelling market-liberalism, largely on account of its contingent buffering not least from the PISA success.

Notes

- 1 All these interview citations are from the Education Governance and Social Inclusion and Exclusion (EGSIE) study, the details of which can be found in Rinne et al. (2001).
- 2 Curiously enough, it is hard to find references to this seminar on the Internet, even though President Martti Ahtisaari was present. It seems to have disappeared from history (cf. Uusikylä, 2003, 54).
- 3 There were 94 private schools in Finland in 2012, covering 3 per cent of pupils at the comprehensive level (Kumpulainen, 2014, 63).
- 4 This interview is from the FabQ study (“Fabricating Quality in European Education”) conducted in 2007.

Dynamics in governance

The peculiarities in the governance of Finnish basic education are best understood in light of the emergence of *quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) as a policy* in the early 1990s. The form of governance changed in line with this policy thread, becoming one of the most centralised in Europe during the 1990s after being among the least centralised. Something characterised as a ‘culture of trust’ emerged in the 1990s, coincident with radical municipal and school autonomy and the soft implementation of evaluation. Curiously enough, all this was partly conscious, and partly attributable to something that with hindsight could be called lucky constellations. The public authorities, on both state and local levels, were the key actors.

Our aim in this chapter is to illustrate the particularities of the Finnish QAE model – as opposed to the supranational mainstream change in education politics – and then to trace the historical trajectory. In the first section we depict radical decentralisation as the structural framework for action among administrators and officials in both governmental and non-governmental institutions on both national and local levels. The second section describes the developments of the main resource in the field, the curious culture of trust. Finally, we show how these situations and possibilities are capitalised on in the governance of basic education.

From strict centralisation towards New Public Management and decentralisation

The tradition of strong centralisation is a significant feature of Finnish administrative culture, with its historical roots in the periods under the rule of the Swedish Crown (1249–1809) and the Russian Tsar (1809–1917). This relation between a strong state and a weak civil society prevailed for centuries and continued during the later nation- and state-building processes in independent Finland. Civic movements and the state have evolved since the nineteenth century, working together towards common aims rather than as rivals in opposing positions (Alapuro & Stenius, 1987). The Nordic state-centred tradition with certain Eastern flavours continues to dominate Finnish administrative culture (Pekonen, 1995, 2005; Tiihonen, 2004; Simola, 2015, 48–66).

It was largely accepted in the 1960s that the comprehensive-school system had to be implemented with strong top-down government. One of the interviewees from the FabQ project (*Fabricating Quality in European Education*; see Ozga et al., 2011) described the birth of the comprehensive school as a “reform implementation based on multi-level planning”, and another characterised the educational legislation of those years as a “handbook of good school keeping”, which had a tendency to expand (Simola et al., 2009). The piles of circulars, statutes and decrees mushroomed during the 1970s and 1980s, all aimed at regulating schooling practices from curriculum implementation to schoolyard construction. The army of inspectors was there to ensure that the regulations were obeyed. Finnish basic schooling was subjected to two decades of extremely bureaucratic, norm-driven and top-down governance. In general, the implementation of comprehensive schooling was in accordance with the planning optimism of the 1960s and 1970s.

The 1960s and 1970s brought remarkable changes in the architecture, functions and procedures of Finnish central administration. The state’s sphere of operations expanded in the fields of education, healthcare and social insurance, for example. The rapid growth in the number of civil servants and administrative bodies indicated a completely new phase of national development (Varjo, 2007). Alongside these quantitative changes, conceptions of how the state could and should be governed were being developed. Pertti Alasuutari (1996, 108) describes Finland between the Second World War and its membership in the European Union in 1995 as a *planning economy*, convinced that “social problems could be solved best by ‘scientific’ planning and organising. Solutions to problems concerning the national economy or the functionality of state administration were found solely through better planning.”

In accordance with planning-economy logic, national education policies were to be enacted and regulated through strict and detailed *legislation*, a *state-subsidy system* and a *national core curriculum*. The implementation was assigned to the Ministry of Education and the National Board of Education on the national level, and regional state administrative agencies and municipal education authorities on the local level. It is worth noting that all of these mechanisms were defined in terms of action planned at the beginning of the process in question (*ex ante*; Lane, 2000). Thus, all *ex post* measurements were aimed at evaluating the implementation (Varjo, Simola & Rinne, 2016).

The major school reforms of the 1970s were planned and implemented in relative isolation. It was commonly considered that normative and detailed legislation was necessary – basically to guarantee equality in different parts of the country. Legislation defined all the educational services to which a citizen was entitled, as well as how they should be provided. For example, subjects, curricula, teachers’ qualification requirements, school books, the rights and duties of students and staff and the architecture and procedures of local school administration were all prescribed in laws, decrees and normative decisions on the central administrative level. Centralised norm steering was finalised with a

procedure that required local education authorities to subordinate their decisions in advance to regional state administrative agencies or the National Board of Education (Varjo, 2007, 58).

In view of Finland's geopolitical position after the Second World War, its special relationship with the neighbouring Soviet Union framed all of its international cooperation until the collapse of the socialist camp in Europe in the early 1990s. The major international cooperative efforts in official Finnish education policy, realised by the Ministry of Education and the National Board of Education, were directed, first, to other Nordic countries and second to UNESCO. Finland was the last of the Nordic countries to join the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which it did in 1969, although it took several more years before its participation went beyond diplomatic representation.

The belief in central governance was abandoned during the 1980s. The heavily centralised planning and steering system in education, which had been under construction for decades and reached its peak during the comprehensive-school reform, was dismantled in 1988 through a government resolution to reform the entire management of the state. The former sector-based planning systems, with their highly detailed and focused steering regulations, were all rapidly brushed aside. Among the many defects of the former sector planning that were listed were its diversity, its unsuitable timetables, the poor implementation of state planning, the bureaucracy, the waste of time, and the futility of detailed and inflexible regulations (Kivinen et al., 1995; Rinne et al., 2000).

The omnipotence of central management gave way to a brand new doctrine and a promise of better efficiency – in other words, more economical and productive services – through the decentralisation of power to the local education authorities (CR, 1996, 4, 23). The intention was to increase the quality of education by “increasing flexibility and choice” and introducing new evaluation mechanisms (Ministry of Education, 1990). The education-policy documents of the 1990s repeated, time after time, the strong belief in progress through continuous development (CR, 1996, 55, 82–85, 106–107; Ministry of Education, 1996). Whereas previously it was believed that the goals could be achieved via strict norm steering and careful implementation, it was now commonly assumed by public authorities on the central level that it was necessary to set national core targets and evaluate the end results *ex post*.

The new administrative landscape of the early 1990s differed radically from the old one: in general, norm steering was replaced with management by results, and information management and evaluation (Laukkanen, 1997, 1998). The new Director General of the National Board of Education put it in a nutshell:

Genuine management by results in the educational sector has two fundamental elements: first, a steering unit that sets the goals and gives resources, and second, a level that creates the products and services, i.e., the schools. [. . .] The national curriculum framework sets the central objectives for

learning and education that define the teaching objectives for obligatory, optional and elective subjects, and so on. The municipal or school-based curriculum, in turn, expresses how these objectives are to be achieved. [...] The evaluation of efficiency means assessing how the main idea and the main objectives in the area in question have been realised.

(Hirvi, 1991; translation ours)

Consequently, by the early 1990s all traditional forms of control over the teacher's work were eliminated, including school inspections, a detailed national curriculum framework, officially approved teaching materials, weekly timetables based on the subjects taught, and class diaries in which the teacher recorded what was taught in each lesson. The only remaining control mechanism was the minimum number of lessons to be taught in each subject in each school, and the national curriculum framework (Simola, 1995). The intention was to replace all traditional means of control with QAE systems, executed by central and municipal authorities. In this respect it could be argued that, at least in terms of rhetoric, Finland eagerly followed supranational trends – like a “model pupil” (Rinne, 2006).

The recession of 1991–1993 also had an unanticipated and creative effect on governance in the form of a bifurcation (cf. Kauko, 2014). It is widely accepted in retrospect among the political and economic elites that without shifting decision making to the local level, the municipalities could not have been required to cut down spending as much as they did during the recession (Simola, Rinne & Kivirauma, 2001). Thus the new decentralised and deregulated mode of governance was moulded to comply with the economic principles of savings and cutbacks. Although the economic crisis cannot be considered the only reason for the emergence of the new rationality, it was like a “crash course for creating a new world” (Kantola, 2002, 148). The 1992 Central Government Acts (Law 707/1992) and the 1995 Local Government Act (Law 365/1995) radically increased local autonomy and strengthened the judicial position of the municipalities.

Changes in educational legislation, financing and governance were among the more extensive developments in Finnish administration during the 1990s, according to the interviews carried out in connection with the EGSIE (*Education Governance and Social Integration and Exclusion*) project (see Simola, Rinne & Kivirauma, 2001). Measures to strengthen local decision-making capacity were taken in other sectors of social policy as well. The reorganisation of the relationship between central government and municipal financing, in other words the state subsidy system, was a primary factor in initiating these changes in 1993. In addition to changing the basis on which state subsidies to the municipalities were calculated, it gave local authorities more freedom to decide how to use the funds. Whereas the money that local treasuries received from the state was previously clearly earmarked for each administrative sector, the municipalities were now free to allocate it within their area of jurisdiction as they saw fit.

The municipality was free to decide, for example, to save education expenses through the laying off of teachers.

Behind this massive wave of decentralisation and deregulation seemed to be the collapse of the previous strong belief in centralised planning and untenable centralised governance. There was unanimity among all the EGSIE interviewees and a strong belief in the superiority of local decision making compared with the older, strictly centralised model. They were clearly of the opinion that expertise rested in the municipalities and in the schools and that it could only be brought out if the decision-making power remained on the local level. On this level the change meant an almost complete break with the earlier government-based steering and inspection system, or as one administrator responsible for the educational functions of a large municipality stated in unequivocal terms: "To put it bluntly, the government officials no longer bother us." The remarks of these state-level EGSIE interviewees indicate a strong belief in the superiority of local decision making (Simola, Rinne & Kivirauma, 2001).

Evaluation was seen as an essential tool of quality development in this new discourse of educational governance. The conviction in the 1990s was that the only way to achieve educational goals was through the setting of core national goals, evaluating achievements in the form of subsequent results and directing educational institutions to compete with one another. According to this rhetoric, the Finnish *Planning State* had turned into an *Evaluative State* (see Neave, 1998), attempting to implement educational policy through management by results. As the Secretary General of the Ministry of Education put it, evaluation was seen as a pivotal element in the new steering system because it "replaces the tasks of the old normative steering, control and inspection system" (Hirvi, 1996, 93).

Corporate managerialism has been defined as a "rational output-oriented, plan-based and management-led view of organisational reform" (Sinclair, 1989, 389). Patrick Weller and Colleen Lewis (1989, 1) claim that managing for results best encapsulates the essence of it. According to Anna Yeteman (1987, 341), it is about "doing more with less" (efficiency), "focusing on outcomes and results" (effectiveness) and "managing change better." In the same spirit, the OECD (1995, 8) promoted the creation of a "performance-oriented" and "less centralised" public sector with the following characteristics: first, a focus on results, efficiency and effectiveness; second, decentralised management environments; third, flexibility to explore alternatives to the public provision of services; fourth, the establishment of productivity targets and a competitive environment within public-sector organisations; and finally, the strengthening of strategic capacities at the centre of the organisation (Taylor et al., 1997, 84.).

It is not an overstatement to suggest that managerialism also heralded a revolutionary change in the educational discourse and governance practices of the Finnish state, exemplified as "a distinction made between policy making and implementation, greater latitude allowed to local-level agents and an emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness" (Laukkanen, 1997, 406–407). According to

this statement, the local level – i.e., the municipality, but also the school if the municipal authorities so decide – has full autonomy not only in making decisions but also in coming up with ideas about the issues that are at stake in education. By definition, the local level is an autonomous actor in the educational field. This may have been one dimension of the new governance, but it also implied so-called “steering at a distance”, in that the usual hierarchical forms of control were rejected in favour of institutional autonomy and self-management, and replaced with “*ex post* corrections” made on the basis of the “quality of outcomes”, for example. In extreme cases, however, this kind of autonomy was about managing reduced funding in the education sector more than anything else: “asking those being cut to cut themselves” (Ball, 1993, 77; see Taylor et al., 1997, 84).

Punctuated trust

The 1990s recession revitalised the Nordic egalitarian ethos. Sirkka Ahonen (2003), for example, argues that it changed the political atmosphere such that market liberalism lost ground to traditional Nordic welfare-state thinking in favour of the common comprehensive school. Ahonen’s argument was plausible at the time given the national plans to restructure the education system. The deep economic crisis brought to light the value of Universalist welfare institutions such as comprehensive schooling. It is no wonder that virtually no political actor in the late 1990s questioned the rhetoric of equality in education discourse (Grek et al., 2009, 12).

Another totally unexpected event was the Finnish success reported in the first Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) published first time in 2002. Finland had done reasonably well in early school performance assessments such as those conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) but was never near the top. It has been noted that pre-PISA international comparisons were of academic rather than administrative interest in Finland (Simola, 2009, 165). One might well wonder how PISA success in general – and the low variation between schools in particular – later came to reaffirm this egalitarian effect. It seems that international success increased the pressure to bring about change in municipal autonomy on the one hand, and buffered market-liberalist policies in Finnish comprehensive schooling on the other.

These contingent factors also had an impact on the governance of basic education. In an extraordinary and ambitious publication, three ex-officials of the National Board of Education sought explanations for the Finnish success in education surveys such as PISA, describing the new period of education policy since the early 1990s as “the era of trust” (Aho, Pitkänen & Sahlberg, 2006, 12):

The gradual shift toward trusting schools and teachers began in the 1980s, when the major phases of the initial [comprehensive school] reform

agenda were completely implemented and consolidated in the education system. In the early 1990s, the era of a trust-based culture formally began in Finland.

(Aho, Pitkänen & Sahlberg, 2006, 12, 132)

This comes across as rather high-handed and smug to anyone who is familiar with Finnish schooling. There is clear counter-evidence, too. An analysis of thousands of pages of state committee documents and memoranda published between the 1860s and the 1990s, and since the implementation of the Comprehensive School Reform in the 1970s, revealed only one exception in which classroom teachers were *not* seen as the very obstacles to developing education and thus as the objects *par excellence* of the reform (Simola, 1995).

It is worth noting (as mentioned in Chapter 3 above) that *Peruskoulu* apparently enjoyed the trust of the general public and also of the political and even economic elite. Some essential changes in governance clearly reflect some kind of trust in Finnish schools and teachers on the part of central policymaking and administration. Three strategic decisions date back to the early 1990s, in other words well before the formal decision to move from *ex ante* to *ex post facto* control was legitimised in 1998. First, as mentioned above, all traditional forms of control over the teacher's work had been eliminated by the early 1990s. The second decision concerned the Finnish evaluation doctrine focusing on development rather than control, as discussed later in this chapter. It is evident that such a doctrine must be based on the assumption that teachers and schools are trustworthy rather than suspect. Finally, and as discussed in detail later in this chapter, it was also decided in the early 1990s that thematic, sample-based evaluations would suffice for quality assurance. National testing and the consequential ranking lists were thus rejected. The preconditions of this decision must include some kind of trust in Finnish schools and teachers.

One should not overstate the rhetoric of trust, however. The late Secretary General of the Ministry of Education, Vilho Hirvi (1996, 93), clearly expressed the basic idea: evaluation was a pivotal element in the new steering system because it "replaces the tasks of the old normative steering, control and inspection system." Thus it was not a question of freeing schools and teachers but rather of controlling them in a new way. The first attempt to apply a strong evaluation system came to light in the final draft of the 1994 Curriculum Framework, which included a detailed *Structural Model of Evaluation* emphasising effectiveness, efficiency and financial accountability, summed up in 33 issues to be evaluated. This was dropped from the final version, however (Simola, 1995, 297).

The Framework for Evaluating Educational Outcomes (NBE, 1995) was published a year later. It was a model for a national evaluation system based on the analysis of selected "evaluation objects", and again on the concepts of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Another concurrent document, *The Reform of Education Legislation* (ME, 1995), made the logic more than clear: evaluation of results

and outcomes is at the very core of the whole new legislation and steering system of education. The municipalities “shall evaluate constantly and systematically the realisation of the enacted goals and curricula” (ME, 1995, 54). Here, again, it seems that a certain amount of trust in schools and teachers was a necessary precondition for the new governance ideology and rhetoric.

It is also evident that the local autonomy that was realised during the 1990s was not fully intended. For a decade there had been talk of the need to decentralise and deregulate administration in the field of education. The recession of the early 1990s provided the opportunity, accompanied with an obligation to execute it without resistance: it was a widely shared belief that it was not possible to implement severe cuts and savings without moving the decision-making power to the municipal level. The day of reckoning came in the late 1990s when almost all traditional means of control were abolished and the municipal autonomy prevented the new means from working. The frustration seemed to be most evident among the interviewees for the *Fabricating Quality in European Education* (FabQ) project from the National Board of Education (NBE), whereas there appeared to be some kind of complacent acceptance of the predominant situation in the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (AFLRA). A high NBE official expressed the frustration (Simola et al., 2009):

[W]e have no jurisdiction to touch anything, we have no legislation about it, we have no mechanisms, we have nothing. This, in a nutshell, is our biggest weakness.

Despite the long tradition among the administration of mistrust in classroom teachers (Simola, 1995), there was at least one major exception on the state level: the Secretary General of the Ministry of Education, Vilho Hirvi (1991). He confirmed his trust in Finnish teachers rather convincingly in our interview in 1998. Significantly, he was more pragmatic in his reasoning: not only was it possible to trust, it was also necessary. Let us give the floor to Hirvi, who was one of the chief architects of change in Finnish schooling in the 1990s.

It was a kind of positive surprise that even during the huge economic cuts in the 1990s [during the recession of 1991–1993] the teaching staff of Finnish schools were in good standing. Isn't it amazing, that even if 18 per cent of your resources have disappeared, I have never seen such enthusiasm for development in schools as was evident at that time. I could say that this was a positive surprise, indeed. I have always had a lot of trust in teachers, but all these things have strengthened it tremendously. And isn't it the very basis that we trust these Finnish teachers and we must do so, I think. [. . .] When I was working as a teacher and official in Jyväskylä, I thought that if I ever had enough influence to give power to the municipalities and to teachers that would be my value. Then we had this possibility in the 90s

and I have since wondered if we were somehow crazy in this. But I don't think so, and I think we could then take some things back if it was necessary. [...] I have pondered deeply and frequently on the 90s when the new National Board of Education was established, and I came in and we got rid of the norms and other things very quickly. I have wondered if it was all too quick and if we did something wrong that cannot be fixed. But the more I think about it the more convinced I am that it had to be done. It was the basis, the belief that we had to trust these Finnish teachers. And I still think that is how it should be. [...] And for sure we could not have achieved these 18 per cent savings top-down, being smart here in the Ministry and taking 5 per cent from this and 7 per cent from that. It would have been the same as in the 70s, with strikes and so on. But when we gave the power of decision to them, it made it all possible.

(EGSIE interview, 1998)

There was also evidence of support for a more sceptical view of the culture of trust in the FabQ interviews. According to a long-standing official of the NBE, national policymakers trusted the municipal officials rather than the teachers: during the implementation of *Peruskoulu* in the 1970s, only one of the roughly 550 municipalities applied to extend the deadlines. Another experienced official remarked:

[W]e can more easily delegate to enlightened than to non-enlightened people, of course. Maybe the marching through the schooling society is just that, in a way. It is, however, impossible to say if the municipal decision makers and teachers of the 90s are much cleverer than those of the 70s. If we now claim that it's easier to delegate when there are such smart decision makers on the municipal level, we'll have problems after a decade when we start to tighten control again. So we'll be asked why the explanation we used no longer works and did we use it just for fun. Therefore, I would speak about political cycles when we want to delegate more rather than arguing that it is because the people there now are so smart.

(FabQ interview, 2007)

It seems clear that the culture of trust in Finnish schooling that arose in the 1990s was based on both political will and fortuitous constellations. When autonomy was granted, it was difficult to limit it, for at least two unanticipated reasons.

First, and because of the radical decentralisation and deregulation, two competing coalitions appeared in the national QAE field of compulsory schooling, neither of which had real normative power over the municipalities and schools. On the one hand the Ministry of Education and the National Board of Education saw QAE from the perspective of the education system and the legislation that governed it, while on the other hand the AFLRA and the Ministry of the

Interior – often accompanied by the Ministry of Finance – saw it in terms of municipal service production and legislation. Both of these coalitions sought to determine the discourse of evaluation in the context of education. It is clear that municipal autonomy was and remains in the interests of AFLRA, and all attempts to limit it would be a call for mobilisation.

Second, the international PISA success has stalled the pursuit of change in municipal autonomy. As one of our interviewees mentioned (see above), it is awkward to argue for less freedom for local schooling, given that municipal-level officials and teachers seem to deserve the trust, at least going by the PISA and other evaluations.

In sum, we might ask what kind of trust was established in the administration of basic schooling in Finland. Following the train of thought of the last quoted official, we suggest that the term *punctuated* may be the most descriptive and relevant. The trust was not predominantly planned or accidental: both sides of the contingency were in evidence, curiously enough.

Non-materialised QAE

The lack of mandatory national testing for the whole age cohort is one of the Finnish peculiarities. There was consensus among education politicians and officials on the state and local levels that thematic, sample-based evaluation would suffice for quality assurance. The conducting of national tests (for the whole age cohort) was unanimously considered too expensive, apart from the negative side effects that are familiar from Anglo-American experiences in particular (Simola et al., 2009). The National Board of Education's Framework for Evaluating Educational Outcomes (NBE, 1995) outlined a policy that proved to be consistent, defining sample-based national exams as the Finnish equivalent of general achievement tests. National examinations were seen as a categorical contrast to final exams, which were considered "problematic in many ways, so they won't be used in the common comprehensive school" (NBE, 1995, 37).

The NBE's Framework did not consider the use of final exams a method for producing data on the whole age cohort and all schools, and thus an opportunity to publish school-specific evaluation results and league tables. It is noteworthy that sample-based national testing – and the whole locked-in path dependence – was taken for granted, and no explicit reason for the opposition to final exams was given. The Framework failed to explain the reasoning behind the stated policy outlines in terms of given aims and was based on antipathy rather than conscious and articulated principles.

Creating the Finnish QAE model

In broad terms, the Finnish QAE model of comprehensive education assumed its current form in the late 1990s. The 1995 Local Government Act introduced a new organ: a municipal auditing committee, the task of which was to prepare

matters related to the administrative and financial audits for council decision, and to assess whether or not the operational and financial targets had been achieved (Law 365/1995). The essential role of evaluation in education was legalised in the Basic Education Act of 1999 (Law 628/1998). According to the law, the municipality (as a major education provider in Finland) shall evaluate the education it provides and its impact and take part in external evaluations of its operations conducted by the National Board of Education, later the Education Evaluation Council.

Thus, the current obligation to conduct local-level evaluation of comprehensive education is twofold: it is among the municipal auditing committee's duties as set out in the Local Government Act on the one hand, and in the Basic Education Act on the other. This rather unusual judicial arrangement has arguably had an impact on the mandates of actors, and on the ways in which evaluations are carried out in Finland.

New educational legislation was drafted by two consecutive working parties between 1993 and 1996 – during and after the depression of the 1990s. The second of these defined the purpose of evaluation as to produce information primarily for the education authorities (ME, 1996) – the administration being the apparent target group. Families needing information to help them make their school choices are referred to only incidentally:

The purpose of the evaluation system is to produce the information needed in local, regional and national development work and educational decision-making. Besides this, the evaluations should produce information on which students and their families can base their choices.

(ME, 1996, 85; translation ours)

A statutory evaluation system was considered necessary in the shift from norm steering to the control and evaluation of outcomes. The purpose of evaluation was “to support the development of education and improve conditions of learning” (ME, 1996, 85; translation ours). Guided by the Ministry of Education, the National Board of Education decided on the means by which to accomplish the evaluation procedures. The providers of education were obligated to take part in external evaluations of their operations. Moreover, the Act also required them to self-evaluate – but gave no practical guidelines.

According to the Act, “The main results of evaluation shall be published” (Law 628/1998, §21). The publication of evaluation results was a novel practice in Finland. It is worth pointing out that strong political and ideological commitment to the notion of equality and the social values embodied in the comprehensive-school system serving the local community interacted with these dominant beliefs and organisational principles. Such interaction resulted in the development of a managerial ethos for publicly funded schooling in the 1960s that required relatively little information on performance. Nor was there any need to give out much information about the processes, which were

largely regulated by political agents and monitored by an inspectorate to ensure uniformity. Moreover, it was not necessary to inform parents about the performance of schools or to give them any choice because it was assumed that all schools were essentially the same and choice would produce inequities (Kauko & Varjo, 2008).

Given this tradition, it is not surprising that the Parliamentary Committee for Education and Culture took a very cautious stand on publicising evaluation results. It stated first in 1998 and then again in 2004:

The publicity concerns only the main results of evaluations. The purpose of the new Basic Education Act is not to publish information directly linked to an individual school or teacher. Publishing the evaluation results cannot in any case lead to the ranking of schools or the categorisation of schools, teachers or pupils as weak or good on unfair grounds.

(CEC, 1998; translation ours)

The emphasis in QAE on development rather than control seems to be another Finnish peculiarity, in addition to the antipathy towards ranking lists. The Ministry of Education Working Party strongly emphasised the developmental characteristics of evaluation in its deliberations during 1990 on the framework for evaluating educational outcomes in Finland. The aim of evaluation was to “set a solid foundation for intentional and open development of education” (ME, 1990, 30), as a categorical contrast to administrative surveillance. Official memorandums and reports published since the middle of the 1990s repeatedly state that the evaluation is “for developing educational services and not an instrument of administrative control” (e.g., ME, 1996, 85). Even though there are individuals among politicians and officials who consciously support the development rather than the control approach, it seems plausible to claim that the hegemony of developmental QAE has been the result of a radical decentralisation and deregulation policy rather than conscious political will. To put it simply, development rather than control is more easily implemented by means of inspirational material and loose, legally non-binding guidelines (Simola et al., 2013).

The “silent or mute consensus” (Varjo, Simola, & Rinne, 2013) on the national sample-based assessment of learning results (as an alternative to national testing) and developmental evaluation (as opposed to evaluation through control and resource allocation) was not entirely solid, after all. Throughout the 1990s there were sporadic initiatives to create a final examination for comprehensive schools and the league tables that went with it. However, the Confederation of Finnish Industries and Employers (CIE), in pamphlets published throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, made new demands to turn compulsory education into a real asset in international economic competition. Measurements of learning outcomes, optimal resource allocation and consumer satisfaction were advocated in *Productivity of Education* (CIE, 1990). The CIE also supported a final national examination (Purhonen, 2005, 63). The two initiatives were

interconnected: if the final examination had materialised, the publication of results would have been inevitable. In that sense, the consensual decision to base the evaluation on the national sample-based assessment of learning results was historically decisive.

One key factor running through the institutional framing of the Finnish QAE system is constant change. A new actor entered the field in 2003, when the new Basic Education Act was amended. The mandate of the National Board of Education was replaced with a loose “network of evaluation experts”:

For the purpose of external evaluation, there shall be a separate Education Evaluation Council attached to the Ministry of Education to organise activities in a network with universities, the National Board of Education and other evaluation experts.

(Law 32/2003; translation ours)

This brought confusion to the field of quality assurance and evaluation in comprehensive education, and the authority was unclear. The most distinctive features of the network formation seemed to be the internecine struggle for legitimacy with regard to individual evaluations, the non-existent coordination and the equally lacking authority to set binding norms (Hannus et al., 2010; Varjo, Simola & Rinne, 2016).

Consequently, the dynamics within the loose “network of evaluation experts” was soon considered insufficient, and a single agency replaced the network model. According to Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen’s government programme (2011; translation ours):

The official evaluation activity concerning education carried out by the National Board of Education, the Finnish Education Evaluation Council and the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council will be concentrated into an independent Education Evaluation Centre.

Characteristics of the Finnish QAE model

On the national level Finnish QAE discourse has at least four specific characteristics, which are based on a sense of trust.

First, the purpose of QAE in education is to develop – not to control, sanction or allocate resources. On the most general level, official texts published since the middle of the 1990s have repeatedly stated that evaluation is “for developing educational services and not an instrument of administrative control” (e.g., ME, 1996). According to the Basic Education Act of 1999 (Law 628/1998, 21 §), “the purpose of the evaluation of education is to ensure the realisation of the purpose of this law and to support the development of education and improve the prerequisites of learning.” However, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (AFLRA), an interest group comprising all

Finnish municipalities, challenged this official educational “truth” about evaluation, claiming that it had been wrongly promoted to schools and teachers primarily as a developmental instrument. In the view of AFLRA, all evaluation implemented in municipal organisations was part of municipal evaluation, which meant at the same time that it was a tool of municipal management and control (Granö-Suomalainen & Lovio, 2002, 23).

Second, QAE data and information are primarily addressed to administrators and decision makers on the national and local level – and only secondarily to other interest groups such as pupils and their parents. The Basic Education Act makes no reference to families, parents or customers among those interested in the evaluation of knowledge beyond the school achievements of their own children. Only incidental reference is made in texts such as the government’s preface to families needing evaluative knowledge in order to make their school choices, for instance (Simola et al., 2009).

AFLRA (2006, 18) challenged this standpoint, arguing that information from evaluations should respond to the needs of citizens in the municipalities, municipal and state politics and government and various authorities and employees (see also Granö-Suomalainen & Lovio, 2002).

Third, sample-based learning-result assessments are favoured over the mandatory national testing of the whole age cohort. Finland has not followed the transnational-accountability movement in education, which advocates making schools and teachers accountable for learning results. The evaluation of student outcomes has traditionally been the task of individual teachers and schools. The only standardised high-stakes assessment is the matriculation examination at the end of upper-secondary school before students enrol in tertiary education, and no external national tests or exams are required before this (Aho, Pitkänen & Sahlberg, 2006, 12).

According to Syrjänen (2013), the sample-based model for evaluating educational outcomes was a product of both structure and agency, whereas coincidence plays a smaller role. The political situation and the political possibilities opened up an active political *Spielraum* in which an influential policy-entrepreneur seized the chance to propose the sample-based solution, which political agents inside the National Board of Education consciously backed. The decision was unanimous. There were no counterproposals, which was reported to be strongly attributable to certain structural factors, including the NBE’s egalitarian value base, a lack of resources and the known functionality of the sample-based model.

Fourth and finally, under the aforementioned policy there is no basis or need for publishing school-based ranking lists. Very few education officials and politicians have supported the provision of ranking lists and making schools transparent in competition by comparing them in terms of average performance indicators. The Education Committee of the CIE was virtually the only body openly to back English-type league tables and national testing (CIE, 1990; Purhonen, 2005).

In fact, there has been clearly articulated antipathy towards ranking lists, the informal consensus on the municipal level not to conduct analyses that could be used to rank schools being a good example. On the national level, the sample-based thematic studies of learning achievement implemented by the NBE, and since 2014 the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, could be considered a genuine part of the Finnish QAE model. One could say that this innovation counteracted both external and internal pressure (cf. Furubo, Rist & Sandahl, 2002, 21) to introduce national testing, and thereby also ranking lists. Paradoxically, what may have strengthened this antipathy to ranking was bureaucratic tradition (see e.g., Tiihonen, 2004; Pekonen, 1995, 2005), according to which administrative innovations are basically meant to support the system and its developments rather than to open it up or inform citizens about it. It is noteworthy that, after a couple of attempts (Simola, 2005), the national press has been silent on the production of ranking lists. A few provincial newspapers have published school-based learning results sporadically (Varjo, Simola & Rinne, 2016).

The principle of not releasing school-based evaluation reports was tested in court in 2000 and 2003 in two separate appeals to regional administrative courts concerning decisions made by municipal education authorities not to publish school-specific information on comprehensive schools (Simola, 2006). Our interviews conducted in connection with the FabQ research project (see Ozga et al., 2011) featured some vivid descriptions of the shock, on both the central and the municipal level, that the “horrible decision” caused. However, as noted above, only a couple of provincial newspapers have sporadically published school-specific evaluation results. The press silence is meaningful, and indicates something about the Finnish ethos concerning league tables and school-specific evaluation in general. In informal conversation we learned that the municipalities were in strong agreement on not evaluating schools in such a way that the results could be used to produce ranking lists.

Two rivals in the field: the NBE and AFLRA

As discussed in previous sections of this chapter, the Finnish QAE model is only loosely regulated, which gives the actors a lot of space. The radical decentralisation and deregulation have enabled them to take different stands on and approaches to evaluation. The perspective of the Ministry of Education and the NBE, for instance, is that of the education system and the related legislation, whereas the AFLRA and the Ministry of the Interior – often supported by the Ministry of Finance – see QAE in terms of municipal service production and legislation. Both of these coalitions have attempted to determine the discourse of evaluation in the context of education. Moreover, although both of them operate in the national field of compulsory schooling, neither of them have had strong normative power over municipalities and schools.

The loose “network of evaluation experts”, to quote the Basic Education Act, and the tendency to seek alignments have had an impact on the

provision of basic education. One of the FabQ interviewees (see Simola et al., 2009) described the chaotic situation as “evaluation bloat” (*arviointiäähky*), referring to a colleague from a northern municipality who complained about being required to undertake more than 50 different evaluation tasks every year:

It’s a runaway, runaway situation, there is no systematic indicator production, except for the twenty or so NBE lot getting together for their indicator publication. [. . .] [T]here is no coordination, it’s overlapping, overlapping even in one state authority. [. . .] [W]hen all these inquiries arrive at the municipalities, it’s like some sort of chaotic evaluation bloat. We don’t have much to develop, we should definitely have some coordinated information production here.

The trajectory of decentralisation opened up *Spielraum*, enabling AFLRA to take its place as a distinguished actor in restructuring the Finnish nation–municipality relationship in general, and in the field of education policy in particular. In cooperating with governmental organs it contributes as both a lobbyist and an expert to major decision-making processes concerning education. On the local level it produces indicators, reference values and best-practice guidelines for municipal councils and officials. According to AFLRA (2001), the municipalities are no longer merely education providers executing top-down, national-level decisions; they are real political actors with their own agenda. This gives them a vast amount of *Spielraum* in this peculiar twofold system in which the nation-state and the municipalities are the main actors driving education policy (see also Kauko & Varjo, 2008).

AFLRA (2006, 18, 23) took the stand that all evaluative actions in the field of education implemented in its municipal organisations should be organised in cooperation with the providers (i.e., the municipalities), not the schools or the teachers, in accordance with the principle of municipal autonomy and policy-making responsibility. It also interpreted the Basic Education Act as giving the municipality, not schools or teachers, the responsibility for educational evaluation (see e.g., AFLRA, 2006, 2). As an example of its willingness and ability to adopt new perspectives, AFLRA challenged the common interpretation in claiming that QAE had been somewhat misleadingly promoted to schools and teachers primarily as an instrument for development: in its view, all evaluation implemented in municipal organisations related to the municipality and was therefore a means of municipal management and administrative control (e.g., AFLRA, 2001; Granö-Suomalainen & Lovio, 2002).

The National Board of Education, with its twofold status as a national agency with administrative duties and an expert in evaluation, started to provoke criticism in the 1990s. This made room for one more actor in the field of basic evaluation in Finland. The two coalitions focused on the principal question of

the autonomy of the proposed Finnish Education Evaluation Council (FEEC). Should it be administratively integrated into the NBE or would the Institute for Educational Research in Jyväskylä be a better host? The result was a notably loose network of evaluators, with undefined authority (Varjo, Simola & Rinne, 2016).

In time, the network model was replaced with a single agency. The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) was founded in 2014, and all national-level evaluation activities were centralised there. The consequences of this re-regulative action are not yet clear, but the number of evaluative institutions has decreased and the decision making is more concentrated. The diminishing status and mandate of the NBE in the field of Finnish QAE policy is the most notable consequence of this institutional reorganisation. The NBE has gradually lost all of its QAE power. In practice this means that FINEEC and ALFRA are now the main actors in the field, and the new dynamics between them is just beginning to take shape.

Sporadic local implementation

One of the key factors affecting the implementation – and the *Spielraum* – of any state-level reform in Finland is the curious and rare structure of the municipalities. They vary widely in size, ranging from Helsinki with more than 600,000 inhabitants to Sottunga, a municipality in Åland with exactly 100 inhabitants at the time of writing. Consequently, there are very many of them: 313, in fact.

After the 1999 Basic Education Act came into force placing new obligations on municipalities concerning evaluation, the NBE conducted two surveys (Rajanen, 2000) of QAE implementation on the local level. In general, these surveys do not give a very reliable picture – for two symptomatic reasons: the task of responding was given to lower-level and thus not necessarily well-informed staff in many municipalities, and the response rate was low (22.5% in 2000 and 19% in 2005). In both cases it is indicative of the low priority given to QAE. According to the 2000 survey (Löfström et al., 2005, 19), only one third of the providers of comprehensive education said they had *some* system of evaluation to underpin their work (Rajanen, 2000, 31).

The 2005 survey contained more detailed questions on the nature of the “system of evaluation” they used. Only a few of the respondent municipalities used the models AFLRA had been promoting for a decade, such as the International Organization for Standardization, Quality Awards, Balanced Scorecard and the European Foundation for Quality Management, whereas 25 per cent of those using some model referred to the NBE’s Framework for Evaluating Educational Outcomes. The great majority (more than 70 per cent) said they capitalised on “their own application of different models”, which could mean anything from a genuine new model to no evaluation at all.

The uncertain situation has been considered problematic. As the Committee for Education and Culture of the Finnish Parliament concluded in 2002:

The evaluation work done has had very small effects at the level of municipalities and schools. Nation-level evaluations have been implemented to a creditable extent, but there is no follow-up on how these evaluations affect the actions of the evaluated and the development of the schools. [. . .] Only evaluation of the biggest providers of schooling seem to be systematic enough and based on a system provided by the present model of administration. Many municipalities are at the very beginning in the evaluation of education.

(CEC, 2002; translation ours)

Rinne and his colleagues (2011) confirmed the views of the Committee for Education and Culture in a survey directed at principals and teachers conducted in 2011. The implementation of QAE practices in Finland had been so sporadic and feeble that the principals and teachers expressed neither positive nor negative opinions, just indifference. One reason for this could have been that QAE data are typically not used as a tool for the regular assessment of the personal performance of teachers (Varjo, Simola & Rinne, 2016).

Evidently there is a wide gap between national-level New Public Management (NPM) rhetoric promoting various QAE tools, and the practical implications on the local level. One of our FabQ interviewees (Simola et al., 2009) compared the reception of NPM discourse in schools and other public services:

The schools and other educational institutions were clearly the stickiest of all. And the discussion was about this terminology, for example this issue of customership: who is the customer of the school? And that was very foreign to the school people.

An evaluation study of Finnish educational administration also emphasised the lack of market-type mechanisms in local-level thinking:

[M]any respondents took a negative stance even towards vouchers, not to speak of the imposition of tuition fees, regardless of the economic principles. [. . .] The idea of market-based thinking seems to be very foreign. Modern market-based instruments really are conspicuous by their absence in our interviews. [. . .] The effects of evaluation were considered limited, and even in terms of ‘planning through the rear-view mirror’, no matter which sector of administration was under discussion.

(Temmes, Ahonen & Ojala, 2002, 70–71, 91; translation ours)

It could be concluded that, thus far, Finnish antipathy towards ranking, combined with a bureaucratic tradition and a developmental approach to QAE

strengthened by radical municipal autonomy, have represented embedded policies that have been rather effective in resisting transnational policies of testing and ranking. It is significant, however, that they are curious combinations of conscious, unintended and contingent factors. Therefore, it also seems evident that the articulated unity is rather fragile given the exogenous trends and paradigm convergence in global reforms of education politics.

Nevertheless, if local passive resistance and national mute consensus do not create overt politics, they certainly give time and space for reasonable readjustment, or even for the creation of a national model. A more obvious outcome, however, would be a Finnish combination of wishful thinking and stubborn resistance: if we can survive just one more day, maybe the world will change and we will be saved. This kind of optimism was evident in the QAE field, in the words of one of our FabQ interviewees:

Internationally, it will still go in the direction of accreditation and control for some time, and towards international comparisons. These are the trends and it won't take too long, but still some time, though. Because nobody wants to work on something for such a long time when the results are put to no use [...], but this hard line, it won't last forever, before I retire there'll be talk of these developing evaluations.

(Simola et al., 2009)

Conclusion: redistributing but punctuated trust

Dynamics on the governance level operates through radical change in steering. The extremely detailed and centralised governance culminated in the mid-1980s and succumbed to the New Public Management wave in the 1990s. The 1991–1993 recession stirred up the discussion, and Finland moved from extreme centralisation and regulation to the opposite: all *ex ante* norm mechanisms were abolished in the early 1990s to be replaced with *ex post* QAE.

As a consequence, in the mid-1990s radical municipal autonomy unexpectedly led to the conclusion that nobody on the national level had the legal right to prescribe norms with regard to how the municipalities should run and evaluate their schools. Deregulation and decentralisation reduced governance to its core: legislation covering basic education, the state-subsidy system, the distribution of classroom hours and the national core curriculum. Even though there was a conscious preference among policymakers and administrators for a soft and developing QAE model instead of a hard and controlling system, the freedom that materialised on the municipal and school level was nobody's conscious aim. It was more like a contingent result of the three coincidences referred to above – the radicalising great recession, the revival of trust in comprehensive schooling and the sudden PISA success – all of which politically affected implementation practices. All in all, this provoked the call for a culture

of trust between national and local policymakers, between administration and schools, and between office- and street-level bureaucrats, which was seemingly exceptional. There is a Russian saying: “If you cannot control, you had better trust.” Accordingly, the constitutive dynamics in governance could be characterised as *punctuated* trust.

Hence, the rapid shift to the most decentralised and deregulated education system in Europe provoked a call for a unique culture of trust in basic schooling. In practical terms, despite the NPM rhetoric, the effects of QAE on the local level thus far have been more obvious. The new balance in central–local relations and the overall constitutive dynamics in governance gave a strong empowering impetus to local education authorities and teachers – not just to survive the budget cuts and redundancies of the 1990s, but also to capitalise on the new freedom to develop distinctive local policies and practices in the provision of basic education and the pedagogy.

Hence, we could refer to the discursive principle defining and steering the talking, thinking and acting in the governance of Finnish basic schooling as *redistributing but punctuated trust*, which really empowered the local actors. Among the national institutions, the AFLRA has benefited at the expense of the NBE, which dominated the field until the 1990s.

Nevertheless, one should be wary of referring to a specific and intentional Finnish model of QAE – at least in the way Erkki Aho, Kari Pitkänen and Pasi Sahlberg (2006) attempt to explain Finnish success in comparative PISA listings. Not even the four Finnish peculiarities mentioned above were articulated in their entirety by any of the interviewees or in any of the documents as a list of guiding principles for QAE practices. Nor is it valid to conclude that what happens in Finnish QAE merely echoes the unintended effects of radical decentralisation.

We do not suggest that there is no consensus on these issues in the field of education: there is, in fact, a very strong tradition of consensus in Finland. The General Director of the National Board of Education joked about that in a parliamentary discussion in the early 1990s: “The parts of the addresses concerning education policy, and its importance and needs for development, could be written by one and the same person” (Hirvi, 1996, 42). This consensus on certain QAE issues could therefore be characterised as silent or mute, based on antipathy rather than conscious and articulated principles.

Dynamics in families' educational strategies

Families appear to have been torn in their educational strategies between a strong social trust in comprehensive school (*Peruskoulu* in Finnish) and the middle-class pursuit of distinction, especially since the 1990s. In the contingent construction of this tension, the tendency towards a global education policy is transformed into a curious national hybrid in which a kind of rustic modesty meets legitimate parental concern for offspring. It is a question of school choice as a policy thread,¹ and especially the Finnish peculiarity, “classes with a special emphasis”, which have become the main mechanism of choice. The focus in this chapter is on parents and municipal education authorities, the structural constraints and opportunities they encounter and how they interact in the field of local education politics.

Leaving the *Peruskoulu* monolith behind

In this first section we introduce the specific socio-historical context and the changes that frame local school-choice policies and families' educational strategies. Institutional confidence focuses on actors such as politicians, officials and organisations (Kouvo, 2011). On the levels of the state and society in general, confidence in social institutions, including comprehensive schooling, is exceptionally high in Finland. According to the Standard Eurobarometer,² institutional confidence, including the press, political parties, national governments, the EU and the UN, is highest in Finland compared with the average in the EU and the Nordic countries. For instance, 62 per cent of Finns were found to trust their national government, against an average 27 per cent in the EU, 31 per cent in Iceland, 42 per cent in Denmark and 59 per cent in Sweden.

On the most abstract level, the sources of generalised trust (in other words, trust in previously unknown fellow citizens) can be traced to the idea of fair and well-functioning public institutions (Kouvo, 2011). As a cornerstone of continuity and consensus in Finnish educational policy, trust in education as an agent for social equality has remained stronger than in many other advanced liberal countries. There are various reasons for such durability. For instance,

educational authorities and political parties have strongly committed themselves to the aim of educational equality. Furthermore, educational administration and staff profiles were moulded in the post-WWII era in which the welfare state was constructed. Finally, quite apart from the traditional social-democratic thinking on equality, there has been a strong rural tradition since the nineteenth century to regard education as an important channel for upward mobility in society (Antikainen, 1990, 79). We found evidence of this in interviews we conducted with school-level actors within the *Education Governance and Social Integration and Exclusion* (EGSIE) project (Simola & Hakala, 2001; Simola, 2002, 2015, 73–74).

John Meyer's (1986) notion of mass schooling as the "religious basis of modern society" has been adopted in Finland in the sense that basic schooling has been seen as an initiation rite of passage to a modern nation-state, the main qualification being modern nation-state rather than individual citizenship. The curriculum code shifted from moral to social only in the 1950s, and from social to individual only in the 1970s (Lundgren, 1979; Rinne, 1987a, 1987b).

The accepted rights and duties of a citizen

Mass schooling was introduced into Finland in the form of a rigid and uniform tradition, a social responsibility like military service. It would be equally out of order to select a school for your offspring as to ask for special treatment or a specific location when they began their military service. The only thing you could do as a parent was to hope that your children would have a fair teacher. For decades this kind of passive acceptance constituted the basis of cooperation between school and home: parents were asked to come to the school to see and hear how their offspring were advancing in developing sufficient social responsibility to become proper citizens (Lundgren, 1979; Rinne, 1987a, 1987b). It would seem that the great majority of parents, even those who capitalise on individual choice options, still have trust in *Peruskoulu* and support the ideals of a civil society, social cohesion and equality of opportunities.

Parental attitudes towards comprehensive school in Finland are more understandable from this perspective. It was reported in a survey conducted in the mid-1990s (Räty et al., 1995) that Finnish parents felt strongly about equality and equity and did not support the tenets of market-oriented schooling or the ideology of competition and giftedness. On the contrary, they were worried about the inequality of educational opportunities. Parents with children at comprehensive school were generally quite satisfied, specifically with the teaching (86 per cent), cooperation (74 per cent) and assessment (71 per cent), although over 60 per cent of them also positively assessed issues to do with equality and representation. Even on the subject of individuality, on which attitudes were the most negative, more parents were satisfied (48 per cent) than dissatisfied (28 per cent).

Findings reported in *Nordisk skolbarometer* (Anon, 2001), a comparative Nordic survey, reflected Finnish trust in *Peruskoulu*. Respondents comprising a sample of the overall population of the Nordic countries and of parents with school-aged children were asked what they thought about contemporary schooling. The Finns were clearly the most satisfied with their schools, especially with how they had been able to provide their offspring with knowledge and skills in different subjects. Unlike their Nordic neighbours, they did not think that the knowledge requirements at school were too low, for example.

The Finnish education system, especially on the comprehensive-school level, has been characteristically intertwined with the Scandinavian notion of the welfare state, with a strong emphasis on equal educational opportunities. One of the key elements in Scandinavian welfare models, comprehensive schooling is described as universal, non-selective, free-of-charge basic education provided by the public sector that is of sufficiently good quality to prevent demands for private schools (Kalalahti, Silvennoinen, Varjo & Rinne, 2015, 205; see also Erikson et al., 1987, vii–viii).

Hence, it is no wonder that Finnish comprehensive schooling was largely homogeneous until the 1990s. The only exceptions were a few classes with a special emphasis on music, uncommonly selected languages (in other words, something other than English as the first foreign language) and curiously enough, schools based on Waldorf (called Steiner schools in Finland) and Montessori pedagogies. *In toto*, the Finnish school system could be described as highly uniform with almost non-existent specialisation or streaming.

The number of private schools has remained very limited since the comprehensive-school reform of the 1970s. Any new private school needs government authorisation. Almost all of them are classified as “compensatory”, meaning that the municipality contracts their schooling services and they form part of the publicly funded system. Although the overall proportion of private schools remains under 3 per cent, 17 per cent of pupils in the capital city of Helsinki attend a private school (Simola et al., 2015), which gives such schools a considerable role in local policymaking.

Emerging suspicion and the emergence of school choice

There were many interrelated social, political and administrative changes during the 1980s and 1990s. Of these, changes in social structures – in other words the diversification of social classes – challenged the basis of all universal systems, including comprehensive schooling (Ahonen, 2001; Kalalahti, Silvennoinen, Varjo & Rinne 2015), and affected occupational structures and societal hierarchies. The numbers of people in the lower- and higher-level professions (judges, doctors, managers and teachers) increased, as did the proportion of office workers. On the other hand, there was a drop in demand for customer-service employees, farmers and skilled workers. Moreover, the collapse in the

number of farmers brought about significant changes to the group classified as entrepreneurs (Erola, 2010).

There has also been a gradual change in societal hierarchies in Finland: relative income differentials increased, and the low-income (at-risk-of-poverty) rate has increased (almost doubled in the past 15 years). It is also noteworthy that, in the meantime, low income and deprivation have become more prevalent, especially in families with underage children, and the numbers of children living in at-risk-of-poverty families has risen (the ratio is close to the EU average) (Lammi-Taskula & Salmi, 2010; Moisio, 2010). As has been argued, this implies not only an economic but also a political trend in policy steering and income transfer (Moisio, 2010).

It is symptomatic and significant that even in the mid-1990s, according to the survey conducted by Hannu Rätty and his colleagues (Rätty et al., 1995), parents from the upper-level employee strata were more apt to criticise the comprehensive-school system for overlooking differences in giftedness, whereas the attitudes of working-class parents were generally more favourable.

In tandem with changing social structures, the discourses of quality and evaluation gained ground in the field of Finnish educational policy and governance (see Chapter 4 in this book). Changes affecting the growing interest in the evaluation of education were realised in the context of the changing political atmosphere and the deep economic recession of 1991–1993. The omnipotence of central management came to an end at the close of the 1980s. It was replaced with a new doctrine promising efficiency improvement, in other words more economic and productive services through the decentralising of authority to local education authorities and schools (CR, 1996, 4, 23). The intention was to increase the quality of education by “increasing flexibility and choice” and introducing new evaluation mechanisms (Ministry of Education, 1990, 11). The education-policy documents of the 1990s reiterated the strong belief in progress through the continuous development of education (Ministry of Education, 1995, 8, CR, 1996: 55, 82–85, 106–107). Whereas previously it was believed that the goals of education could be achieved by strict norm steering, the conviction now was that the only way was to set national core goals and evaluate the achievements afterwards.

As a prime example of deregulation, the abolishment of the formal and strict school districts and intake areas in the mid-1990s freed the municipalities to decide how to organise their schools. The 1999 *Basic Education Act* (Law 628/1998) only obliges municipalities to assign each child of elementary school age to “a neighbourhood school or some other appropriate place where education is given”; simultaneously, the term ‘school district’ was removed. The notion of a neighbourhood school means that children are obliged to attend a designated school defined in terms of proximity and local conditions. Thus, municipalities are empowered to develop distinctive policies and practices in order to allocate children to their neighbourhood schools in an equitable

manner (Seppänen, 2006; Varjo & Kalalahti, 2011; Kalalahti & Varjo, 2012; Varjo, Kalalahti & Silvennoinen, 2014).

The Basic Education Act (Law 628/1998) also entitles parents to choose between schools on the grounds of their particular characteristics and curriculum. Education providers and their comprehensive schools are still required to follow national curriculum guidelines. However, within a given framework they are allowed to specialise in certain areas, in other words to develop and express a distinctive character to meet the varying demands of parents and cope with the varying aptitudes of pupils. These sub-national constructions have been characterised as “local institutional spaces for parental school choice” (Varjo & Kalalahti, 2011; Varjo, Kalalahti & Silvennoinen, 2014).

In practice they gave providers of education (that is, municipalities in Finland) the option of including in the school-based curriculum some extra hours of teaching covering a variety of subjects and themes. This so-called emphasised tuition was not problematised at all during the law-drafting process: it was probably assumed to refer only to part-time selection rather than establishing permanent classes. However, as Piia Seppänen and her colleagues showed (Seppänen, 2006; see also Varjo & Kalalahti, 2011; Seppänen et al., 2012), classes with a special emphasis (*painotetun opetuksen luokat*) became the main vehicle for parental school choice in highly autonomous municipalities, especially in major cities but also in bigger towns.

The 1999 Basic Education Act created a space for “soft school choice” (Rinne et al., 2015). Interestingly, refraining from final testing and ranking prevented the establishment of a strong competition discourse among families. Finnish schools were still apparently equal and of uniform quality, both officially and publicly. In practice, parental school choice is exercised within the publicly funded comprehensive system.

The radical municipal autonomy that was granted during and because of the 1991–1993 recession transformed Finland into a laboratory of municipal policymaking in schooling (Varjo, Kalalahti & Seppänen, 2015; Varjo, Kalalahti & Silvennoinen, 2015b). The dynamics of emerging school choice was visible in the locally built educational context. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in less than a decade Finland became one of the most decentralised European nations in basic education policy after being among the most centralised. A recent *Parents and School Choice* (PASC) study, conducted in five large urban cities, revealed considerable variation among municipalities in the selectivity of local admission policies. First and obviously, the proportion of pupils in selective classes with a special emphasis varies widely city by city. Taking into account the provision of special education (*erityisopetus*), in the most extreme case only 50 per cent of pupils were in a “normal”, non-selective class (Simola et al., 2015). Second, the opportunity, ability and willingness to choose seem to transform into exercised choice differently in different local institutional spaces (Varjo & Kalalahti, 2011; Varjo, Kalalahti & Silvennoinen, 2014). The variation, non-linearity and dissimilarity in the timing of the developments,

even in neighbouring municipal school-choice spaces, reveal the dynamics of municipal policies, social structures and ideological battles.

Clearly, the whole question of choice being on the agenda when parents are formulating their educational strategies shatters the universal notion of trust in common comprehensive schooling. It may have been a case of emerging suspicion that intensified after the 1990s when the first steps towards school choice were taken. Since then, it has become an educational strategy for one third of parents in some large urban municipalities (Seppänen et al., 2015b).

The basic idea of universal social systems – like comprehensive schooling in essence – is embedded in the notion of shared participation. The fact that a growing number of parents are able and willing to choose a school for their offspring puts in doubt the shared and naturalised understanding of equal quality among schools.

As Jaana Poikolainen and Sari Silmäri-Salo (2015) state, “choice strategies are bound to the local context.” Referring to the concept of “bounded agency”, they wonder under what circumstances the ideological battle between social equality and individual equity on the political level would take “an individual turn” from the “collective good” on the parental level (Poikolainen & Silmäri-Salo, 2015; see also Wilkins, 2010). Bounded agency seems to prevail in restricted school-choice spaces. The limited scope of or openness to choice in policy spaces affects the egalitarian or individual values that steer the actions of choice. Parents living in municipalities with a restrictive policy are not particularly active choosers and lean more on egalitarian values, whereas those in a city with an open choice space actively play the marketing game and rely more strongly on equity-based values (Poikolainen & Silmäri-Salo, 2015).

The variety of implemented municipal policies and practices is also apparent in the degree of contentment with the school-choice policy that families express. Parents are generally more satisfied with the policies in open spaces of municipal choice, which are rich in possibilities, but these spaces simultaneously arouse suspicion related to the equal quality of schools (Varjo, Kalalahti & Seppänen, 2015). Richness of school choice works in tandem with parental understanding in terms of whether or not all municipal schools offer equal opportunities for individual children (Varjo, Kalalahti & Seppänen, 2015). Of particular importance is the parental value of quality with regard to local schools. Parents who rate their neighbourhood schools as excellent or at least decent are more likely to oppose school choice: it is only if the quality is considered bad that the question arises (Varjo et al., 2015a; Kalalahti & Varjo, 2016). According to the PASC survey, parents who were dissatisfied with the quality of local schools were more favourable towards school choice, whereas those who considered their local school “good enough” did not give it a high value (see Seppänen, Kalalahti et al., 2015 for further details).

It seems that local school-choice policies and parental attitudes are highly intertwined. According to Janne Varjo, Mira Kalalahti and Heikki Silvennoinen (2014), when the introduction of school-choice mechanisms is not hindered by

strong support among social groups of the universalistic features of comprehensive school, families with high levels of education and income actively exercise parental choice and accelerate the local provision of a more open space for it. These normative practices have been described as a shift from public welfarism towards elite separatism (Reay et al., 2008).

Contradictory school choice

Our aim in this section is to elaborate on what is possible, avoidable and desirable for municipalities and families in the policy field of local school choice. Our special focus is on structures and agency.

We understand structure as recurrent patterned arrangements and societal hierarchies that influence or limit the choices and opportunities available, whereas agency commonly refers to the capacity to act independently and make free choices (see Giddens, 1993; Barker, 2005, for instance). In terms of structure, processes of decentralisation and deregulation have resulted in the wider recognition of the role and position of local education authorities, as well as a significant increase in their powers and level of funding. Finnish local authorities, for example, are authorised to choose the ways they manage their services and administrative structures – including the policies and practices governing the provision of basic education.

With regard to agency, local authorities, meaning local councils elected by universal suffrage and with an executive, are expected to respond to the demands of citizens. Parents can express their wishes (concerning school choice and local admission policies, for example) in municipal elections through the principles of representative democracy. They can also construct and reconstruct local institutional spaces for parental school choice in more direct ways – such as making (or not making) an actual choice.

The legitimization of school choice

The interviews with local writers on education, conducted in connection with the *School Markets and Segregation* (SMS) project (see Varjo & Kalalahti, 2015; Varjo, Kalalahti & Lundahl, 2016), enriched our interpretation of the underdeveloped Finnish quality-through-choice doctrine (as discussed in Chapter 4). The local education authorities had to set their priorities regarding the social benefits and the costs. In terms of social benefits, school choice could be interpreted as a policy that supports the fostering of individual abilities, learning skills and academic achievement through choice and competition. It is also acknowledged that there are social costs, such as differentiation in learning results and increased socio-spatial segregation. Competition and the problem of “failing schools” are also issues in Finland. The country’s success in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), for instance, reflects both high overall educational achievement as well as a small variation in outcomes

among individual pupils and schools. Nevertheless, a group of underachieving schools has emerged very recently in Helsinki (Bernelius, 2011; 2015), and a gradual differentiation in learning results is widely acknowledged in Finnish education-policy discourse.

Although the interviewees talked about the issue of school choice in their municipalities, the discourse of its legitimation is built on two conceptual categories: first, that parents have a principal right to choose, and second, that choice has some pedagogical potential.

According to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, parents have the right to choose the kind of education given to their children (see Varjo, Kalalahti & Silvennoinen, 2014). It is fair to say that the interviewees emphasised the parental right to make educational decisions for their offspring, but in quite a bureaucratic and practical manner. Choice is considered an artifice for keeping parents satisfied with their municipality in general (and local education authorities in particular), and for preventing them from appealing against the placement of their child, for instance. Moreover, some explicit reasons that could be considered “social” (such as having siblings or friends at the preferred school) are also seen as legitimate reasons for school choice.

We can take health-related reasons into consideration, and issues concerning siblings at the same school, as well. This is very humane; I think they must be taken into consideration.³

School choice is also discussed in terms of pedagogical practices, as an opportunity to enrich teaching in a certain subject and to take individual aptitude into account more thoroughly. Pedagogical practices are understood as a vehicle for conscious and continuous school-based developmental work. The emphasis on the development of quality, commonly articulated in technical terms as learning outcomes and attracting pupils, is obviously an issue that particularly concerns schools located in deprived neighbourhoods.

If we put up a class with a special emphasis in a school located in a demanding neighbourhood, we try to ensure that parents who are generally interested in their children's hobbies and upbringing stay in the neighbourhood and don't send their children to other schools, at least during grades 1–6, perhaps in grades 7–9, as well.

It seems that the association of social benefits with school choice is built on professional, teacher-centric notions of quality that emphasise non-competitiveness and cannot be measured. In general, economic factors such as efficiency and effectiveness are missing from this discourse in our data: in fact, the interviewees seldom discussed economic benefits.

In combination, the conceptions of the principal right of parents to choose and the pedagogical potential of choice formed the basis of the legitimation

of school choice among the interviewees. They set the modest and controlled opportunities to choose against the potential social costs of a non-selective comprehensive system. Denial or dismissal of the parental right to choose appears to foster dissatisfaction with public services and the projection of a negative municipal image. The interviewees were afraid that families would move their children to schools in other municipalities or that the imbalanced dynamics of school choice would somehow spread to the housing markets. The denial of choice is then associated with the stress of monitoring parental attitudes and complaints, pupil flows to other municipalities and the social composition of residential areas in relation to school quality. The ultimate fear is that if the problem of the diversification of schools is addressed by limiting choice, families would start to select their residential areas based on the images of local schools.

Promoting the comprehensive system

It is worth pointing out that interpretations of the social benefits of school, as elaborated in the previous section, focus only on certain aspects of the provision of basic education. They belong to the realm of the comprehensive school, the gains only being achievable through a well-governed comprehensive system. Hence, the conceivable benefits of school choice do not involve notions such as for-profit private schooling, high-stakes testing and public league tables. On the other hand, the social costs are perceived as more concrete and compelling, the underlying, self-evident assumption being that the uncontrolled diversification of schools will inevitably create a vicious circle of residential segregation.

All the interviewees involved in the SMS project (see Varjo & Kalalahti, 2015; Varjo, Kalalahti & Lundahl, 2016) shared, at least to some extent, the premise that school choice inevitably fuelled social and spatial segregation. One person's right to choose automatically means that someone else is inevitably left behind. Hence, choice is something to be treated with caution and managed by public authorities rather than markets. It could be argued that the assumed correlation between choice and segregation is an unquestioned article of faith among Finnish local-education authorities.

It is as simple as that. If all well-educated and active parents get together, everybody else will be shut out. And that's exactly what happens in music classes, you know.

Concerns about segregation are not grounded in the commonly held belief that schools have or will become differentiated by quality, however: it is rather a question of their reputation or image. Indeed, it is argued that competition between schools increases or decreases pupil intake depending on their image, and in particular promotes the emergence of failing schools and school choice

as a naturalised social norm on the most abstract level. The interviews gave the impression of schools trapped in a vicious circle in which an unfavourable image inevitably led to difficulties in attracting academically able pupils and competent, highly qualified teachers. As a way out, the municipalities attempt to enhance the heterogeneity of their schools in terms of catering for different learners, social classes and specialisations.

It should also be noted that complete homogeneity within the comprehensive system is in no way seen as desirable *per se*. Clearly, choice is a social practice that simply cannot be denied – even in Finland. It is more a question of the number of choices allowed within the comprehensive system, and to whom they are offered. All our interviewees supported a conception we refer to as *restricted possibilities to exercise choice* – a controlled balance between the freedom to choose and comprehensive ideology:

[P]arents really love to talk about their children's schooling these days. From our point of view, it means that each and every one of our local schools has to be good for parents to be able to boast that their neighbourhood school has this or that.

Middle-class expressive goals and concerted cultivation

The new mode of school choice causes anxieties and conflicting attitudes among families as well as in local education authorities (Seppänen, Carrasco et al., 2015). One example is finding a balance between “good parenthood” and “good citizenship”, in other words between collective (societal) values and individual aspirations. Another is balancing instrumental and expressive values.

Parental attitudes towards school choice are strongly conflicted and intricately intertwined. It has been suggested that parents feel torn between “instrumental” and “expressive” values, such as deciding between children's wellbeing at school and high academic achievement, and evaluating the value that schools guarantee. As Agnès van Zanten (2015) argues, the evaluation is balanced differently in different school-choice spaces depending on the strength of “the link between the initial diploma and employment”, which affects “the degree of confidence that parents have in the overall quality of the school system and in the homogeneity of school provision.” In France, for example, much emphasis is laid on providing the necessary tools to ensure success in finding employment: “The emphasis is also squarely placed on the intellectual nature of training, so much so that many parents put wellbeing and happiness in second place, and connect these emotional states strongly to mastery of knowledge and educational success” (van Zanten, 2015).

Many Finnish researchers have concluded that, despite the emerging school choice, Finnish parents share a strong belief in common comprehensive schooling and the even quality of schools (see e.g., Varjo, Kalalahti, & Silvennoinen, 2014; Seppänen, Carrasco, et al., 2015). Universal, common schooling and

the idea of the neighbourhood school are valued, and parents settle for “good enough” schools (Seppänen et al., 2015a; Kosunen, 2016). Moreover, there are no public league tables adding instrumental value when embarking on upper-secondary education. It could therefore be said that Finnish parents “can” (or at least could) put more emphasis on expressive goals than on instrumental considerations (cf. van Zanten, 2015).

To be sure, parental reasoning on school choice is loaded with expressive values intertwined with expressions of social cohesion and collectivism, and abounds with child-centred, welfare-oriented and peer-related arguments. Most evidently, parents emphasise and evaluate the school as a safe and developing social environment and part of their children's everyday life, and therefore worry about and resist evident segregation leading to the diversification of pupils, teaching groups and schools (see e.g., Silmäri-Salo, 2015; Seppänen, Kosunen et al., 2015)

We should also emphasise the fact that not all school choice is about individual instrumental gain or social distinction. New forms of “good parenthood” and familism have emerged as a reaction to individualist and instrumentalist trends (Jallinoja, 2006). Middle-class parents in particular rely on the daily contact they have with other parents and teachers to monitor their children's educational and social experiences (van Zanten, 2015). One of the key dimensions of the dynamics of family strategies is the intertwinement of soft school-choice policies with a middle-class lifestyle and parenthood. School choices and choices at school are legitimated by the development of talents and abilities, the pursuance of hobbies, language choices, challenges and support for learning (see e.g., Poikolainen & Silmäri-Salo, 2015; Seppänen, Kosunen et al., 2015).

Middle-class parents in particular have adopted the idea of “emphasised teaching” as a practical means of exercising school choice – as a natural part of their child-centred parenting that is compatible with Annette Lareau's (2003) middle-class “concerted cultivation.” Lareau (2003) distinguishes between two different parenting styles. First, concerted cultivation is favoured by middle-class families in which parents encourage negotiation and discussion and the questioning of authority, and enrol their children in extensive, organised activities. This style puts children on the path to a middle-class career, teaches them to question those in authority, develops their vocabulary and makes them comfortable in interaction with people with more authority.

Second, “the accomplishment of natural growth” is the parenting style favoured in working-class and lower-class families: parents issue directives to their children rather than negotiating with them, encourage them to go along with and trust people in authority, and do not structure their children's daily activities but rather let them play on their own (Lareau, 2003).

In the Finnish context, classes with a special emphasis are perfectly in line with the ethos of middle-class concerted cultivation. In a naturalised and child-centred way, they take into account and support the personal and special interests and talents of middle-class children. In applying for such a class, middle-class

parents feel they can offer their offspring something that is lacking in regular classes at neighbourhood schools (see e.g., Poikolainen & Silmäri-Salo, 2015; Seppänen, Carrasco et al., 2015).

Emerging instrumentalism and new cleavages within the middle classes

Albeit the Finnish version of school choice could be described generally as soft and child-centred, some social groups have more positive attitudes towards it than others. Although it is mainly a middle-class enterprise, instrumental and expressive values are emphasised differently in different occupational and social groups.

The recognition of individual abilities, talents and giftedness is one of the basic principles legitimating classes with a special emphasis and pupil selection. There are various arguments in favour of school choice (e.g., distance from home to school, friends and siblings at the desired school, some kind of comprehensive-school ethics), but many parents justify it as serving the needs of “gifted” or “talented” children (Falabella, Seppänen & Raczynski, 2015; Seppänen, Kosunen et al., 2015). Classes with a special emphasis serve as a legitimated instrument for “skilled, hard-working and disciplined pupils (and families) [who] *deserve* to be admitted into schools of their preference, following a meritocratic rationale” (Falabella, Seppänen & Raczynski, 2015). Hence, the instrumental value of these classes lies in maximising the potential of talented pupils. In terms of social groups, according to Ayşe Güveli (2006), people in social and cultural occupations (e.g., teachers, social workers, psychologists) require specialised knowledge and creative, artistic and communication skills to foster wellbeing, whereas those in technocratic occupations (e.g., managers, administrators, technicians) have specialised knowledge and skills that serve organisational, technical and structural needs.

Persistent universalism seems to steer education strategies towards expressive goals, especially among cultural-social specialists. As van Zanten (2015, 7) argues:

Among middle-class parents, in particular those who work in the educational, social and health sectors, as well as among lower-middle-class and working-class parents, the expressive dimensions usually gain the upper hand. Members of these social groups are very attentive to their children's physical and psychological wellbeing, and place great importance on friendly relationships.

As a consequence, “Parents from the intellectual fractions of the upper class, especially those who work in the public sector, are more likely to send their children to schools in which they will mix with children from working-class backgrounds and various ethno-racial groups” (van Zanten, 2015).

In an attempt to shed light on these new cleavages and the respective attitudes to school choice within the Finnish middle class, Risto Rinne and his colleagues (2015) made a two-level (higher-/lower-level professionals) distinction between the “new” class of social and cultural specialists and the “old”

class of technocrats within the service class of the Erikson–Goldthorpe schema. They found that higher-level professionals had higher incomes than lower-level professionals and that technocrats earned more than social and cultural specialists and were more likely to be employed in the private sector.

Interestingly, exercised school choice was evidently connected to occupational level (higher-/lower-level professionals) rather than sector (social-cultural specialists/technocrats): higher professionals in general were more likely to exercise school choice than lower-level professionals in both sectors. However, attitudes towards school choice were linked to occupational level and sector.

As a general rule, the strongest promoters of school choice were from the upper levels of the social stratification, were more likely to be groups of parents employed as technocrats, with a high income and tending to vote for the National Coalition Party. The upper fraction of the middle class in particular actively chose the school and the classes with a special emphasis. The willingness to choose was connected to the feeling of disparity in terms of equal opportunities at schools, as discussed earlier (Varjo, Kalalahti & Seppänen, 2015; Rinne, Carrasco & Flores, 2015b).

Although upper-level social-cultural specialists have higher educational qualifications than upper-level technocrats, their income level is lower. Moreover, lower-level social-cultural specialists are more likely to be employed in the public sector and typically support the Greens of Finland. Their children were enrolled in classes with a special emphasis and had better grades than the children of technocrat mothers. In general, the upper-level social-cultural specialists had the most reserved views on school choice and selection by ability. Paradoxically, their children were more likely to be enrolled in a class with a special emphasis, and in tandem with upper-level technocrats they could accept educational competition.

Despite the uneven levels of education and income, lower- and upper-level technocrats seem to share common features: they typically work in the private sector and support the National Coalition Party. In a similar vein, both groups typically set instrumental aims for education. The middle-class fractions were the most favourable to school choice. By way of contrast, lower-level social-cultural specialists typically worked in the public sector, and of all the middle class fractions had the lowest levels of education and income. Moreover, their children did least well at school, and they placed the least value on school choice and educational competition. (Rinne, Carrasco & Flores, 2015)

The promotion of school choice and competition in the realm of comprehensive school – considered indicators of emerging instrumental attitudes – are evidently features that are distributed along the new cleavages within the middle classes. They centre on the technocratic fraction, whereas social-cultural specialists put more emphasis on expressive values. Nevertheless, actual admission to a class with a special emphasis is traditionally class-based: the higher the educational level of the parents, the more the child achieves at school and the more likely he or she is to be in a class with a special emphasis. One could thus conclude that university-educated higher-level professionals are most willing and able to exploit the *Spielraum* of Finnish variety in school choice.

Local politicking for soft school choice

On the global level it seems that the most powerful impediments to school choice are economic in nature (van Zanten, 2015). However, this does not seem to be so obvious in Finland – or at least not to the same extent as in countries in which sending a child to a school other than the local one incurs costs for transportation, school fees and the like. The very limited private sector guarantees the possibility of choice to all families in principle. Given that choice at the lower-secondary level does not extend to the upper-secondary level, it is not so obviously connected to educational achievement in general.

One could argue, as Rinne and his colleagues (2015) do, that school-choice policies across countries do not automatically produce static relationships between social class and education: curiously enough, social class operates somewhat differently. It seems that “there is heterogeneity in the disposition to play the game” in Finland – in other words, education and school choice are not used so blatantly or openly to gain positional advantage (Rinne, Carrasco & Flores, 2015). Nevertheless, the Finnish “soft” policy offers a variety of tools that facilitate gentle distinction and educational advantage.

Four different “Finnish varieties of school choice” have emerged, as opposed to a single choice between public and private schooling, for instance: families may choose between classes with and without a special emphasis, and between local and non-local schools. These choices form different streams that operate within the Finnish, officially non-tracking comprehensive system.

These streams offer early individual choices on the one hand, but strengthen the diversification of individual school pathways on the other (Kalalahti & Varjo, 2016). Interestingly, they seem to ease parental value-related anxieties: many highly educated middle-class parents select a local school that offers a safe and short journey and a familiar peer group, in the spirit of comprehensive schooling. Nevertheless, they apply for teaching with a special emphasis within this local school, thereby ensuring the fostering of individual competences and talents.

As Poikolainen and Silmäri-Salo (2015) report, “determined choosers” – those who actively choose a school for their offspring – are still in the minority in Finland. A determined will to choose, when it exists, intertwines with a high parental educational level. In simple terms, the higher the educational level of the parents, the more they value equity and the acquisition of a suitable habitus, evidenced in their choice of a class with a special emphasis. In general, these determined choosers tend to be parents with high educational qualifications.

Nevertheless, there is wide variety in parental conceptions and aspirations, and even some highly educated parents promote equality and adopt hybrid or systematic school-choice strategies. “Parents taking a traditional stance, on the other hand, used a token strategy: they did not use their social or cultural resources as an argument in their decision-making, even though they could have done” (Poikolainen & Silmäri-Salo, 2015).

It has been shown in a vast amount of research on school choice in Finland that selection into a class with a special emphasis is meritocratic and class based

(Seppänen et al., 2015a; Berisha & Seppänen, 2016). Highly educated and middle-class families possess the most information about the reputations and hierarchies of schools, which they use as a powerful tool to make “good” choices. As Sonja Kosunen and Seppänen (2015) report, children from upper-class families in particular have the competence to be selected to these classes given their higher school grades and the hobbies they pursue that support success in ability tests. Moreover, families living in municipalities that encourage school choice capitalise on their social position and assign symbolic meanings to the schools in the game, which they play using their social, cultural and economic capital (Kosunen, 2016). One could argue, with reason, that Finland’s soft policy on school choice has incurred unintended and unforeseen but severe *social costs*, resulting in the social and geographical diversification of the municipal school system (see Varjo, Kalalahti & Lundahl, 2015).

Local policies promoting equality

Novel, soft policies promoting school choice may well satisfy demands to cater to individual talents and competences. Parents appreciate the fact that they have a choice and exploit the opportunity. However, the social costs are evident in major Finnish cities. Selection (into a class with a special emphasis) by ability clusters pupils according to their educational achievements. Moreover, the exercising of school choice is strongly connected to the educational level of the parents. The dynamics of diversification in the comprehensive-school system tends to increase social and spatial distances between families, school classes, schools and neighbourhoods.

Under these somewhat unsettled circumstances, municipalities have developed numerous policies and practices to prevent or compensate for the above-mentioned social costs. Both types of discourse identified during the interviews with local-authority experts (“the legitimisation of school choice” and “promoting the comprehensive system”) (see the previous section and Varjo & Kalalahti, 2015) are rich in references to policies and practices related to the social consequences of school choice. According to Varjo and Kalalahti (2015), the “policy of equalising” implies the equal and principled allocation of resources within the municipal provision of comprehensive education. As an example from the *School Markets and Segregation* (SMS) interviews, if a school applies to offer a guaranteed attraction such as a music class, more “demanding” or “resource-consuming” obligations might be imposed on it, such as providing special-education groups or preparatory instruction for immigrant pupils:

[W]hen talking about special education or preparatory instruction for immigrant pupils, we have the idea or philosophy that each and every school should do their fair share regarding these matters. We don't allow free riders, so to say.

The equalising policy is also present in all-embracing efforts to govern admission policies in an equitable manner – local education authorities use a wide variety of means to ensure the heterogeneity of schools and classes within them. For instance, they modify admission policies through geographical catchment areas, set limits on selectivity and encourage schools to draw pupils from their neighbourhood areas by means of incentive bonuses.

Another consequence of the policy is the allocation of more financial resources (the most common form of “positive discrimination”, as it is called in Finland) to schools located in deprived neighbourhoods, based on various indicators and measurements.

We have indicators, and based on them a school located in a deprived neighbourhood receives more (financial) resources than a similar school in a more affluent neighbourhood.

Positive discrimination and the governance of admission policies could also be referred to as *governing segregation by data and co-operation*: the fair allocation of resources requires data to draw upon. Governing by numbers demands a wide variety of statistics, including information about socio-spatial segregation in the population, learning results and the heterogeneity of schools and classes, measured by socio-economic indicators and ratios of pupils in special education and in classes with a special emphasis.

It is worth pointing out that one way in which the municipalities can control the social costs of school choice is to control information and its public availability. In Finland, this is of the essence – and is possible – given that there are no national examinations covering the whole age cohort in compulsory education, and neither governmental organisations nor the mass media publish league tables (see Wallenius, 2015). All the SMS interviewees were of the opinion that in order to prevent the publication of league tables it was essential that test results and other school-based performance indicators remain confidential and be used for administrative purposes only (see also Kauko & Varjo, 2008). Hence, the overall attitude towards the mass media as a channel for communicating issues concerning school choice could be described as sceptical:

Public ranking lists would just increase opt-out from certain schools. Kind of cause a vicious circle. It is a delicate question, but journalists also quite well understand the ethical principles involved here.

Another emerging issue is the use and availability of data within the municipal politico-administrative system. Thus, to avoid any “information leaks”, politicians have been practically excluded. Curiously, even those elected to a position of trust (such as a member of the municipal board of education) do not personally feel the need for these type of data:

As a member of the Board of Education, I don't expect the local education authorities to deliver a map of the weakest schools in our city to the Board meeting. That would just not be clever.

Despite reservations concerning 'hot knowledge' (see Ball & Vincent, 1998; Kosunen, 2014, 2016), the governance of equalising policies is shared, consciously argued through and thoroughly developed among local education authorities. Vast amounts of data are collected from principals, parents, the education administration and other administrative sectors. Schools and local education authorities have developed a wide variety of measures to maintain the compatibility of the local school with all social classes and individuals. Local education authorities map out pupil allocation, follow the potential segregation of schools on multiple indicators, develop joint projects with the health and social sectors, target schools with demanding socio-economic compositions, follow the quality of local schools and, finally, strive to enhance the positive public image of all schools:

Cooperation between schools, especially between principals, has been extremely intensive. We have regular meetings on a monthly basis, and I would say that the dialogue has been quite open. Perhaps because the allocation of resources has been transparent from the very beginning. Everybody knows how, and on what grounds, everything is distributed. My opinion is that this is why there are no competitive arrangements between schools.

In order to maintain similar quality levels and evenly distributed options for restricted choice in all local schools throughout the entire municipal area, conscious measures must be considered and taken. Even though school choice is understood as a profound parental right, the shift from strict comprehensivism to a more choice-oriented system means a serious, expensive and laborious compensatory system – the whole machinery of equalising everything.

Escalating social costs beyond the reach of the municipalities

It is apparent, however, that school choice is an example of a political task that is too demanding and complex to be mastered on the municipal level, even in big Finnish cities such as Helsinki and Turku.

As the *Parents and School Choice* project showed, local spaces of school choice have diversified in terms of how much choice is allowed, and how teaching groups are arranged in the schools. In the early 2010s, for example, 37 per cent of pupils in the city of Turku were in teaching groups with a special emphasis on music or science, comprising selected children, compared with 11 per cent in Vantaa. When class composition based on teaching with a special emphasis

and specialised teaching (for special education) are taken into account, the respective percentages of pupils selected out from the general classes rise to 57 per cent in Turku and 26 per cent in Vantaa (Simola et al., 2015).

Municipalities take different stances on restricting and opening up their school-choice spaces, but they also have the power to compensate the social costs. The ability to control such costs is tied to the willingness, needs and resources of the respective municipalities. The capital of Finland, Helsinki, is a case apart, and exemplifies the escalating social costs of school choice in Finland.

Helsinki is among the municipalities offering the most school-choice options, and most of the private schools are located in the city. In this regard the space of school choice in Helsinki is the most open in the Finnish soft-choice mode. Helsinki also struggles with spatial socioeconomic and ethnic differentiation (Bernelius, 2013), and over almost 15 years has developed and implemented a variety of policies of positive discrimination (Lankinen, 2001) to ensure equal educational opportunities. Despite the evident will, need and (at least some) resources, however, Venla Bernelius (2013) found that the variation in social composition of pupils at different schools had increased and that many families rejected schools located in relatively disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The conditions in which urban schools operate have similarly diversified (Bernelius, 2013).

Increasing socio-economic segregation in neighbourhoods is reflected in the schools and their operational environments. Although it is difficult to examine causalities, there is evidence of simultaneous growth in terms of extended school choice, the diversification of operational environments and the variation in learning outcomes among schools, particularly in Helsinki (see e.g., Bernelius, 2015). The differences in learning outcomes and the variation in the socio-economic composition of the respective neighbourhoods are more moderate in the municipality of Vantaa, which maintains its restrictive school-choice policies (Bernelius, 2015; Simola et al., 2015). Again, it should be noted that the relatively high number of private schools in Helsinki limits the means by which public authorities are able to control the social costs of school choice. This kind of situation is referred to as “municipal control deficit” in the Swedish context (Varjo, Kalalahti & Lundahl, 2015).

According to the PASC findings, the dominant ideology and attitudes support the common and egalitarian *Peruskoulu* (Kalalahti et al., 2015; Poikolainen & Silmäri-Salo, 2015; Seppänen et al., 2015). Only a minority of parents would consciously like more competitive and market-oriented basic schooling (Kalalahti et al., 2015). Policymakers therefore have a strong mandate to counter what has been happening in Turku and Helsinki, where social costs understood as the unintended and unwanted social diversification of schools and pupils have escalated despite the long-term positive discrimination and equalising policies executed in Helsinki, for example. Controlling the demand for choice and the resulting social costs may outstretch local resources and capacities, both financially and intellectually. The PASC results genuinely surprised

the local education authorities, especially in Turku: it seemed clear that they did not reflect the intentions of any of them. The leading local authorities there immediately made rather radical proposals to the Municipal Education Board advocating the tighter control of school choice, but the proposals were shelved. At the same time, strongly worded letters to the editor of the local newspaper reacted in particular to this attempt to reorganise and limit the establishment of permanent classes with a special emphasis for selected pupils. It is apparent that these are critical moments: if vehicles for distinction – such as the selection of pupils into specialised classes – are established, parents will capitalise on them. As Adam Swift (2003) concludes in his book on school choice, parents have a legitimate right to partiality in the case of their offspring. One aspect of good parenting is to want the best for your child and to act in pursuit of that. Society has not necessarily established a marketplace for basic schooling, however – and if it does, it would be as well to stop moralising about shopping for schools: the battle for common schooling will finally be lost.

Conclusion: diverging but civic parenthood

The 20 years of free school choice with slight though gradually advancing segregation could be summarised as follows. First there is no discourse of competitive education given the decision not to introduce final testing in comprehensive schools. Second, the great majority of parents, even those who capitalise on school choice, have trust in *Peruskoulu* and support social cohesion and equality of opportunities. Third, the parental discourse seems to reflect a kind of (middle class) parenthood rather than the desire to stand out, although there is a tendency in that direction.

The social contract between the middle and other classes in establishing the comprehensive system in the 1970s began to weaken during the 1990s – a decade or so later than in most European countries. More choice was allowed in the national core curriculum, schools were encouraged to “profile” themselves and parental school choice was implemented. Although the national housing policy has traditionally aimed to distribute social groups evenly across neighbourhoods, the social and ethnic mix in public schools located in heterogeneous urban areas hindered the realisation of educational expectations for many parents (e.g., van Zanten, 2003; Raveaud & van Zanten, 2007).

Given the strength of egalitarianism, middle-class families in particular are struggling with the incongruity of good citizenship and good parenthood. A specific kind of parenthood preventing them from going beyond what was seen as available for everybody still seemed to quell the desire for distinction. It is still not considered socially acceptable to want something special or better for your offspring in the context of common basic schooling.

In the post-recession hype of *Peruskoulu* rehabilitation, the political reaction to these middle-class pressures emphasised the principles of neighbourhood schooling and a fully comprehensive system: the former stating the absolute

right (and duty) of every pupil to go to their neighbourhood school, and the latter abolishing the historical division between the first level (i.e., primary school, taught by classroom teachers) and the comprehensive level (i.e., the three lower-secondary classes taught by subject teachers).

Municipal autonomy has made Finland a curious laboratory of local education policies – there are drastic differences in school choice between neighbouring cities. One of the biggest cities in Finland (Vantaa) has created a model in compliance with the current legislation: there is virtually no parental choice, but the catchment areas are large and fluctuating, and most schools are filled with neighbourhood pupils. What is remarkable here is that the parents have not rejected or even heavily criticised the “Vantaa model.”⁴ Even more significantly, it is cheaper (in terms of annual costs per pupil) than the local models that encourage parental choice.

The constitutive dynamics on the level of educational strategies that emerged between the trust of Finnish families in *Peruskoulu* and the universal middle-class pursuit of distinction sparked public discussion only in the 1990s. There is a curious paradox in the Finnish family view of schooling. On the one hand, Finns share a strong belief in schooling as a means of social advancement. On the other hand, basic schooling was long seen to resemble universal military service: it is an obligation rather than a right. Parents rarely challenge teachers on their treatment of their children, but rather think of school as a gateway to society and just keep their fingers crossed that their offspring will survive and emerge intact. All this is changing, however.

Dynamics that capture the relations between families and discursive formations in Finnish school-choice policy could be conceptualised as *diverging but still civic parenthood*, crystallising dynamic relations and relational dynamics in the school-choice thread in Finnish basic-education politics. Confidence has resolved the contradiction between good parenthood (wanting the best for your offspring) and good citizenship (supporting universal and egalitarian *Peruskoulu*): in Finland the nearest school is mainly – or by definition – good enough for your offspring if it is good enough for everybody else. Only if the neighbourhood school is not decent (mostly referring to disciplinary problems) or if your child has a deviant or atypical personality and certain special needs (there is a risk that she/he might be bullied), is it acceptable to find a school other than the nearest one or the local school to which the authorities have allocated him or her.

On the one hand, this kind of confidence could be characterised as naïve in that everybody knows that not all schools are equal, even in Finland. On the other hand, it could be seen as a sign of weakness: as there are no alternatives, you had better resign yourself to what you get. Bourdieu (1986) similarly characterised the cultural attitude of the lower social classes: better to want that which you can have.

Thus it is easier to understand why classes with a special emphasis as a vehicle for selection and distinction have become the main mode of school choice: it is

socially more acceptable to make a choice for pedagogical reasons, as has been familiar practice since the 1970s (music and rare-language classes and Waldorf schools) than just to want something better (or more apposite school mates) for your offspring. There is no research evidence, but it seems likely that within a decade classes with a special emphasis will have spread to smaller cities, towns and even rural areas, and that original school choice will be limited to bigger cities.

We dare to claim that it is this parental attitude inherited from the agrarian society that has delayed and retarded the universal middle-class pursuit of social distinction from Finnish basic schooling. Still, it is evident that this soft-choice mode has globally familiar class-based and segregative outcomes that we refer to as the severe social costs of school choice.

Notes

- 1 Most of the empirical findings reported in this chapter draw on the *Parents and School Choice* (PASC) and *School Markets and Segregation* (SMS) research projects (see Varjo & Kalalahti, 2015; Seppänen et al., 2015a, 2015b; Varjo, Kalalahti & Lundahl, 2015).
- 2 European Commission, Nov 2012. <http://ec.europa.eu/COMFrontOffice/PublicOpinion/index.cfm/General/index>.
- 3 All interview citations in this chapter from Varjo & Kalalahti (2015).
- 4 The highest proportion (7 per cent) of parents moving their offspring to a school in the neighbouring cities of Helsinki and Espoo could be seen as reacting to this policy, however.

Dynamics in classroom cultures

The cultural dynamics in Finnish classrooms appears to be based on two strong and conflicting but interweaving discourses: a tradition of frontal teaching and social pedagogy versus the top-down implemented individualist didactics of *Peruskoulu*. The emphasis in this chapter is on dynamics on the classroom level as reported in a contrastive study conducted in Finland and Sweden, its closest neighbouring country.

From Herbart-Zillerian and social pedagogy to *Peruskoulu* didactics

Pedagogical individualism reached Finnish educational discourse quite late, compared with our Nordic neighbours. In fact, the principle of individualising teaching did not feature in Finnish pedagogical vocabulary before the 1960s. Linked with the moral and civic curriculum codes, keywords even in the Finnish ‘new school’ movement of the 1930s included *Die Arbeitsschule*, workbooks and social education rather than child-centred individualism, as was the case in Sweden and Estonia, for example. Whereas the florescence of the pedagogy founded by Swiss philosopher Johan Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841) was over in the rest of Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, Finland was a fertile ground. Herbartianism was passé in academia by the 1920s, and the only textbook of pedagogy that was used in the teacher seminaries until the Second World War was written by Herbart-Zillerian¹ (Isosaari, 1966, 216; Lahdes, 1969, 21).

The strong Herbart-Zillerian tradition in Finnish teacher training was phased out only in the late 1940s through the introduction of a new textbook of didactics² for teacher training. The author of the book was Matti Koskenniemi, a leading academic figure in Finnish education throughout the 1950s and 1960s, with a strong mission to promote social education (Simola, 1998b). Koskenniemi based his textbook on the social psychology of the classroom, permeated by the ethos of social education. The school context with its historically formed, compulsory and universal nature is explicitly present and is tuned to moulding the institutional life of a group of future citizens. Therefore, one

could claim that child-centred progressivism came into Finnish schooling from the top and through reform.

The massive two-volume National Curriculum (CUR, 1970) became the “*Peruskoulu Bible*” in 1970. Since then, the reform discourse reiterated the view that feudal field teachers were the very obstacles of reform, and therefore reforming teacher training was very high on the political agenda. Simola’s (1995) doctoral dissertation traces all ‘state educational discourse’ since the establishment of primary schooling in Finland from 1863 to 1995. With two minor exceptions, he found no trace of trust or appreciation of the work of classroom teachers between the 1960s and the 1990s.

The civic focus of the Finnish curriculum code (Rinne, 1984; Lundgren, 1991) did not take an individualist turn until the 1970s, when the curriculum for the new comprehensive school was set. Until then, the individual pupil had been the main *raison d’être* of schooling. There have been three shifts in educational discourse in the last three decades that are specifically related to individualism. First, an egalitarian or social-democratic interpretation characterised the period from the 1970s until the late 1980s (Simola, 1995). Second, there was a contending or market-liberalist interpretation from the late 1980s until the late 1990s (Sulkunen, 1991; Koski & Nummenmaa, 1995). Third, egalitarianism made its comeback in 1996, but in a social-liberal version with an emphasis on individual responsibility and profitability rather than individual freedom and choice (Gordon, Holland & Lahelma, 2000; Rinne et al., 2000).

In Herbart’s view, psychology was the science that formed the very basis of didactics. He built his pedagogical goals on the pillars of ethics, and the role of didactics was to create the means for education. The famous ‘Herbartian triangle’ featured in official Finnish teacher-training documents until the 1960s. At that point ethics disappeared, psychology turned into educational psychology, and educational sciences became the scientific basis of studies in teacher education (Simola, 1993). The Finnish pedagogical tradition thus has a very strong connection with psychology as the basis of didactics, especially with regard to teacher education (Simola, Kivinen & Rinne, 1997).

The psychological turn in the educational sciences was strongly connected to the orientation towards dynamic Gestalt psychology, depth psychology and intelligence testing. The first Finnish psychological laboratory was founded at the University of Turku in 1921, and the first professorship was established in 1936 at the Educational College of Jyväskylä (Rinne, 1988a, 127). The educational sciences faced many problems in taking control of the new educational psychology because the field was strongly associated with ‘pure’ psychology and ‘pure’ philosophy. There was a change in orientation towards empirical educational research after the Second World War, which continued until the 1970s. To an increasing degree it came to comprise psychologically and didactically oriented applied sciences, and at the same time began to make use of mathematically and statistically based psychological research. (Simola, Kivinen, & Rinne, 1997)

The rapid growth of the educational system made it necessary to gather more information about schools as well as pupils, and large-scale intelligence testing became a major subject of educational research. Although the experimental approach was used in educational psychology to some extent before the Second World War, most Finnish research in the field of education was from a historical or philosophical perspective (Kansanen, 1990, 281). The educational sciences began to struggle for academic recognition in the 1950s, and empirical didactics achieved a dominant position in the 1960s (Päivänsalo, 1980, 233). The didactics model was adopted in connection with educational psychology – a close relation that is apparent in any attempt to place Finnish didactics in the Anglo-American educational tradition. Pertti Kansanen compares US textbooks of educational psychology with those dealing with Finnish didactics: ‘It becomes quite soon apparent that [. . .] textbooks [of educational psychology] contain two parts: educational psychology, in the strict sense of the word, and a part with normative advice, which is very much like didactics’ (Kansanen, 1990, 278; cf. Simola, Kivinen & Rinne, 1997).

One textbook on didactics dominated the market during the comprehensive-school period and until the 1990s. The author was Erkki Lahdes, the late Professor of Didactics at the University of Turku and the first secretary of the Comprehensive School Curriculum Committee. He re-wrote the book twice (Lahdes, 1969, 1977, 1986), in line with changes in the conception of educational psychology. The clear behaviourism of the late 1960s was flavoured with influences from Mastery Learning Strategies and the structural ideas of S.C.T. Clarke in the late 1970s. Lahdes then announced a ‘modern’ turn in the psychology of learning in the 1980s, from behaviourism to cognitivism. He characterises the approach in his last re-write as constructivist, and refers to the Swiss scholar and student of Jean Piaget, Hans Aebli, as the most influential figure. The psychology-based background of Finnish didactics is strongly tied to the legitimisation of Finnish teacher training, with psychometric theory and statistical testing as the core contents in educational methodology (Kansanen, 1990, 282).

Bucking the trend, Kansanen (1993) suggested distinguishing between the concepts of ‘school pedagogy’ and ‘didactics’. Both concern the teaching process, but the orientation of the former is towards the social sciences, especially the sociology of education, whereas the latter derives from educational philosophy and psychology. The subject of school pedagogy is the school as a social system with its framework factors limiting the didactical procedures and possibilities of both teachers and pupils. It thus seeks to construct a theory of schooling. Didactics, on the other hand, concerns the individual teacher and pupil, and involves attempts to construct universal models and theories of teaching. However, as Kansanen (1993, 25) points out, ‘whenever we try to apply these models in practice, we need the help of school pedagogy and theories of schooling’. (Simola, Kivinen & Rinne, 1997)

It is fair to conclude from the brief historical analysis of official school discourse presented above that, thus far, Finnish didactics has not really needed the ‘help of school pedagogy and theories of schooling’. On the contrary, ‘the rationalism of hope’ as a ‘tacit discursive principle’ of official texts has produced a tendency towards pure didactics, a kind of abstract, non-historical and decontextualised science of teaching. Schooling as a historically formed institution for obligatory mass education tends to be dismissed as uninteresting. The everyday activities of teaching and learning in school, the socio-cultural system of time, space and rituals (Kivinen et al., 1985) – ‘the grammar of schooling’ (Tyack, 1994; Tyack & Cuban, 1995) – appear to be out of focus, or even absent, when improvements in teaching and learning are being planned and propagated. The ‘true’ knowledge of teaching in Finnish official school discourse could be characterised in its decontextualisation by the term ‘school-free pedagogy’: the science of how the teacher should teach and how the pupil should learn in school – as if it were not school (Simola, 1998b; Simola, Heikkinen & Silvonen, 1998).

Individualised *Peruskoulu* pedagogies since 1970

Child-centred comprehensive school pedagogy reached Finnish teachers from the top down and the outside in, mediated to a great extent by the developments in neighbouring Sweden. Progressivism rarely featured in practice in Finnish classrooms before the 1970s. It is therefore no wonder that the new didactics and its child-centred credo were not very well received at the school level in the everyday reality of schooling. The rhetoric was imbibed according to countless contemporary witnesses from Sweden. Let us therefore first make an excursion to Sweden.

The big brother and the small brother

Progressivism made its mark much earlier in Sweden, most prominently in the 1980 curriculum (*Läroplan för grundskolan 1980*, called *Lgr 80*). The ideology behind both the text in *Lgr 80* and the pupil make-up became more visible at the end of the nineteenth century when the idea of a “basic school” for all, *bottenskola*, was put forward. These ideas were progressive in many ways (cf. Isling, 1980, 145–152). The *bottenskola* programme strongly emphasised the need for education that would provide the necessary “universally human and civic schooling, which everyone needs for his or her basic development, and which in our times no citizen can safely be without” (Berg, 1883, translation ours). The discussion of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also showed a deep concern for the social and what today we would call the “integrative” functions of basic schooling, arguing strongly for the provision of an institution that would foster sympathy and commonality as opposed to separation (Isling, 1980, 151).

The basic school programme had not yet been realised at the time of these discussions, but the foundation was laid for what almost a hundred years later would become the Swedish comprehensive school, *grundskolan*. A school commission was appointed in 1946, and two years later it put forward a proposal advocating nine-year compulsory basic education for all pupils, during which children from different social backgrounds and with different ability levels would be taught together.³

The decision to introduce the comprehensive school in Sweden was taken in 1962. The new nine-year model replaced earlier parallel school forms and introduced comprehensive schooling with very little ability streaming or tracking. In short, the Swedish comprehensive school is characterised by little or no organisational differentiation but by a curricular expectation of substantial pedagogical differentiation – which is predominantly discussed in terms of individualisation through which it is to be realised. According to Torsten Husén (1962, 4), individualisation refers to “all the more formal or informal procedures taken within the class in order to provide for individual differences.” One of the main ways of realising this individualisation was through the use of progressive child-centred pedagogy, relying on the pupils’ own work.

The goals of Swedish comprehensive schooling (democracy, equity and the development of individuals) and the ways chosen to reach them (pupil-centred teaching, inductive inquiry and increasing the pupil’s work load) were both bold and ambitious. These reforms have spawned a substantial amount of research, which evaluates them in more or less explicit terms.⁴ Not surprisingly, the general findings from these evaluations, carried out in relation to the different curricula, indicate that neither the goals nor the prescribed work methods have been fully achieved.

Urban Dahllöf (1999, 205–212) argues in one review that the Swedish reforms were successful in terms of enrolment and system design, but less successful in terms of curriculum structure and teaching. It is suggested that the price of comprehensivisation was “quite heavy” with respect to a loss of effectiveness due to difficulties in individualising instruction in heterogeneous classes. As Dahllöf concludes, much research showed that, in practice, the pedagogical differentiation from a teaching point of view was much less than expected (cf. Lindblad, 1994, for a Swedish summary).

Nevertheless, as Dahllöf (1999) and Sverker Lindblad (1994) indicate, it seems that the proposed work methods have been implemented, at least in part. According to other Swedish research on classroom interaction in lower-secondary school conducted by Kerstin Bergqvist (1990), Sverker Lindblad and Fritjof Sahlström (1999) and Kjell Granström (1987, 1992), for example, the dominance of plenary teaching reported by Staf Callewaert and B.A. Nilsson (1974, 1980) and Lundgren (1972) appears to have attenuated. This also seems to apply to younger children, as Eva Österlind (1998) reported. Desk working increased in importance as a method, in line with the explicit curriculum texts and the progressive ideology.

Bergqvist (1990), whose study reports one of the few substantial investigations of classroom interaction in lower-secondary schools using the Swedish LGR 80 curriculum, arrives at similar conclusions. Having conducted a close analysis of a number of lessons in grade 7 at a Swedish comprehensive school, she found that the pupils' work, of which there was a substantial amount, was instrumental and procedural and carried out under unclear premises (Bergqvist, 1990, 119). The pupils in her study transformed the seemingly investigative tasks into finding out what the teacher was after. She concludes (Bergqvist, 1990, 121): "there is little congruence between the pervading features of the rhetoric in the comprehensive school and what is actually carried out in the classroom setting." Derek Edwards and Neil Mercer (1987) argue along similar lines in a study of British schools, concluding (Edwards and Mercer, 1987, 169) that despite good intentions, "the notion of experiential learning is clearly inadequate as a description of what actually happens in classrooms." Thus, what seems to be the case is that the progressive ideology has been implemented, but not in the way it is spelled out in the curriculum.

As Jan O. Jonsson (1999) concludes, the equity that was expected as an outcome of the kind of work discussed by Bergqvist and others also failed to materialise as expected. The Swedish comprehensive reforms were successful in terms of getting different pupils into the same classrooms, but this alone does not seem to have been sufficient for achieving the goals of equity. Despite the proliferation of classes in which different pupils meet, it seems that "different schools for different kinds of children" replaced the "one school for all" ideal.

Finland shared Sweden's comprehensive ideas but approached the matter from a different angle, with the individual in focus and psychology in the toolbox. Individualist rhetoric was strong in the Finnish education-policy documents of the late 1980s and early 1990s, materialised as enthusiasm for so-called 'non-graded tuition' (*vuosiluokkiin sitomaton opetus* – VSOP)⁵ for the whole education system from pre-school to the vocational level. VSOP was officially seen as "one stage of development in moving towards non-graded comprehensive schooling" and as fully individualised tuition (Apajalahti & Kartovaara, 1995; Merimaa, 1996). Extensive experiments aimed at developing VSOP and organised by the National Board of Education (NBE) were launched in 1994 (Merimaa, 1996; Mehtäläinen, 1997; Hellström, 2004).

There was a clear move from 'free choice' to 'preventing exclusion' in the education-policy rhetoric of the late 1990s, however. The background is easily traceable to the Finnish reality. In 1991 the nation sank into an economic depression comparable only to the Great Depression of the 1930s, and social problems became increasingly apparent to everybody. The social reality dampened the enthusiasm for individualised and flexible tuition. The focus shifted to the dangers of exclusion and to the problems pupils were having at school. A developmental project that was under way aptly captures the new emphasis in the title: "Different Learners – Common School" (2004). The social ideal had

its comeback in the communitarian formulations of learning in the 2004 Curriculum Framework (2004), but now flavoured more strongly than ever with ideas of entrepreneurship.

A professionalist drift among Finnish teachers

The path of the Finnish teacher towards acceptance by both the common people and the elite has been a long one. Ever since they came into existence as a body, Finnish teachers have been fighting a ‘middle-class war on two fronts’ (Rinne, 1988, 440). On the one hand they have been struggling to convince the general public of the wisdom of bringing their children to school and leaving them there, and to convince parents that they can be trusted to take care of their offspring. On the other hand, it has been necessary to convince the establishment of the usefulness and productivity of compulsory schooling.

There have been victories and defeats on both fronts. The land-owning peasantry in four out of five municipalities was initially against schooling, and it was not until the early twentieth century that almost every municipality finally had a school, which was very late in the European and Nordic contexts (Kivirauma & Jauhiainen, 1996). The country descended into Civil War in 1918, which brought defeat on both fronts. Elementary-school teachers tended to side with the Whites, even though some leaders of the Reds had different expectations given the poor financial and legal position of teachers. During the bloody showdown that followed, only 92 teachers in the whole country were charged with cooperation with the Reds, 8 of whom were executed and 10 cleared (Rantala, 2002, 17–19).

An essential element in the upward movement of Finnish teachers was their exceptionally persistent striving for professionalism. As early as in 1890, primary school teachers were claiming that their extension training should be organised at university level. According to a Finnish school historian (Halila, 1950, 296), before the Second World War there were more primary school teachers with an upper-secondary school certificate (the matriculation examination) in Finland than in any other country. A significant breakthrough in raising the status and prestige of teaching was the establishment of the University College of Education in Jyväskylä in the 1930s, followed after the war by the establishment of three teacher-training colleges in bigger cities. These were the first institutions to offer graduate-based training for primary school teachers, and this clearly ranked above the teacher-training seminars in the educational hierarchy. Starting in the late 1950s, the teachers’ union actively demanded that the training of primary school teachers should be at the same level as that of grammar school teachers, in other words the university level.

This professionalist project finally triumphed in the late 1970s when full responsibility for the education of primary school teachers was transferred to the universities and elevated to the master’s level. Since 1979, teachers in both comprehensive and upper-secondary school have all qualified at the same

academic level. Thus, within about ten years the length of occupational preparation for primary school teaching doubled. Teacher training was moved from teachers' colleges and small-town 'seminaries' to the brand-new university faculties of education established as 'teacher-education units'. At the same time, teaching as a career was limited to those with proven ability and a willingness to cope with the ever-lengthening schooling apparatus, and who had matriculated from upper-secondary school. A country that had just left its agricultural lifestyle behind embarked upon one of the most advanced programmes of professional teacher training (Simola, 1993).

Given this continuing and successful social advancement, it is no surprise that teachers in Finnish comprehensive schools prefer to identify themselves with the upper middle class. Hannu Rätty (Rätty et al., 1997), to whose survey on parents we refer above, administered the same questionnaire to teachers in 1997. They clearly shared the opinions of those in the upper-level employee strata on education policy, being more favourable to a market-oriented and competitive school policy than parents in general. A third of them agreed with the statement "the pursuit of equality is no longer a response to the challenges of today," and supported the establishment of more private schools and special schools for gifted pupils.

The former social-democratic head of the National Board of Education, Erkki Aho, the main driver of the comprehensive-school reform between 1973 and 1991, stated that it was during his period in office in the 1980s that the high trust in schooling became a consensual belief in Finland:

The gradual shift toward trusting schools and teachers began in the 1980s, when the major phases of the initial [comprehensive school] reform agenda were completely implemented and consolidated in the education system. In the early 1990s, the era of a trust-based culture formally began in Finland.

(Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006, 12, 132)

To anyone familiar with Finnish schooling, this sounds too lofty and too smug to be true. There is clear counter-evidence, too. Perusal of thousands of pages of state committee and memoranda material between the 1860s and 1990s, and since the implementation of the Comprehensive School Reform in the 1970s, revealed only one exception in which classroom teachers were *not* seen as the very obstacles to developing education and thus as objects *par excellence* of the reform (Simola, 1995).

A revealing antithesis of this mistrust of nation-level policymakers, officials and even teacher educators since the establishment of *Peruskoulu* is to be found in the 1952 curriculum. The Curriculum Committee stated that Finland had "awake and reformist teachers" among whom "a big part are rather responsive to developing their teaching skills through experiments." It emphasised that the unprompted development work of teachers was "one of the most important prerequisites for the constant renewal of the school", and therefore "the

experiences of teachers in the field should be recorded and thus effectively capitalised on in wider circles.” The Committee stressed that the role of teachers was more enduring and even more important than “pedagogical booms when many plans are presented and novel methods are tried out, because the elevation of educational effectiveness is considered so vital.” It consequently made a proposal “to collect the good practices of teachers to be systematically delivered and tested by other teachers” (cit. Simola, 1995, 177). Ironically this simple idea was reincarnated over 60 years later when an enthusiastic businessman created a worldwide business on the back of it ⁶

It is nevertheless true that there is minimal supervision in Finnish schools by international standards. All traditional forms of control over the teacher’s work had disappeared by the beginning of the 1990s. The school inspectorate, a detailed national curriculum, officially approved teaching materials, weekly timetables based on the subjects taught and a class diary in which the teacher recorded what was taught during each lesson were all abandoned. In fact, Finland has never had a tradition of nationwide standardised testing at the comprehensive-school level, and according to a Eurydice report (2004), Finnish teachers at comprehensive schools seem to have the greatest freedom from evaluative control among their European colleagues. All this could be interpreted as very high trust in the work of teachers and the culture of schools, which may legitimate the rare, rather autonomous position of teaching professionals and school-welfare institutions (Rinne et al., 2011).

A hybrid of tradition and progress

Interestingly enough, there is very limited research evidence concerning what really happens in Finnish classrooms. The little there is, however, does not attest to the broad prevalence of individualising practices. It was concluded from an empirical study (Leiwo et al., 1987) conducted in the late 1980s based on videotaped lessons that the model of verbal interaction in classrooms seemed to have remained the same during the previous 50 years: the teacher talked more than two-thirds of the time, and the pupils gave short responses. The final crushing characterisation of the Finnish comprehensive-school classroom was as a “wasteland not only of intelligence but also of emotions.”

Ten years later, a foreign evaluation team reported on its empirical excursion to Finnish classrooms. The team visited, observed and interviewed principals, teachers and students in 50 schools that were selected as being pilot schools or otherwise interested in the curriculum reform under way at the time. What is significant here is that these establishments clearly represented so-called good and innovative schools. The report was a disappointment to its subscribers because it showed how poorly the curriculum reform was being realised on the school level. It could be said, however, that the most interesting notions and observations concerned the pedagogical practices of Finnish comprehensive schools. The British group reported:

We have seen much traditional teaching both in the lower and the upper comprehensive school. By this we mean whole class, simultaneous instruction based on following the teacher or textbook and where the teacher selects the contents to be covered, says what is significant and determines the pace of learning.

(Norris et al., 1996, 86)

[W]hole classes [follow] line by line what is written in the textbook, at a pace determined by the teacher. Rows and rows of children all doing the same thing in the same way whether it be art, mathematics or geography. We have moved from school to school and seen almost identical lessons, you could have swapped the teachers over and the children would never have noticed the difference.

(Norris et al., 1996, 29)

[In] both the lower and upper comprehensive school, we did not see much evidence of, for example, student-centred learning or independent learning rather than subject-centred teaching.

(Norris et al., 1996, 85)

In the eyes of the British researchers, Finnish school teaching and learning seemed to be very traditional, mainly involving teaching the whole group of pupils from the front. Observations of individualised and pupil-centred forms of instruction were rare. Given the strong similarity between the schools, the observers were convinced of the high level of pedagogical discipline and order.

This testimony of the British evaluation group contrasts strongly with some empirical findings from Sweden. Sverker Lindblad (2001) gave a keynote address at the Annual Meeting of the Finnish Educational Research Association in Turku. He described the change in organisational and interaction patterns in Swedish classrooms in the 1970s and 1990s as shown in Table 6.1 below:

Table 6.1 Comparisons of teaching in grade 8 of comprehensive school, 1973 and 1995

<i>Aspects</i>	<i>1973</i>	<i>1995</i>
Organisation	Lesson organised around the teacher in front of the whole class	Short introduction by the teacher, then students work individually or in groups
Interaction	The teacher tells or the teacher asks – the student responds – the teacher evaluates	Short teacher instruction in combination with walking around and helping. Considerable student-student interaction

If the testimony of Norris and Lindblad is valid, there seems to have been a dramatic difference between Finnish and Swedish classroom practices in the 1990s. With a view to analysing discursive and cultural conditions and resources, we look into the teaching methods that purport to realise the millennium dream of individualising mass schooling.

Differentiation and individualisation as saviours

One of the enduring dreams, pursuits and promises associated with public education in Western industrialised countries is a school that is able to respond to individual learning needs and the individual qualities of each pupil. According to *The International Encyclopaedia of Education* (Anderson, 1994), attempts to individualise instruction in modern pedagogy can be traced to the work of Frederic Burk in San Francisco at the beginning of the twentieth century. It seems that the yearbook of the prestigious US National Society for the Study of Education, published in 1925, was devoted entirely to individualised instruction. This pursuit has been at the heart of reform efforts such as the Winnetka, the Illinois, the Dalton and the Decroly programmes ever since.

These aspirations reached the Nordic countries much later, although still long ago. As Donald Broady (1987) observes in the case of Sweden, for example, public school in the 1940s was no longer seen as being in the service of society, but rather served the needs of the individual. After a delay of 20 years, the one basic truth in Finnish educational discourse during the 1960s was the *individualist* character of modern comprehensive schooling.

It is reasonable to say that public schooling is charged with at least three basic institutional tasks that permeate all its practices (see Simola, 1995, 343–348; Tyack & Cuban, 1995, 86). Thus, every innovation must relate to these main characteristics if it is to survive and succeed. In other words, it must solve at least three problems: first, the *problem of organisation*, referring to the fact that a school is a mass institution instructing heterogeneous pupils; second, the *problem of control*, implying that the school as an institution is obliged to control pupil behaviour; and third, the *problem of sorting*, meaning that the school is responsible for selecting people for future roles in school and later life. Simola (1995) crystallised these very same problems facing the prime movers of schooling: mass instruction, responsibility for selection and obligatoriness.

Classroom instruction in Finland and globally primarily relies on two types of interaction: whole-class teaching from the front of the class and work by pupils, either as individuals or in informal small groups. As Sahlström (1999; 2001) showed, both of these major forms of interaction work like distributive businesses, whereby goods distribution is participative (which in turn is the building block of teaching and learning).

Sahlström's analysis demonstrates that the notion of interaction organised as an economy can yield some insights. The organisation of classroom interaction seems to involve an intricate and complex web of relationships among

the participants who are present, each form of participation having different costs and benefits for the interlocutors, the other individuals and the pupils' collectively constituted interaction partners. As an example, displayed participation through hand-raising by some pupils enables others to engage in desk talk, which in turn reduces competition for plenary turns with the hand-raising pupils (cf. Sahlström, 2001).

In general, classroom interaction is not organised to ensure equal opportunities for participation. The reason for this is that one of the fundamental requirements of plenary interaction in particular is to differentiate between pupils: put simply, only one pupil at a time can talk in public. A requirement for talking is listening, and a requirement for listening is the occasional opportunity of talking. As the plenary interaction is organised, some pupils will do the primary work of maintaining receptivity and the talk of the group, while others, both constrained and facilitated by these "plenary receptivity workers," will do other things.

Another example of how interaction does not allow equity of participation is the finding that desk interaction seems to rely largely on the resources provided by one's desk partner. Such resources vary, and do not provide all pupils with the same opportunities to participate. This depends in particular on the way competence in different subject areas is unevenly distributed across pupils in a class: not everybody knows about dancing, or genetics, or feldspar, or wood-cutting.

Thus, one could argue that because of the way the interaction is organised, resources are distributed in differentiating ways (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). From an organisational perspective, the same pupils are likely to be found in approximately the same positions minute after minute, lesson after lesson, day after day (as has been found in other studies based on the same material with this particular interest: see Sahlström & Lindblad, 1998). They are not forced to do this, of course, and it is technically possible that there would be a continuous reshuffling of interaction positions. However, incitement to interaction and resources for reshuffling are scarce, whereas there are abundant resources for doing things "as usual." In the long term, this constitutes a very bleak vision of individualisation, which one would hardly expect to be conducive to the constitution of equal educational opportunities.

One could further argue that the distribution of turns in classroom interaction seems to promote difference rather than equity. Thus, interaction that mediates classroom learning and socialisation makes it difficult to provide what is expected from it, namely, equal opportunities for everyone to develop his or her capacities. Arguments such as this are likely to strengthen the impression among policymakers that one-sided plenary teaching is "bad progressive practice", in which it is impossible to achieve the necessary individualisation. However, the progressive solution to this problem – to have pupils ask questions and do their own work – does not solve the problem of facilitating equity constitution.

On the contrary, a classroom-interaction format according to which pupils ask questions out loud, choose with whom to sit, and spend a good deal of time

on desk work seems in some respects to facilitate the constitution of difference. A change of practice in plenary interaction in a progressive direction, from a teacher-controlled, turn-allocation, hand-raising device to pupil-controlled self-selection, would perhaps reduce the chances of equity constitution. Thus, of all the plenary-interaction formats, those that afforded the most equity-constitution were the “old-fashioned” ones.

Analyses of the pupils’ actions in the material also clearly demonstrate that their lived lessons were individualised to a large extent, which does not seem to promote equity constitution, either. Thus, the perceived progressive orientation in the development of the Swedish comprehensive school, expressed in the increasing amount of desk work and the “informalisation” of plenary classroom interaction, seems to have been counter-productive in terms of the possibilities of creating equity.

Ironically, the expressed curricular ambition of creating equity has led to a choice of work methods that in their very organisation make this more or less a technical impossibility. The constitutive means for reaching the expected goals are simply not available – and according to my analysis, it is highly unlikely that they ever could be. Thus, the situated constitution of moment-by-moment success and failure is mediated by interaction, which in its very organisation allows for differences.

Another example of a similar phenomenon, in other words a practice that in its execution contradicts its own aims, is the increasing amount of individual work (IW), known as “*individuellt arbete*”⁷ in Swedish. Eva Österlind (1998) showed in her dissertation how individual work functioned in relation to individualisation.

“Individual work” and sorting in Sweden

According to Österlind (1998, 148), the *planeringsbook* “makes it possible for the teacher to ‘let go’ of the students without losing them.” In the Finnish context, the principal of the school applying IW was convinced that the teacher’s control of learning was even better than in traditional teaching:

I claim that our teachers know more than the average teacher teaching up front about the skills and the level of every child because they are available for the full 45 minutes, and because the cake is not divided equally but according to need. It takes just a second to check on somebody who is capable of independent work. . . . And then the teacher may have 10 minutes for one or two with temporary or chronic learning difficulties. And the teacher will receive immediate feedback, s/he will see it in the eyes of the child if it comes across or not.

There did not seem to be any problems as far as general order in the classroom was concerned, quite the contrary. According to Österlind (1998): “[t]hreats to the classroom order are diminished as situations where pupils hang around and

wait for help seldom appear" (Österlind, 1998, 148). Moreover, "it is obvious that the power of pupils as a group weakened" because "[f]ormerly members of a collective, all students now have to negotiate for themselves" (Österlind, 1998, 149).

Another positive way in which IW seems to be in accordance with both the official educational discourse and the teachers' opinions is the shifting of some responsibility from the teacher to the pupil (see Österlind, 1998, 149). This is a much-debated issue in Finnish texts (CUR, 1994), and in the talk of the teachers we interviewed (Simola & Hakala, 2001; Simola, 2002).

The teachers supported individualism as such. Interestingly, although they spoke rather positively about it in principle, when asked they could not concretise how they might individualise their teaching in a classroom of 25 pupils (Simola, 2002.). Rätty et al. (1996) found that Finnish teachers were more willing to explore different kinds of individual treatment than the parents were to accept it (Rätty et al., 1995). One might conclude that Finnish teachers do not find much to criticise in individualism, but they lack the tools and the means to realise the ideology in the crowded classrooms of comprehensive schools.

According to our empirical data, IW does not affect the reproduction of social distinction. Half of the pupils in Österlind's sample ($N = 49$ pupils from two classrooms) came from wealthy or 'active' homes and the other half from average or 'limited' homes. IW was very clearly capitalised by offspring from different 'life-style groups' (i.e., parental occupation, economic status, cultural consumption, family hobbies, vacations and social networking). In terms of adequacy, no pupils from 'wealthy' families and only 10 per cent from 'active' families failed, whereas among pupils from 'average' and 'limited' families the failure rate was 50 and 40 per cent, respectively (Österlind, 1998, 148). Thus, only 25 per cent of all pupils were inadequate in this respect.

Österlind (1998) ends her study on IW by analysing its alternative meanings for and effects on different pupils. She suggests that the key is the combination of freedom and control. Referring to Foucault, she claims that "when the teaching becomes more individualized and the discipline more indirect and discrete, it is part of a general development in our society towards individualization and self-discipline as two sides of the same coin" (Österlind, 1998, 139). She also refers to the new demands from the labour market: "The employees are asked to think for themselves and solve problems, to be independent and responsible. The conclusion is that it is not enough to teach students to be punctual and do their work properly. A new student role is also needed" (Österlind, 1998).

Österlind (1998) also refers to IW as "a new way to secure an advantaged position for middle-class children in education, as they will make use of the freedom to achieve more." Among the 'have-nots' its meaning might be very different:

In relation to the situation in the labour market, with unemployment and trends towards self-employment and temporary jobs – perhaps *working*

alone at a computer – the training offered by IW seems to fit in very well. Aiming at *planning and evaluation skills, efficiency and responsibility*, IW does not appear old-fashioned at all.

(Österlind, 1998, 150; emphasis ours)

It seems obvious that IW is one of the techniques that, to quote Lindblad (2001, 65):

[Is] creating demands on students that on a superficial level fit well with texts on educational restructuring but in practice imply different responses among them that will lead to self-selection and self-exclusion: in other words they work by themselves whereas in earlier teaching the teachers dealt more directly with differentiation and selection.

Lindblad (2001, 65) continues:

The new pattern is very well suited to a comprehensive school with no tracking and streaming. The problem to individualise the learning process is handed over to the students. Their way of dealing with this – with given tasks and a given social basis for work – is something *they* are responsible for to a much larger extent compared to teaching in the 1970s. We have processes of inclusion and exclusion as well as social differentiation, which work in different – but probably effective – ways that are more acceptable to all involved, and that also produce less overt resistance among students.

Indeed, if the mission of the teacher in the old school was to be a gatekeeper of fully authorised citizenship, the mission of the modern comprehensive-school teacher might be, to cite Rinne (1988, 443), “to inscribe into the pupils the sense of ‘self-selection’ and ‘suitability’, to guide the pupils to the free choices and routes that are fitting and suitable for them.” It does not seem an overstatement to suggest that IW-type innovations are highly functional in our late-modern society, which is ruled by doctrines of free but obligatory individual choice, persistent competition, the exchangeable and the replaceable, and the constant weighing up of the adequacy and sufficiency of others and oneself (see e.g., Beck et al., 1994; Rose, 1994).

Finnish resistance to individualisation

In 1994 the NBE launched a project focusing on non-graded tuition (*vuosiluokkiin sitomaton opetus, VSOP*) in *Peruskoulu* (Mehtäläinen, 1997, 16; Leppälä, 2007, 40–58). The ambitious but at the same time rather abstract and confusing aim was to develop school teaching to take the individuality of pupils more into account. In the recent *National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014* (NBE, 2014), the term still covers practically all the individualising pedagogical

acts, including the philosophy applied in the whole school, and the procedures appertaining to certain grades and certain individual pupils (NBE, 2014, 38). In practice, it is used mainly as a way to help pupils who cannot follow the general pace of tuition as expressed in recent NBE guidelines: “in practice, non-graded tuition is a form of differentiation that has always been used in schools, in one way or another.”⁸

Much of the little information there is on the distribution of individualising pedagogy in the realities of basic schooling in Finland is contradictory. On the one hand, VSOP is mentioned and explained on half a page of the brand new national Framework Curriculum 2016 (NBE, 2014, 38), and is mentioned on the home sites of various cities and municipalities. It is apparent that it is used mainly as a means of differentiating weak pupils rather than organising studies in the whole group.⁹

On the other hand, the latest large-scale evaluation report of the *Centre for Educational Assessment* (Atjonen et al., 2008) on pedagogical practices in basic schooling does not even mention it. Our conclusion in a comparative article (Carlgren et al., 2006) published 10 years ago in cooperation with Nordic colleagues may be still valid:

The case of Finland shows the complex and contradictory relations between societal changes, changes in policy discourses and changes at the school level. While Finland at the beginning of the 1990s developed the most neo-liberal individualism at the policy level among the Nordic countries, the change towards a more socio-liberal common school orientation is interesting, as well as the connection in Finland between the success in PISA and the strong position of traditional teaching. The other four countries have experienced something of a PISA shock and now look to Finland for answers.

(Carlgren et al., 2006, 318–219)

However, the teachers we interviewed for our two studies (Simola & Hakala, 2001; Simola, 2002) saw the changes in schools during the 1990s as progress. Phenomena that were most frequently and positively mentioned, almost without any negative connotations, included increasing autonomy in schools, increasing co-operation among teachers (and also with other professionals and agencies), discussions on basic values and the tasks of the school (carried out in teachers’ lounges during the implementation of the school-based curriculum), an emphasis on the needs and interests of individual pupils, opening the school to society (as well as opening classroom doors), bringing the teacher out of the classroom and a broader choice for parents and pupils. Nevertheless, the comments almost always implied strong reservations. The main changes were carried out at the same time as the deep economic depression took hold in the early 1990s, which brought not only changes but also considerable cuts in school budgets.

A few studies from the 2000s on Finnish teachers give a clear picture of a profession that is committed to its traditional work in the classroom but resists and strongly criticises the innovation wave. According to a survey conducted by Nina Santavirta et al. (2001; see also Virta & Kurikka, 2001), 8 out of 10 Finnish teachers see their work as rewarding, like it and are strongly involved in it. What appears to stress them the most is the 'extra work', in other words meetings, planning and reporting, for example, not the basic classroom work. Syrjäläinen (2002) interviewed teachers about their experiences of and attitudes towards recent school reforms and innovations. She summarises their critical thinking as follows: reforms mean too heavy a work load, the teachers have no say in the innovations, the development work is too often chaotic, the sphere of teachers' responsibilities has been extended too far, only lip service is paid to professional responsibility and competence and there is too much unrealistic and even dangerous development work (Syrjäläinen, 2002, 90–100)

Traditional teaching seems still to be alive and well. According to a recent comparative TALIS study (Taajamo et al., 2014), Finnish teachers at lower-secondary schools, compared with their counterparts in the other 33 participating countries, on average give fewer different tasks to different pupils (37 per cent and 44 per cent, respectively), prefer less group work (34 per cent and 47 per cent, respectively), refer more seldom to everyday problems in their teaching (64 per cent and 68 per cent, respectively) and give less written feedback to pupils (25 per cent and 54 per cent, respectively) (Taajamo et al., 2014, 40–41). It is obvious that these findings do not give evidence of student-centred constructive pedagogy, rather the contrary.

There is a curious paradox in the latest larger-scale evaluation report of the *Centre for Educational Assessment* (Atjonen et al., 2008) on the pedagogical culture of Finnish schools. The conclusion is optimistic, although the evidence is based on a survey and visits (interviews, discussions and around 50 classroom observations) in 12 schools.

On the one hand, the group found a very positive development in terms of student centeredness in teachers' attitudes and rhetoric. The report concludes that the pedagogical pursuits and attitudes of "the big proportion of teachers" are pupil centred, and their starting point in the individualisation of teaching is to listen, support and encourage the pupils (Atjonen et al., 2008, 142). The school-based curricula are also pupil-centred, as evidenced during the school visits (Atjonen et al., 2008, 141). There seemed to have been positive developments since the Norris study in the 1990s, but at a slower rate than was desired (Atjonen et al., 2008, 122). Norris and his colleagues (1996) emphasised that the great majority of teachers did not seem to internalise pupil-centred values in their curricular work:

[N]ine teachers out of ten described their principles of action and were able to crystallise the principles they considered the most important. This is indicative of structured pedagogical thinking and conscious pedagogical decision-making, which are considered signs of good teacherhood.

(Norris et al., 1996, 194; translation ours)

On the other hand, however, two thirds of the teachers said that they seldom, if ever, emphasised individualising and differentiating teaching in their choice of methods. The evaluators also found evidence of this in their school visits (Norris et al., 1996, 199). Thus it seems that most of the teachers – nine out of ten (Norris et al., 1996, 194) – had adopted individualising rhetoric, but a minority – one third (Norris et al., 1996, 199) – seemed to be able or willing to put it into practice. Teacher-centred methods still seemed to dominate (Norris et al., 1996, 121–122), and the evaluators also reported resistance to individualist methods (Norris et al., 1996, 136; see also Kankainen, 2001; Virta & Kurikka, 2001; Kupari & Reinikainen, 2004; Heinonen, 2005; Reinikainen, 2007).

Another interesting finding of the evaluation report (Atjonen et al., 2008) concerns the relationship between parents and the school.

The most important external stakeholders of the school are the guardians of the pupils. However, nine out of ten teachers said that they took little if any account of parental expectations when planning their teaching. One interpretation of this is that teachers are protective of their expertise in teaching and distance themselves from the parenting tasks of guardians.
(Atjonen et al., 2008, 204; translation ours)

This interpretation attests to the persistence of a characteristic that rather sharply distinguishes Finnish teachers from their Nordic colleagues, which we identified in our turn-of-the-millennium comparative study (Simola & Hakala, 2001; Klette et al., 2002; Simola, 2002):

[T]he teachers rarely mentioned the forging of close relationships with families and parents as a basic task. Although new forms of verbal evaluation and increased choice entailed more frequent communication with families, they seemed to be quite happy with the traditional relations. Without asking for much individual treatment, families are supposed to leave their children at school, which is seen as a legitimate representative of society.
(Simola, 2015, 164)

Mute opposition from Finnish pupils

It is conspicuous that, according to international reviews, the most serious problem seems to be that Finnish pupils report almost the lowest levels of enjoyment at school among the many countries that have been compared (Linakylä, 1995). For many this lack of enjoyment also seems to foreshadow their future educational career, given that most vocational and other qualifications are awarded to youngsters by school institutions.

In the light of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000 results, however, enjoyment at school does not seem to differ dramatically between Finland and the other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. According to the responses from 15-year-old

pupils (see Table 6.2 below), more Finns (26%) than Swedes (20%) were in agreement only concerning the statement “My school is a place where I do not want go”, but this was still below the OECD average. The only way in which Finns and Swedes differed significantly from other OECD pupils was in their stronger tendency to feel bored at school.

The Finns and the Swedes did not differ in how they felt about the disciplinary climate of their school, but they did differ from their peers in other countries, as shown in Table 6.3. In nearly all the measures, our pupils rated the classroom climate lower than the OECD average. The only measures on which Finns scored more highly than Swedes and the OECD average concerned working conditions. This could refer to the slightly better work discipline in Finnish than in Swedish classrooms, from the pupils’ point of view.

Meanwhile, Finland seems to differ significantly from Sweden and the OECD average in how individual teachers relate to their pupils: only half of

Table 6.2 Engagement with school: “My school is a place where . . .”

Agree or agree strongly

	<i>I make friends easily</i> (%)	<i>I feel I belong</i> (%)	<i>Other pupils seem to like me</i> (%)	<i>I feel lonely</i> (%)	<i>I do not want go</i> (%)	<i>I often feel bored</i> (%)	<i>I feel like an outsider</i> (%)	<i>I feel awkward and out of place</i> (%)
Finland	84	87	84	8	26	60	6	11
Sweden	87	78	88	9	20	58	7	7
OECD average					28	48	8	13

Note: Most lessons (%) + every lesson (%)

Source: PISA 2000

Table 6.3 Disciplinary climate: “How often do these things happen in your ‘test language’ lessons?”

Agree or agree strongly

	<i>The teacher has to wait a long time for pupils to “quieten down”</i> (%)	<i>Pupils take a long time to start working after the lesson begins</i> (%)	<i>Pupils don’t listen to what the teacher says</i> (%)	<i>There is noise and disorder</i> (%)	<i>Pupils cannot work well</i> (%)
Finland	39	21	30	42	15
Sweden	43	31	29	38	23
OECD average	32	25	24	30	19

Note: Most lessons (%) + every lesson (%)

Source: PISA 2000

Table 6.4 Teacher support: “How often do these things happen in your ‘test language’ lessons?”

Most lessons + every lesson

	<i>The teacher helps pupils with their learning</i>	<i>The teacher gives pupils the opportunity to express opinions</i>	<i>The teacher shows an interest in every pupil’s learning</i>
Finland	41.9 + 24.1 = 66.0%	32.6 + 39.0 = 71.6%	32.8 + 19.3 = 52.1%
Sweden	40.2 + 35.8 = 76.0%	36.3 + 34.9 = 71.2%	37.1 + 27.0 = 64.1%
OECD average	30.2 + 26.3 = 56.5%	28.8 + 37.4 = 66.1%	37.2 + 28.3 = 65.5%

Source: PISA 2000

the pupils thought that “the teacher shows an interest in every pupil’s learning in most or all lessons”, compared with around two thirds in Sweden and the OECD on average (Table 6.4). This result could be seen as lightly supporting our interview findings that Finnish teachers seem to maintain a certain distance from their pupils (Simola & Hakala, 2001; Simola, 2002).

The latest PISA 2012¹⁰ indicated some alarming developments among Finnish youth: the percentage of pupils reporting being happy at school was the fifth lowest, and the deterioration in sense of belonging between 2013 and 2012 was the fourth strongest among the OECD countries. Päivi Harinen and Juha Halme (2012) analysed and presented for discussion existing information from research and policy-steering instruments related to the wellbeing of young people and children at school. The bulk of the data presented in the study derived from international comparisons, national statistical analyses and surveys, and studies based on pupil interviews and analyses of everyday activities at school and related interaction. The focus was on the everyday matters that contributed to wellbeing at school and factors that made it worse in children’s and young people’s opinions.

Harinen and Halme concluded that although a great deal of effort is put into protecting the basic rights of the child at Finnish schools, there are matters related to school activities and the operating environment that impede their realisation. These include a specifically Finnish “anti-school culture” that leads to frequent problems related to disturbances during lessons. Finnish comprehensive schools also struggle with regard to the right to participate. Pupils’ voices are seldom heard when educational content and methods are discussed, for example. Moreover, pupils play no part in deciding on schedules, the length of schooldays and the study periods, or on issues related to school equipment. This could explain the emotional gap between adults and children at Finnish elementary schools, which is often manifest in an extremely negative attitude towards teachers.

The picture of Finnish children and youth is bipartite: on one side is the growing majority who feel happy, involved and optimistic towards the future, and on the other is the minority who seem to feel increasingly unhappy, excluded and pessimistic.¹¹

It is tempting to think that at least some of the authority of Finnish teachers is based on their relatively strong professional identity, which enables them to season their traditional teaching with the spice of progress.¹² It is also tempting to think that at least some of the obedience of Finnish pupils stems from a natural acceptance of authority, and the ethos of respect for teachers. Some of the observations of the British evaluation group from the mid-1990s referred to above appear to support this positive interpretation:

Without exception the schools appeared as calm, secure places for pupils to work. Finnish pupils seemed generally well behaved; problems of order and discipline were few and confined to individuals or small groups. [. . .] There appeared to be concern for others, and respect for property. Teachers' relationships with pupils generally demonstrated caring and mutual respect, and there was little sense of teachers needing to exercise strict discipline or authority.

(Norris et al., 1996, 39)

These [observation] examples were deliberately drawn from the whole range of schools, and include examples of teaching in both upper and lower comprehensives. No doubt some of them reflected high-quality teaching and considerable professional skill within the formal whole-class instructional tradition, and there is little doubt that in the best cases, the pupils enjoyed the lessons enormously and probably learned a lot.

(Norris et al., 1996, 62)

Our findings in a study that is still going on (Simola et al., 2015)¹³ supports the conclusion that Finnish comprehensive-school pedagogy in practice appears to be a curious combination of traditional, teacher-centred tuition and progressive, pupil-centred caring. The Local Education Authority of Helsinki collects dense and longitudinal data on its schools and their pupils in terms of both socioeconomic and cultural background and learning results. These data clearly show the strong and internationally recognised connection between the two.

Our study (Simola et al., 2015) focused on three primary schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Helsinki. The schools achieved clearly better learning results on nationally standardised tests than statistically predicted in accordance with the economic, social and cultural factors of the catchment areas; in other words, the schools outperformed other schools in similarly disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

We drew the following conclusions from our one-year field study based on observations, discussions and interviews in these schools: (1) there is a strong caring and demanding ethos in the schools; (2) the teachers clearly see themselves as adults and as collectively responsible for the life of the school; and (3)

the pedagogical culture is generally traditional, although all the schools supported experimentation.

Conclusion: consolidating but paternalistic progressivism

The dynamics on the level of classroom cultures combines two discourses: a strong Finnish paternalistic pedagogical tradition and pupil-centred progressivism, which has mainly been a top-down process emanating from the national curriculum and teacher education for comprehensive school. Even though Finnish teachers appreciate their master's degree, they still strongly doubt the 'ecological validity' (cf. Neisser, 1976) of educational theories in the reality of the classroom. Although the street credibility of child-centred progressivism is not high, the official ideology of academic teacher education has veered towards a curious Finnish *Peruskoulu* pedagogy that could be characterised as paternalistic progressivism.

This classroom pedagogy is paternalistic in the sense that teachers see themselves as adults keeping a professional distance from pupils and parents; it is progressive in its heavy commitment to the 'no child left behind' ideology that is strongly supported in state educational discourse, efficient special-education and remedial teaching systems, school healthcare and other welfare services and free school meals for all pupils.

This paternalistic progressivism appears to have had a strongly intensifying effect on everyday schooling, which works well in compulsory schooling – as long as teachers believe in their traditional role and pupils accept their traditional position. It thus functions both reproductively and progressively, as does the schooling: it tends to keep things as they have been, but still opens up niches for new practices.

The dynamics on the classroom level could be characterised as *paternalistic progressivism*, which appears to have had a strongly *consolidating* effect on the teacher's work in everyday schooling. This also works well in compulsory schooling – as long as teachers believe in their traditional role and pupils accept their traditional position. Paternalistic progressivism thus functions both reproductively and progressively, as does the schooling: it tends to keep things as they have been, but still opens up niches for new practices.

Notes

- 1 Tuiskon Ziller (1817–1882) was a leading and ruling Herbartian in Germany, the founding father and president of the Association of Scientific Pedagogy (1868–ca. 1927).
- 2 The use of the terms pedagogy (*pedagogiikka*) and didactics (*didaktiikka*) in Finnish is curious. The origins of the distinction lie in the German tradition. The natural distinction in Finnish was between *kasvatus-ja opetusoppi*, a bipartite teaching subject in the teacher's seminaries and colleges as well as at the University of Helsinki, and could be

literally translated into English as a ‘teaching subject of education and tuition’. This was given a scientific hue in 1966 when it was re-named *kasvatustiede*, Educational Science, at the University of Helsinki and upgraded to a major subject (“didactic closure”, see Simola et al., 1997; Simola, 2015). Another curious and distinctive detail is that Finland-Swedish follows the Swedish and Anglo-American discourse in using the term *pedagogik* for the academic subject.

- 3 cf. Husén, 1962; Dahllöf, 1967; Richardson, 1978; Lundgren, 1979; Isling, 1980; Marklund, 1985; Englund, 1986; Dahllöf, 1999; Jonsson, 1999; Lindblad & Lundahl, 1999 for thorough discussions of the post-war period from different perspectives.
- 4 We chose to use and rely primarily on the more recent research discussing experiences from the school period within which Sahlström’s studies were conducted. As a result, much of the impressive and extensive research from the 1960s and 70s conducted in Sweden in the field of differentiation, exemplified by Dahllöf (1967) and presented in an overview in Marklund (1985), for example, is not discussed further.
- 5 “I did find it challenging to focus on appropriate learning goals for each child and affording opportunities for supporting individual progress. It was also challenging to find appropriate pedagogical and didactic solutions to new situations, especially tools for assessing the children’s learning. Finally, I would like to point out that there is still much to be done in developing combined pre-school and first and second grade education. The school should have more resources and readiness to receive different kinds of children” (Leppälä, 2007, 3).
- 6 “Over the next two years we will interview 100 leading global thinkers, create 100 case studies of exciting education happenings worldwide, and trial 100 new innovations in a selection of schools in Finland over a period of one year.” <https://hundred.fi/about>; read in 030616.
- 7 It was also referred to as *Eget Arbete* (your own work).
- 8 http://www.oph.fi/saadokset_ja_ohjeet/ohjeita_koulutuksen_jarjestamiseen/perusopetuksen_jarjestaminen/perusopetuksen_oppilaan_arviointi/jousto_oppilaan_arviointiin_vuosiluokkiin_sitomattoman_opiskelun_avulla (accessed March 20, 2016).
- 9 One case in which VSOP has been applied successfully for years is Roihuvuori School in Helsinki. It is indicative of its laboriousness that teachers create an Individual Study and Development Plan for each pupil (see <http://roiuhuvuori.com/foorumi/2-keskustelu/2791-kouluun-roihuvuoreen> accessed March 20, 2006).
- 10 OECD (2013); see also (Kupiainen, Hautamaki & Karjalainen, 2009; Deakin Crick, Stringher & Ren, 2014)
- 11 For a recent concluding study, see Myllyniemi (2015).
- 12 According to a US teacher working in Finland, Finnish schooling differs specifically in terms of the teacher’s confidence in the pupils (<http://www.hs.fi/kotimaa/a1431221158937>).
- 13 (Vartiainen, 2014, 2015, 2016; Vartiainen & Paakari, 2014)

The dynamics of Finnish basic-education politics

From understanding to explanation

Our aim in this final chapter is to summarise the respective discursive formations in the dynamics of the four fields of Finnish basic-education politics. This will give us a basis on which to outline our concluding explanation of the success of *Peruskoulu*, as well as to speculate on or even anticipate the problems it is facing and may face in the near future. Thus, we venture to offer proposals for discussion on the future of Finnish schooling and to give our reaction to Pasi Sahlberg's (2011) insightful and thought-provoking subtitle in his bestseller *The Finnish Lessons*: "What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?"

Four constitutive discursive dynamics in Finnish basic schooling are outlined below: *buffering and embedded egalitarianism* in policymaking, *redistributive but punctuated trust* in governance, *diverging but civic parenthood* in families' educational strategies and *consolidating but paternalistic progressivism* in classroom culture. As emphasised in Chapter 1, these discursive principles are not ideas, paradigms or premises presented in intentional or explicit forms, but rather fit in the ambiguous area between words and things. They could be described as tacit and unarticulated although self-evident for every actor in the field. Our concluding claim is thus that they essentially define, steer and guide dynamic relations or relational dynamics in four fields of basic-education politics in Finland.

These analytical descriptions also fit into the framework of this study (see Table 7.1). At least two qualities in the relations between each of these four dynamics are noteworthy.

First, the internal relations in each are highly controversial, even paradoxical: in other words they are conducive to change. The conflicts are not problematic, however, but are favourable in making our conceptualisations vivid, alive and vibrant and thus more credible. This is what reality and life are, by definition, as we emphasise in our theoretical approach at the beginning of this book.

"Embedded equalitarism" refers to a contradiction between something and something else that challenges it and in a way comes from the outside (i.e., travelling individual egalitarianism or "equitarism"). This contradiction refers to the struggle that continues even though embedded egalitarianism currently seems to be dominant. "Punctuated trust" is trust that is not stable or constant but

Table 7.1 Four constitutive discursive principles in our three-dimensional analytical framework

	<i>Politicking: the art of playing with contingency</i> EFFECT	<i>The political situation: structural frameworks for action</i> QUALITY	<i>Political possibilities: discursive capacities enabling action</i> SUBJECT
Policymaking	Buffering	<i>and</i> embedded	egalitarianism
Governance	Redistributive	<i>but</i> punctuated	trust
Families' educational strategies	Diverging	<i>but</i> civic	parenthood
Classroom cultures	Consolidated	<i>but</i> paternalistic	progressivism

rather dependent on many factors that are not straightforward or rational. It is bound to business cycles in politics and culture as well and in economics. The term “civic parenthood” implies *naivety*, ineffectuality and immaturity; a trustful mind that reflects the closeness of the agrarian culture: you had better want what you can get. The implication is that it is not decent to demand more than is realistic. As for “paternalistic progressivism”, it is highly paradoxical to demand subservience as a prerequisite for care. The linking words “and” and “but” indicate whether or not there are contradictions between the attributes and thus refer to the transience and fragility in those relations (in all except egalitarianism).

Second, the four nouns (egalitarianism, trust, parenthood and progressivism) are *content related* and are doubly attributed. The first attributes (buffering, redistributive, diverging and consolidating) refer to the *effects* of the respective dynamics whereas the second (embedded, punctuated, civic and paternalistic) characterise the *qualities*. These attributes, referring to the actors and institutions, make the main discursive formations dynamic. They reveal, interestingly enough, that two of the discursive dynamics are *defensive or preventive*, whereas the other two are *offensive or forward-oriented*. Punctuated trust reorganises the power relations among the local actors, and paternalistic progressivism empowers the teachers. Embedded egalitarianism buffers the travelling policies from taking root in *Peruskoulu*, and even civic parenthood delays the middle-class pursuit of distinction.

Dynamics in policymaking

There is a clear tendency in policymaking to achieve a balance between social and individual equality. There is increasing and credible evidence of positive social and economic effects of both. The success of Nordic societies in numerous global comparisons and rankings, especially those with a wide selection of indicators, could be considered one example of this. The most convincing

books on the fundamental importance of social equality are unquestionably *The Spirit Level* (2009) by two British epidemiologists, Richard G. Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, and *Capital in the Twenty-first Century* (2013) by French economist Thomas Piketty.

The issue is far from simple, however. We pointed out in a study on school choice in Finland (Simola et al., 2015) that there are at least two different “equalities”, or dimensions of equality in schooling¹: *social* and *individual* equality (or equity). Both are concretised in two recognised international agreements. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) defines education as an equal right for everybody, regardless of wealth, ethnicity, gender or place of residence. It states in Article 26 of this document, however, that “[p]arents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.” These two principles are confirmed in the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*² (1976, Article 13):

§1 The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. [. . .]

§3 The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to choose for their children schools, other than those established by the public authorities, which conform to such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the State and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

We further characterised the right to education as a principle of social equality, and freedom of education as individual equality or equity, and went on to define the sensitive and complex balance between these two principles as follows (Simola et al., 2015):

Without sufficient common rights there are no freedoms – at least not for everybody. Then again, without sufficient individual freedom, common rights may imply coercion.

(Simola et al., 2015, 115–116).

Without social equality, no other dimensions of equality are realisable. Without social equality, individual rights are not real rights but rather privileges enjoyed by the few.

(Simola et al., 2015, 116–117)

Our concern about equality policy relates to rights and freedom. Social and individual equality should not be seen as opposites but rather as complementary, and at the same time controversial. Social equality (as a right) is fundamental but does not work without individual equality (freedom), whereas individual equality will not be realised without strong social equality.

This balance has recently been questioned in the context of school choice and classes with a special emphasis, thereby exemplifying the vast spaces for politicking created on the local level. Different municipalities have very different policies on these issues. In some cities parents are encouraged to choose a school other than the local one and to find emphasised tuition for their offspring, whereas in others the intake areas are drawn such that the school is filled with local pupils, hence there is simply no space for school choice, and emphasised tuition is mainly organised in non-permanent classes. Examples from various countries show how difficult it is politically to withdraw previously allowable instruments for distinction in public schooling. Our perspective on dynamics implies that radically free school choice would be legally and theoretically possible throughout Finland. However, the path dependencies and patterns of interaction would constrain or even prevent its implementation. This underlines the fragility and contingency of the situation as well as the fruitfulness of the endeavour to understand the logics of action in a given policy thread.

Dynamics in governance

Two internationally well-known success stories have been written into the recent history of Finland: Nokia and *Peruskoulu*. In both cases the success seems to have essentially stemmed from demolishing hierarchies, cutting down on control and thus promoting creativity and pride in one's work on the shop-floor level,³ in a word encouraging a culture of trust.

Social and political theorists ranging from Locke, Tocqueville and Simmel to Putnam and Bourdieu have stressed the fundamental importance of engendering trust in modern societies (see e.g., Simmel, 1994; Misztal, 1996; Newton, 2001). Former President of the European Evaluation Society Francis E. Leeuw attested to this indirectly in a curious way in his farewell speech in 2002. He pointed out that the network society, the collaborative state, and partnering arrangements between organisations are surrounded by trust, commitment and reputation. The chairman of industry on the increase warned in his farewell speech that "evaluating trust(-based) relationships leads to unintended side effects and can even kill trust. Evaluation then acts as a trust-killer" (Leeuw, 2002, 5).

The creation of social trust is a long and complex historical process. Sustaining social trust in societies in which it has been achieved is not that complicated – in short, it just needs the political will. It is nevertheless clear that securing the political will is an extremely complicated process: social trust is hard to achieve and easy to lose.

Some people might think it is a simple matter to create a culture of trust in the field of education in societies such as Finland with its strong trust in public institutions. There is a slight risk that the actors might misuse their autonomy and freedom, but what rather happened in the Finnish *Peruskoulu* case was that the teachers carried out their tasks in more or less the same way, possibly slightly more happily and more creatively. As shown above (Ch. 4), however, it was not a linear political process but one of contingent intertwinement between good constellations and active actions. It has also become clear that nobody anticipated the radical level of autonomy that was finally realised. The heavily centralised norm-steering came to an end in the administration during the late 1980s. The economic recession of the early 1990s gave a good reason to move the decision making on cuts and savings to the municipal level. The new head of the National Board of Education from 1991 happened to have real trust in Finnish teachers and this opened the door to radical municipal autonomy in education.

Even if public trust in institutions is strong in Finland (cf. Figure 2.1: Public trust in institutions), this is not necessarily reflected in its educational institutions. Convincing evidence of contingency is to be found in Finnish university politics, especially in the University of Helsinki (see e.g., Patomäki, 2005; Rinne & Simola, 2005; Simola, 2009), where trust is conspicuous by its absence. Even though existing in a trust-based society, according to Finnish sociologist Pekka Sulkunen the prevailing administration and policy ideology refers

to the large-scale industrial management of mass-armies copied from early last century rather than to Silicon Valley. It is as if we were preparing for the Normandy landings rather than scientific breakthroughs.

(Sulkunen, 2009; cit. Rinne et al., 2012, 349–359; translation ours)

It is therefore no exaggeration to describe the culture of trust in the administration of Finnish basic education as “punctuated”: it may crumble away quickly, and if it does it will be really difficult to reconstruct. This is a real challenge for national policymaking, in particular because it is more than evident that today’s municipal autonomy and freedom impose such demanding responsibilities on the municipalities that not even the biggest cities are able to fulfil them honourably. This is especially true with regard to school choice, as shown in Chapter 6 of this book.

Today’s school principals are also highly autonomous and very powerful in the formation of teaching groups, for example. There is no research evidence of this apart from indirect conclusions from the PISA 2009 study indicating that there was some kind of streaming in over half of the schools, in other words the teaching groups were established in a selective and permanent way.⁴ This, of course, would seriously contravene both the spirit and the regulations of *Peruskoulu*. One could thus conclude that local educational authorities and school principals are loaded with responsibilities that exceed their capacities.

This dilemma is challenging but far from unsolvable. How, then, could the autonomy and freedom of municipalities and school principals be limited without destroying the administrative culture of trust (Seppänen, Kalalahti et al., 2015)? It appears evident that a new kind of balance between centralised and decentralised governance is needed in Finnish basic education. The problems of municipalities related to school choice and of schools related to permanent grouping are extremely complex, and profound cooperation among the best specialists in policymaking, governance, teaching and research is urgently needed. In particular, there is a pressing need to agree on common and shared principles. It is not overstating the problem to warn that *Peruskoulu* is on the cusp of becoming segmented and segregated in a way that reflects the pre-1970s binary school system.

Dynamics in families' educational strategies

The dynamics in the educational strategies of families in Finland clearly seems to be in a state of change. There is no reason to assume that prolific social differentiation and segregation will not produce a similar divide in schooling. The tendencies are clear: school segregation and socially challenging schools are recognised social costs in the discourse of local authorities, especially in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. Along with this have emerged fierce debates in social media among parents, authorities and school personnel about the parental right to choose a school as well as to place their child in a class with a special emphasis. The proportion of private schools is increasing slowly but consistently, especially in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. A small but vocal minority comprising parents and teachers is fiercely defending free school choice, emphasised tuition and selective classes against all initiatives at limitation or even reasonable re-organisation.

Nevertheless, the fight against segregation is far from hopeless in Finland. The cause of equal schooling is championed in various ways. First, the great majority, even in the upper and middle classes, supports equality and uniformity in comprehensive schooling (Seppänen, Kalalahti et al., 2015). Second, there is a rather successful and consensual tradition in urban planning policy to mix owner-occupied, rented and municipality-supported housing in all neighbourhoods. Third, in terms of education policy, the 1998 Basic Education Law emphasises the right of every pupil to attend a neighbourhood school on the one hand, and on the other establishes comprehensive schooling as an entity and not as comprising primary school with class teachers and lower-secondary school with subject teachers, as is the tradition elsewhere in the world. These principles led to the establishment over a decade of almost 600 full comprehensive schools (i.e., catering to grades 1–9), which is 20 per cent of all the schools offering basic education in Finland.⁵ Fourth, Finland's internationally rare master's-level teacher education makes it possible for class teachers to major in teaching subjects and thus also to teach at the upper-comprehensive

level (i.e., grades 7 to 9). The high-quality pedagogical training of subject teachers qualifies them also to teach on the lower-comprehensive level (i.e., grades 1–6). These unique Finnish qualities ensure pedagogical flexibility and teacher-friendliness in the organisation of full comprehensive schooling: teachers are able to capitalise on their specialties in their teaching work.

There is no doubt that increasing consumerism in education will erode naïve confidence in the homogeneity of schools. As a result, more and more families will look for the best alternatives for their offspring. It is useless to moralise about parental “school shopping”: it is the responsibility of society to decide if basic education will become a market place. What is remarkable here is that the market place is only open to those with the relevant currency, in other words economic, social and especially cultural capital. Basic education would then be transformed little by little from a public to a private good (cf. e.g., Labaree, 1997; Hellsten & Larbi, 2006). What may be worse, if the means of distinction are given to the haves in society, withdrawal will be difficult if not impossible.⁶

Even though schools will never be homogeneous, they could still be “good enough” for the great majority of parents. It is not a major political or administrative problem if a small minority wish to choose a private or a popular school, or a class with a special emphasis: it only requires the system to be flexible enough. It is much more difficult to maintain the confidence of parents. The bottom line here is that the schools really are good enough in reality: in their learning results, in their leadership, in their ethos, in their relationships – and in their reputation. Only the last of these may be difficult for local actors to handle. Otherwise the keys are in the hands of the local educational authorities, the principals and the teachers – on condition that urban segregation does not increase too much.⁷ In the Finnish case, a reasonably sized⁸ full comprehensive school would facilitate the creation of a sustainable school culture. It would cut down the school shopping in that parents may not be eager to take their pubescent offspring away at the main transition point between the lower (grades 1–6) and upper (grades 7–9) stages of *Peruskoulu*. In any case, the fundamental issue will be what really happens in the school, as discussed in the next section.

Dynamics in classroom cultures

What about the dynamics in classroom cultures? So far, the effects of the rather original “paternalistic progressivism” have been to “consolidate” the position of teachers and their authority. It is clear, however, that this will no longer suffice. The authority of teachers has been questioned and challenged not only through the loosening and diversifying of social codes but also through digital revolution. Those calling on research evidence of a superficial, incoherent and heterogeneous understanding of youth competences (see e.g., Margaryan, Littlejohn & Vojt, 2011; Hatlevik & Christophersen, 2013) are the defendants here: structured teaching appears to be needless if not impossible.

Paradoxically enough, an informed answer comes from the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS), which despite its neutral name is one of the oldest right-wing think tanks in the UK, established by Margaret Thatcher. The title of the 66-page pamphlet *Real Finnish Lesson*,⁹ written by Gabriel Heller Sahlgren, research director of the Centre of the Study of Market Reform of Education and a doctoral student [*sic*] and published in 2015, openly challenges Pasi Sahlberg's (2011) best-seller *Finnish Lessons*.¹⁰

Sahlgren begins promisingly with a wide socio-historical retrospective account,¹¹ but then performs ideological somersaults in his conclusions that would not stand up in any academic seminar. Nevertheless, one might make two intertwined deductions from the pamphlet that could vitally affect both the present and the future of Finnish schooling. First, Sahlgren claims that the main explanation for the Finnish downturn in its PISA results is simply that it is speedily becoming similar to other advanced liberal countries. Second, by way of a generalisation he suggests that if teacher authority and structured teaching are given up in schooling, the learning results will inevitably decline. Intertwined with this he claims that the Finnish school has maintained teacher authority and structured teaching on account of its cultural retardation. Thus, this cultural change is generating the erosion of necessary elements of successful learning at school.

We believe Sahlgren is right in some respects: successful learning at school does require *some kind* of teacher authority and *some kind* of structured teaching. What is certain, however, is that what we used to know as teacher authority and structured teaching does not work in late-modern schooling. The essential question is what kind of authority and what kind of structured teaching a successful late-modern school should apply.

The Finnish experience reflects the extreme difficulty of consciously creating a policy that goes against the grain, against transnational truths and against global consensus. At the same time, Finland has been the model pupil of the OECD and an obdurate defender of worker-peasant egalitarianism. Given its war-riddled past, this could indeed be characterised as a victory for prevention that resembles the Finnish combination of wishful thinking and stubborn resistance in the desperate battle against an overpowering enemy in the Second World War: if we can stand just one more day, maybe the world will change and we will be saved. The Finnish quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) 'model', based on mute consensus rather than a well-articulated political programme, reflects the same argumentation, although it could also include universal, positive and offensive elements. It is hard to believe that humankind would survive without notions such as equality, trust and progress.

Comparison?

Despite our rather bugle-sounding critics and big promises related to the studies in comparative education in Chapter 1, there are not too many references to

it in this book, with the exception of contrasting the Finnish and Swedish cases in Chapter 6 on dynamics in classroom cultures. How, then, could we claim to have made even a humble contribution to comparative education here? We claimed at the beginning of the book that all studies in education (as well as in other social sciences) are comparative in a sense: although doing research in one country, region or locality, we always have others in mind. This could be characterised as very modest or maybe even *unconscious* comparativism. In that sense our book is consciously comparative even if it is predominantly about one national case. The basic aim is to contribute mutual understanding rather than to lift one case above others. In our terms, political situations, political possibilities and policy spaces differ widely in different societies.

We believe that a reasonably humble but still fruitful approach to comparison in education politics would be to *contrast*¹² two cases, in other words analyse one case against another. From this perspective, it might be possible to conduct a similar analysis of another country or education system to the one we did of Finland. Focusing on discursive dynamics we could thus contrast the discursive principles in the four fields of basic schooling in Finland and Sweden, for example. In fact, this is what we are doing in an ongoing study¹³ on education politics in the Nordic countries.

We also think we always have to choose different foci as a subject of comparison, depending on the research task. In the case of this book, we consider four fields (policymaking, governance, families' educational strategies and classroom cultures), and although it is rather general and somewhat abstract, our focus is on discursive dynamics. In other studies, that have been finished or are in process we have emphasised policy threads, bifurcations, quality assurance and evaluation, policy narratives and the educational ethos.¹⁴

To conclude, our approach may offer a new possibility in terms of comparing education systems and the politics behind them in complex, contingent and transnational late modernity. We would like to think this book takes modest steps towards "post-comparative education", as Patricia Broadfoot puts it in her Editorial for *Comparative Education*. In other words, we aim

to use empirical studies as a means of generating more general understanding, certainly about fundamental educational questions but also, even more ambitiously, to use the comparative approach to make novel contributions to theory more generally.

[. . .] to draw on mainstream theory to situate comparative analyses within the fundamental quest to understand issues of social identity, of the structuring of social institutions and the relationships between people and the many different groups and societies to which they belong.

(Broadfoot, 2003, 276–277)

We have attempted to explain these notions in our book via a framework that would allow more room for understanding the constraints and possibilities of

action in the context of the politics of education. In sum, we have found out how fragile any given dynamics are in Finnish education politics. In many cases, it is a result of contingencies in history, and is currently sustained by political action on different levels or that is constantly subjected to transnational flows. The action itself, regardless of whether or not it is considered political, derives from societal thought structures, is questioned or unquestioned, happens in the course of time, is connected to resources and past events, passes and creates room for future action. What is called equality, trust or progress is manifested through action, described here in terms of relational and contingent dynamics.

From understanding discursive dynamics to explaining success and decline

It is still common in academic research to make a rather sharp distinction between understanding and explaining. On the one hand, there is a tradition that could be characterised loosely as positivistic, emphasising the unity of the sciences (i.e., natural sciences), and on the other is a complex and hermeneutic tradition that emphasises the relative specificity of the arts (i.e., human and social sciences): the former focuses on explaining, the latter on understanding.¹⁵

In what follows, we use this idea in an attempt to progress from understanding the discursive dynamics to explaining the Finnish success in schooling as well as its evaporation (Table 7.2).

What is striking in these chains of causal dependence is the contradictory and even post hoc characterisation of these explanations of the Finnish success story. We characterise the vitality of worker-peasant egalitarianism as “obstinate”, the belief in social climbing through schooling as “persistent”, and the confidence among parents in homogeneity and the good-enough quality of *Peruskoulu* as “prolonged.” Is that too pessimistic or even cynical, too critical? We believe there is a good reason for such a conclusion: it is simply that worker-peasant egalitarianism, and a belief in schooling and in the homogeneity of schools, are historically based. This does not mean that they are old-fashioned or currently irrelevant; on the contrary. We are not implying that they will vanish in the late-modern period. However, they are being challenged and need to be remoulded, reconstructed and reshaped to keep their relevance and vital place in the world.

Only the appreciation and status of teachers earns the attribute “ostensibly stable”, and only the intertwining of well-structured teaching with educational progressivism and teacher professionalism is given the attribute “original.” There are indications, especially in their talk, that teachers are under pressure in terms of status and appreciation, but there are no serious signs of a dramatic change, at least not in the near future. Schools are faced with apparently never-ending cuts and savings, but so are other public services. Teachers certainly tend to complain about vanishing parenthood and the degenerating family, and about increasingly difficult and disturbed children and young people, but although indisputably problematic, these trends do not question the vital

Table 7.2 Explanations of the Finnish success and decline in basic-schooling politics

Causes (C)	Effects (E)	Relation to the Finnish success and decline (R)
<p>(C1) Swedish/Nordic politico-administrative institutions and culture, also during autonomy under the Russian Empire (C2) Delayed societal development until independence in 1917 (C3) Appalling historical experiences until WW2 and rigours of life until the 1960s, especially in rural areas (C4) The historical slenderness of the upper social strata and relatively small income inequalities among the great majority until the 2000s</p>	<p>(E1) Obstinate worker-peasant egalitarianism in a late-modern society</p>	<p>(R1) Buffering co-effects</p>
<p>(C5) Late industrialisation around WW2 and rapid post-industrialisation in the 1980s (C6) The late expansion of schooling in the late 1950s (C7) The late establishment of a Nordic welfare state in the late 1960s</p>	<p>(E2) Persistent belief in social climbing through schooling (E3) Ostensibly stable appreciation and status of <i>Peruskoulu</i> teachers</p>	<p>(R2) Buffering co-effects, due to the contingent temporal coincidence (R3) Empowering effects (C8) bound to contingent effects (C9 and C10)</p>
<p>(C8) The loyalty of teachers to appreciation of the nation-state during the Civil War of 1918 and afterwards (C9) Upgrading the education of primary school teachers to the master's level after the late 1970s (C10) Success in PISA since the early 2000s</p>	<p>(E4) Punctuated culture of trust in policymaking and the administration of <i>Peruskoulu</i></p>	<p>(R4) Redistributing effects (C11) bound to contingent effects (C12 and C13)</p>
<p>(C11) The dissolution of practically all <i>ex ante</i> mechanisms of control over teachers' work by the mid-1990s (C12) Radical municipal autonomy partly due to the recession in the late 1990s (C13) The contested and limited legal right of central administration to control municipal schooling, including QAE, since the late 1990s</p>	<p>(E5) Prolonged confidence among parents in homogeneity and the good-enough quality of <i>Peruskoulu</i></p>	<p>(R5) Delaying effects, deeply cultural</p>
<p>(C14) A strong egalitarian ethos in schooling since the 1960s (C15) Positive experiences of <i>Peruskoulu</i> among the parents of the present-day pupils since the 1970s (C16) Schooling viewed not only as a right but also as the duty of a decent citizen until the 2000s (C17) Modesty in promoting the interests of one's offspring until the 2000s</p>	<p>(E6) The original intertwining of well-structured teaching with educational progressivism and teacher professionalism</p>	<p>(R6) Consolidating effects, paradoxically intertwined</p>
<p>(C18) The intertwining of the resilient Herbart-Zillerian tradition with Koskenniemi's social pedagogy until the 1960s (C19) Top-down and pupil-centred academic didactics and pedagogical progressivism since the 1970s (C20) A paternalistic education ethos until the 2000s</p>		

importance of teachers and schools; on the contrary. Paradoxically, the problem in advanced liberal countries is that schooling is seen as omnipotent in tackling social and cultural problems: perhaps its capacities should be assessed more realistically. The explanation given in this book reflects the metaphorical argument that “mass schooling is the religious base of modern society” (Meyer, 1986).

There is a clear reason for optimism here, too: public education has been historically successful, as two eminent US historians of school reform, David Tyack and Larry Cuban, state:

When critics say that schools have never been worse, advocates may be tempted to try to prove that they have never been better. We make neither claim. The public schools, for all their faults, remain one of our most stable and effective public institutions – indeed, given the increase of social pathologies in the society, educators have done far better in the last generation than might have been expected. At the same time, it is clear that the public schools need to do a better job of teaching students to think, not just in order to (supposedly) rescue an ailing economy but to serve a broad civic purpose as well.

(Tyack & Cuban, 1995, 38)

However, as is clear from Hans Joas’ statement on the “Era of Contingency” we cited in Chapter 1 of this book, it is necessary in today’s world to distinguish the already-done from the yet-to-be-done and to acknowledge the increasing lack of necessity and feasibility. Therefore, any stability needs an adjunct qualifier such as “ostensible.”

Are we justified in attributing Finnish classroom pedagogy as “original”? It does seem to be rather stable, there being no direct or immediate threat to this predominant everyday approach to the teacher’s work. The professionalism of Finnish teachers is above all some kind of self-image that does not seem to be endangered. The volume of applicants for teacher education appears very stable year on year, and even if our PISA fame diminishes over the years, it is hardly logical to claim that the globally praised Finnish teacher has suddenly deteriorated.

Actors?

Thus, it is rather easy to defend our sceptical formulations. What is more difficult and challenging is to respond to criticism of the apparently structuralist nature of our explanations: what is the role of the actors here? Hundreds of publications, in the media and in academic circles, refer to Finland’s reputation for having the best teacher education in the world and the best teachers, as the country’s best-kept secret. Pasi Sahlberg (2015, 184) argues that “education development has been based on the continual adjustment of schooling to the changing needs of individuals and society”, referring to the success story of

“continuous renewal [. . .] guided by wise educational leadership” (Sahlberg, 2015, 203). Where, then, are the policymakers and officials in our picture? How do we see the role of teachers and teacher education?

In response to this understandable criticism, let us first cite Simola. He closes his book *The Finnish Education Mystery* as follows:

It seems that Joas’ construction of the ambiguous concept of contingency as dialectics spiralling between uncertainty and freedom is useful. From the point of view of the actor, awareness of contingency means, on the one hand, that things are increasingly not necessary or impossible, and on the other, that it is precisely this that not only makes the change possible but also acts for it. Thus, and paradoxically, the concept opens up the field of meaningful action in today’s seemingly chaotic and intricate world. One could even say that it may ‘save’ the agency in these complex and late-modern times. In this sense, it could be seen as essential within the neo-structuralist project as understood by Finnish sociologist Risto Heiskala, a channel through which to bring subjectivity, history and meaning back to the discussion in the wake of postmodernist and post-structuralist nihilism. (Simola, 2015, 281; cf. Heiskala 2001; Frank 1989)

From this perspective, what actors refrain to do is equally meaningful: the policymakers did not give up on equality, often dismissed as old fashioned and not for today; the administrators did not push to have back their time-honoured right of authority over municipalities, schools and teachers, although it was no longer so trendy; the teacher educators continued their mission to develop research-based teacher education supporting the academic self-esteem of teachers without worrying too much that the official “curricular poetry”¹⁶ did not work in practice; teachers did not renounce their original view of how to run schooling even though no one ‘up there’ in the educational establishment was really interested in what they thought; and finally, the parents unrelentingly hung onto the idea of good-enough schools for their offspring even if good parenthood was inclined towards active choice and selection.

We thus think that the space for individual actors in history is seriously limited by the structural situations framing the actions and possessive capacities making it possible to capitalise on opportunities. This question has arisen again and again in recent decades as neo-institutional research has made it clear that it is almost impossible to import such a socially constructed phenomenon (see Salokangas & Kauko, 2016). We share Bourdieu’s feelings about the small space of individuals situated in different social fields of life:

Social fields are universes where things continually move and are never completely predetermined. However, that is much more so than I believed when I first set out to do sociology. I am often stunned by the degree to which things are determined: sometimes I think to myself: “This is

impossible, people are going to think that you exaggerate.” And, believe me, I do not rejoice over this. Indeed, I think that if I perceive necessity so acutely, it is because I find it particularly unbearable. As an individual, I personally suffer when I see somebody trapped by necessity, whether it be the necessity of the poor or that of the rich.

(Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, 199–200)

Finnish teacher education is lauded as heroic.¹⁷ It is true that the format is divergent and unique globally. Its mission since the late 1970s has been to be accepted as similar to the research-based academic training the university offers for traditionally highly regarded professions employing physicians, psychologists and lawyers. As in the US (Labaree, 1992), educational science (or didactics in the case of Finnish teacher education) is allied with educational psychology. At the same time, however, the Normal School system has been maintained and developed as an environment for both pedagogical innovation and research-informed teaching practice. It could therefore be claimed that the Finnish student teacher receives high-level training both academically and pragmatically. There is another, more practical achievement. Within their required academic studies, all Finnish class (i.e., primary school) teachers are able to minor in one teaching subject for the upper stage of comprehensive school. This qualifies them to work as a subject teacher in grades 7–9, too. Given that subject teachers receive rather extensive pedagogical training, in theory all teachers at Finnish comprehensive schools are qualified to work at all the levels of *Peruskoulu*.

However, as usual the reality is far from cloudless and rosy. Simola, Kivinen and Rinne (1997) refer to the basic problem of Finnish teacher education as “didactic closure.” Even in his doctoral dissertation, Simola settled on “wishful rationalism” as the tacit discursive principle of the authoritative talk on schooling in Finland (1995; for a summary see e.g., 2015, 3–26). One of the props was the “decontextualisation of schooling” in the 1970s, during which the socio-historically formed institutional context of teaching and learning in school vanished from official Finnish educational texts on education. There has been a tendency to dismiss as uninteresting schooling as an institution for historically formed, obligatory mass education. This has turned Finnish didactics into a kind of abstract and universalistic, non-historical and decontextualised academic discipline, a school-free pedagogy dictating how the teacher should teach and how the pupil should learn in school as if it were not school (Simola, 1998a, 883; Simola, Heikkinen & Silvonen, 1998, 122; Simola, 2015, 15, 122).

Eminent US historians of educational reform David Tyack and Larry Cuban (1995; Tyack 1994) similarly refer to an eclipse of the “grammar of schooling” as an essential reason for the century-long frustrations of school innovators. There is a research tradition in the sociology of education focusing on everyday life in classrooms through a “hidden curriculum” (Jackson, 1968; Broady, 1987), more precisely conceptualised as “a sociocultural system of time, space and rituals of schooling” (Rinne, 1987). Simola (1995; Simola et al., 2015) reduced these

natural laws of basic schooling to three-dimensional prime movers of life in classrooms: first, its mass character, second, its obligatoriness and third, responsibility for pupil selection. These prime movers orchestrate, perpetuate, offer possibilities and set limits for everything that happens in classrooms.

It is evident that the full master's-level training has essentially strengthened appreciation of the teaching profession in Finland (see Chapter 6 for details). It is also probable that the university training has developed the rhetorical capacities of teachers. As mentioned in evaluation research (Atjonen et al., 2008, 194; see Chapter 6 for details): "nine teachers out of ten described their principles of action and were able to crystallise the essential ones." What seems to be a mystery to teacher educators, education officials and policymakers is why teachers do not apply these pedagogical principles and curricular aims in classroom practice. Why do two thirds of them say that they emphasise individualising and differentiating teaching only a little or not at all in their choice of methods in the classroom (Atjonen et al., 2008, 199)?

As we see it, there are not too many heroes in late-modern times. One could say, in fact, that Finland is lucky to have had some insightful educational forerunners such as R. H. Oittinen, Erkki Aho, Jaakko Numminen and Vilho Hirvi, but determining their trajectories as sustainable leadership appears to be just part of a great man history. In fact, it is not unreasonable to suggest that there has been a real lack of sustainable leadership in the field of Finnish education policy since the late 1990s, whatever sustainability might mean in this context. We even venture to claim that nobody in Finland could name any insightful leaders in education policy at the moment, and that is a problem. If one were to name some heroes among the actors, one might include people who were out of the limelight such as Ritva Jakku-Sihvonen, the driving force behind the development of sample-based thematic assessment, and Kauko Hämäläinen, the eminence behind the concept of development-focused evaluation. And what about the thousands of classroom teachers who were able to combine caring and demanding principles in their everyday work and persistently strove to improve their teaching?

Futures?

It seems right at the end of a book such as this one, which focuses on one national education system, to pose one more question. After all we have documented above, what are our well-informed policy recommendations to actors in the field of Finnish basic education? Moreover, given our comparative ethos and the English format of this book, one might ask: "What can the world learn from the educational changes in Finland?" (Sahlberg, 2011).

What should we say to researchers forever demanding wise policy recommendations? Given our ontological and epistemic premises that are set out in Chapter 1 of this book, it should not surprise the reader that we believe it is neither reasonable nor wise to make direct policy recommendations based on social research. The fashionable promise of "evidence-based policy" therefore

appears to us simply hyperbolic over-publicising. In a reality characterised by complexity, contingency, relationalism and transnationalism, prediction may, at best, merely be well-informed guesswork. It should always be borne in mind that what matters is what happens at the grassroots and shop-floor level: the role of action on other levels is mainly to create frameworks within which to open up possibilities and to set limits. Again, this kind of well-informed guesswork and ventilation may well be fruitful and reasonable if one accepts and is conscious of the limits. We should rather demand from social research evidence-based hypotheses and research-based questioning, serious warnings and valiant proposals rather than recommendations and predictions.

One rational aim would be to enhance understanding of social *comprehension*. The term comes from the Latin *comprehendo* or *comprendo*, which means very concretely to catch or grasp something, and later also to remember and to become aware of something. In many languages, there is a word for understanding that incorporates physical references such as ‘hand’ (in Finnish *käsittää*) or ‘grasp’ (in Swedish *begripa* and in German *begreifen*). We could thus say that social research should aim to help humankind to get a pragmatic hold, grip or grasp of the world, no matter how slippery or loose. We should do this in any case; otherwise, we risk rampant arbitrariness. Our mission might thus be defined as helping people to handle this complex reality and live on this earth with dignity.

From this pragmatic (or even pragmatist)¹⁸ point of view, one might reasonably ask what is the role of constructions such as theoretical concepts and discursive principles formulated in this book. To put it simply, they should all enhance understanding of dynamics in educational systems on a practical level. A reasonable response in defence of such an approach could be “ecological validity” (referred to by psychologist Ulrich Neisser, 1976; cf. Brewer, 2000). How does an approach work in practice? Is it equivalent to reality? We could therefore ask if the above analysis could orient and support a fictional (or real) foreign policymaker, official, parent or teacher coming to work and live in the Finnish education system. That would be an example of pragmatic and contrasting comparativism.

Conceptual constructions of this kind are *devices* that enable us to see the educational reality in a new and fruitful way. Sakari Heikkinen, Jussi Silvonen and Hannu Simola (1999, 154) compared these devices to the cloud chamber used in elementary particle physics to make the traces of otherwise indiscernible particles visible. Perhaps we should look upon the discursive principles of Finnish basic-education politics as ‘heuristic devices’ used to raise and analyse new problems. The role of the device is not to act as a decontextualised, universal model for answers but rather to make space for new ways of asking new and fruitful questions. It is not a method for conducting concrete empirical research but is rather a way of questioning the conditions of empirical inquiry, going beyond the dichotomies of essentialism and nominalism, deduction and induction. As such, it may open up pathways extending beyond the familiar

and conventional, and facilitate innovative and creative activity in this late-modern world in which one of the main political truths is TINA (there is no alternative).

Although, even if between the lines, we have put forward some “evidence-based hypotheses, research-based questions and serious warnings”, we are strongly conscious of their limitations as defined above, and urge caution. We set out three main hypotheses. First, trust is of fundamental importance in education politics, and indeed in late-modern societies. Second, the questioning referred to above primarily concerns the basis of the Finnish classroom culture, in other words a well-structured but teacher-centred pedagogy, paternalistically intertwined with educational progressivism and teacher professionalism. Third, the warnings we issued concerning the central elements of Finnish culture that are based on a world that is in the past, namely the late modern hybrids of equality, belief in education and confidence in public schooling, will assume more relevance in the future. They should be guarded, but also updated.

What, if anything, can the world learn from educational change in Finland? We can readily agree with Sahlberg’s (2011) three final conclusions. First, successful basic schooling must depend on those who implement every school reform, in other words the teachers. From this perspective, humiliating school inspections, standardised curricula and naming-and-shaming ranking lists are more than questionable. Second, efforts must be made to preserve a relaxed and fear-free learning environment for pupils by keeping testing to the absolute minimum, as well as by creating a caring and demanding ethos in the learning community. Finally, enhancing trust within educational systems is *de rigueur* for sustainable success. This means putting responsibility before accountability, and ‘good enough’ before excellence, and coming up with an adept combination of embedded national traditions and international insights.

We wish to end this book with the encouraging and far-sighted words of British education historian Andy Green (1997). Two decades ago he pointed out that even though only a few governments had a clear notion what nationhood and citizenship meant in complex and pluralistic democracies, public education remained the prime institution for social integration, cohesion and solidarity. This was the main task and purpose assigned to national education systems in the early years of public schooling when societies were divided not only by class, religion, gender and ethnicity but also by geography and language:

At the time of the revolution in France, when national education was already firmly on the agenda, only 50 per cent of the population spoke French. At the moment of unification in Italy, when national education was firstly introduced, less than 3 per cent of the population spoke Italian.
(Hobsbawm, 1990, 60, cit. Green, 1997, 185)

Green further notes that although late-modern societies are more pluralistic, individualist and diverse, they are also much more homogeneous: they are less

structurally fragmented than their predecessors, and with a common language facilitate enormous advancements in communication. Public education and its teachers have a major role to play in all this. Green ends his book on a note of sceptical optimism:

Education must remain the public arena where tolerance, mutual respect and understanding and the ability to cooperate are cultivated. Just as it offers opportunities for individual development and advancement, it must also strive to promote civic identity and civic competence and to make possible a democratic and cohesive society. Education cannot ignore the realities of the global market. But nor can it surrender to global commodification. (Green, 1997, 186)

Notes

- 1 We made a distinction between the third dimension of equality and inclusive equality as the right to fully fledged education in conventional schooling of challenged and other groups such as incomers arriving in Finland in the 2000s.
- 2 <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>
- 3 On Nokia, see e.g., Häikiö, 2001, 2009; Castells & Himanen, 2002; on *Peruskoulu*, see e.g., Rinne et al., 2011, 351–352; Simola, 2015.
- 4 This was the conclusion reached by Marjukka Liiten, the leading Education Editor of Finland's top-selling daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* (November 3, 2011).
- 5 There were 28,028 comprehensive schools in 2012 in Finland, including lower (i.e., primary, grades 1–6) and upper (i.e., lower-secondary, grades 7–9) level schools, and full comprehensive schools (grades 1–9). See http://www.oph.fi/download/163331_koulutuksen_tilastollinen_vuosikirja_2014.pdf. Curiously enough, there is no official information on the proportion of full comprehensives in Finland. The most recent statistical analyses do not give any data. The Network of Full Comprehensives <http://www.t-tiimi.com/syve/reports> having 106 such schools as members but Wikipedia claims that the number is 400: <https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yhten%C3%A4iskoulu>. According to a news item from the Finnish Broadcasting Company in 2015, there were more than 600 full comprehensives in the country. http://yle.fi/uutiset/yhtenaiskoulut_herattavat_turhaakin_pelkoa/7895050
- 6 There is evidence of this in Sweden, for example, with its free schools and a parallel German basic-education system: even though the education specialists are of a mind on their problems, withdrawal seems politically impossible (see e.g., Lundahl, 2002; Wiborg, 2010).
- 7 There are clear symptoms of imminent exacerbation of the situation, especially in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area (Vaattovaara, Kortteinen & Schulman, 2011).
- 8 If the class size is a maximum of 20, the current average figure, and there are three parallel classes, a full comprehensive school will cater to around 500 pupils, almost all of them familiar to teachers at least by name.
- 9 <http://www.cps.org.uk/files/reports/original/150410115444-RealFinnishLessonsFULLDRAFTCOVER.pdf>
- 10 The book (Sahlberg, 2011) has been translated into over 20 languages and has sold over 100,000 copies. An updated version, *Finnish Lessons 2.0*, was published in 2015. Curiously enough, it was not translated into Finnish until 2015.
- 11 Simola is the researcher whose texts Sahlgren refers to the most [*sic*].
- 12 Cf. e.g., Pawson, 2000; Fitz, 2003; Werner & Zimmermann, 2003; Crossley, Broadfoot & Schweisfurth, 2007.

- 13 *Dynamics in Basic Education Politics in the Nordic Countries* (2014–2018), headed by Janne Varjo and funded by the Academy of Finland.
- 14 On policy threads see e.g., Kauko 2011; on bifurcations see e.g., Kauko et al. 2015; on quality assurance and evaluation, see e.g., Kauko et al. 2016, on policy narratives see e.g., Kosunen & Hansen 2016; on educational ethos see e.g., Simola, 2016; Simola et al., 2016.
- 15 We are grateful to Panu Ratikainen (2015) here. This simple division has been problematised at least since the work of Wilhelm Dilthey in 1883 and Carl Hempel in 1942. Their legacy has been promoted in theorisations known as contrafactual and interventionist explanations: see e.g., Lebow, 2010; Nolan, 2013; Menzies, 2014.
- 16 We are grateful to Gunilla Svingby (1979) for the term *läroplanspoesi*
- 17 On Finnish reflection on this issue, see e.g., Niemi & Tirri, 1996; Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2006; Niemi, Toom & Kallioniemi, 2012.
- 18 Or neo-structuralist (cf. Frank, 1989; Heiskala, 2001). Both Bourdieu and even Foucault could be seen as neo-structuralists in our view.

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Index

Note: Information in figures and tables is indicated by page numbers in *italics*.

- accountability 4, 44
AFLRA *see* Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities
Agricola, Mikael 23
agricultural employment 28
Aho, Erkki 97, 127
Ahtisaari, Martti 48n2
ambitiousness, theoretical 6–7
Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (AFLRA) 56–8, 61–5
autonomy 25–6
- Ball, Stephen J. 9–10
Basic Education Act 42, 59–61, 72–3
Becker, Howard S. 13
bottenskola 93
Bourdieu, Pierre 15, 125–6, 131n19
Broadfoot, Patricia 121
Burk, Frederic 100
- CADEP *see* Comparative Analytics of Dynamics in Education Politics
centralisation 30, 37, 49–54
Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) 120
certainty 7
change 8–10
chaos theory 8
choice *see* school choice
CIE *see* Confederation of Finnish Industries and Employers
citizen rights and duties 70–1
Civil War 24
classroom cultures: *bottenskola* programme and 93; differentiation and 100–2; dynamics in 119–20; Herbart–Zillerian tradition and 90–3; individualisation and 100–2, 104–7; individual work and 102–4; interaction and 100–2; participation and 100–2; *Peruskoulu* and 93–8; teacher professionalism and 96–8; tradition–progress hybrid and 98–111, 99, 108–9
Comparative Analytics of Dynamics in Education Politics (CADEP) 2, 16–20, 18
comparative education: as contested terrain 4–16, 15; focus on end products *vs.* processes in 7; intellectual nationalism and 7; problems in studies of 5–7; problems of complexity in 7; uncertainty and 7–8
complexity, problems of 7
Comprehensive School Reform 36, 55
compulsory education 34
Confederation of Finnish Industries and Employers (CIE) 33, 40–1, 45, 60–1
Conservative Party 43
consolidation 111
contingency 10, 12–14
convergence 10–12
corporate managerialism 53–4
corporatism 26
CPS *see* Centre for Policy Studies (CPS)
Cuban, Larry 9, 124, 126
“Cudgel War” 24
Cygnaeus, Uno 23
- Dahllöf, Urban 94
Dale, Roger 5
decentralisation 44, 49–54
Decentralization and Professionalism: the Construction of the New Teacher in the Nordic Countries 2

- Denmark: agricultural employment in 28;
public employment in 29–30; public
trust of institutions in 26
- depth psychology 91
- didactics, as term 111n2
- differentiation 100–2
- “Different Learners — Common School”
95–6
- Dilthey, Wilhelm 130n4
- disciplinary climate 108
- discrimination, positive 84
- discursive dynamics 122–4, 123t
- discursive principles 18, 114t
- duties, of citizens 70–1
- dynamics 16–17, 18; in classroom cultures
119–20; discursive 122–4, 123t; in
families’ educational strategies 118–19;
in governance 116–18; in policymaking
114–16
- Educational Evaluation Council 40, 43
- Education for All (EFA) 1
- Education Governance and Social Integration
and Exclusion in Europe* (EGSIE) 1–2,
52, 70
- EFA *see* Education for All (EFA)
- efficiency 4, 51
- egalitarianism 47, 113–14
- EGSIE *see* *Education Governance and Social
Integration and Exclusion in Europe*
(EGSIE)
- “emphasised teaching” 79
- employment, public 29
- End of Certainty, The* (Prigogine) 7
- engagement 108
- equality 33, 39–43, 83–5, 115–16, 130n1
- equity 39–43, 95, 102
- Fabricating Quality in Education: Data and
Governance in Europe* (FabQ) 2, 50, 56, 64
- Fairclough, Norman 10
- families’ educational strategies: and citizen
rights and duties 70–1; dynamics in
118–19; *Peruskoulu* and 69–75; school
choice and 75–87
- Family Strategies, Segregation and School
Policies in Chilean and Finnish Basic
Schooling* 2
- FINEEC *see* Finnish Education Evaluation
Centre (FINEEC)
- Finland: agricultural employment in 28;
public employment in 29–30; pupil
opposition in 107–11, 108–9; resistance
to individualisation in 104–7; *see also*
Peruskoulu
- Finnish case 21–32, 26, 28–30
- Finnish Education Evaluation Centre
(FINEEC) 65
- Finnish Lessons* (Sahlberg) 120
- Foucault, Michel 14, 17, 131n19
- Framework for Evaluating Educational
Outcomes* 55
- Gestalt psychology 91
- Goldstein, Harvey 1
- governance: dynamics in 116–18
- Great Migration 38
- Green, Andy 11, 129–30
- Greens of Finland 81
- grundskolan* 94
- Halonen, Tarja 22
- Hämäläinen, Kauko 127
- Heisenberg, Werner 7
- Heiskala, Risto 14
- Helsinki 86
- Hempel, Carl 130n4
- Herbart-Zillerian tradition 90–3, 123
- “hidden education policy” 45
- Hirvi, Vilho 43–4, 55–7, 127
- historical processes 8
- historicity 6
- Holkeri, Harri 39–40
- hyperglobalism 7
- individual autonomy 25–6
- individualisation 100–2, 104–7
- individual work (IW) 102–4
- institutions, public trust in 26
- instrumentalism 80–1
- intellectual nationalism 7
- intelligence testing 91–2
- interaction, in classrooms 100–2
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and
Cultural Rights* 115
- IW *see* individual work (IW)
- Jakku-Sihvonen, Ritva 127
- Joas, Hans 12–13, 124
- Kalalahti, Mira 74
- Katainen, Jyrki 61
- Kauko, Jaakko 19
- Kekkonen, Urho 22
- Kettunen, Pauli 6, 10
- Koivisto, Mauno 22

- Koskenniemi, Matti 90
 Kosunen, Sonja 83
 KUPOLI *see* *Research Unit Focusing on Sociology and Politics in Education* (KUPOLI)
- Lahdes, Erkki 92
 Leeuw, Francis E. 116
 Levi, Margaret 12
 Liiten, Marjukka 130n4
 Lindblad, Sverker 99
 Local Government Act 58–9
 Luhmann, Niklas 12
- managerialism 53–4
 Mann, Michael 4
 Mastery Learning Strategies 92
 media visibility 4
 Meyer, John W. 6
- National Board of Education (NBE) 40, 43–4, 50–2, 61, 63–5, 104
 National Coalition Party 39, 81
 National Curriculum 91
 nationalism, intellectual 7
 NBE *see* National Board of Education (NBE)
 Neisser, Ulrich 128
 New Public Management (NPM) 2, 38, 47, 49–54, 66
 Nordic values 25–6
 Norway: agricultural employment in 28; public employment in 29–30
 Nóvoa, António 5
 NPM *see* New Public Management (NPM)
 Numminen, Jaakko 43, 127
- OECD *see* Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
 Oittinen, R. H. 127
 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 51, 120
 Österlind, Eva 94
- Palonen, Kari 13
Parents and School Choice (PASC) 2, 73–4, 85–7
 Parsons, Talcott 14
 participation 100–2
 PASC *see* *Parents and School Choice* (PASC)
 paternalism 111, 114t
 path dependence 10–12, 40–1
- pedagogy, as term 111n2
Peruskoulu 36, 38, 40–3, 47, 57, 69–75, 87–8, 93–8, 113, 116
 Pickett, Kate 115
 Pierson, Paul 11
 PISA *see* Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)
 Poikolainen, Jaana 74
 policy: writing *vs.* implementation of 9–10
 policymaking: dynamics in 114–16
 politicization 15–16
 politicking 15–16, 27–31, 28–30, 82–7
 positive discrimination 84
 power mechanism effects 14, 15
 Prigogine, Ilya 7
 problems of complexity 7
 process philosophy 14
Productivity in Education 60
 professionalism 96–8
 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 6, 38, 43–6, 54, 68, 75–6, 107–8
 psychology 91
 public employment 29–30
 public trust, in institutions 26
- quality 4
 quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) 46, 49, 57–68
- Ragin, Charles 4
 rankings 4, 62–3, 84
 Ratikainen, Panu 131n16
 Rätty, Hannu 72, 97
Real Finnish Lesson (Sahlgren) 120
Reform of Education Legislation 55–6
 reforms 50–1
 relationality 14–16
 relational sociology 15
 relativity 14–16
Research Unit Focusing on Sociology and Politics in Education (KUPOLI) 2
 rights, of citizens 70–1
 Rinne, Risto 80
 Russia, public trust of institutions in 26
- Saari, Juho 38
 Sahlberg, Pasi 120, 124–5
 Sahlström, Fritjof 94
 Sahlgren, Gabriel Heller 120
 sample-based learning-result assessments 62
 Schmitt, Carl 13

- school choice: Basic Education Act and 72–3; contradictory 75–81; determined 82; emergence of 71–5; equality and 83–5; expressive goals and 78–80; instrumentalism and 80–1; politicking for 82–7; Programme for International Student Assessment and 75–6; social benefits and 76; social costs and 85–8, 89; soft 82–7; and *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* 76
- schooling, belief in 34–8, 35
- School Markets and Segregation* (SMS) 75, 83
- school system 34
- Seppänen, Piia 42, 73
- Sewell, William 12
- Silmäri-Salo, Sari 74
- Silvennoinen, Heikki 74
- Simola, Hannu 125
- SMS *see School Markets and Segregation* (SMS)
- Social Democrat Party 43
- Sorokin, Pitrim 16
- space, conceptualisation of 8
- Spirit Level, The* (Wilkinson & Pickett) 115
- Strange, Susan 5
- student-centeredness 106
- success 122–4, 123t
- Sweden: agricultural employment in 28; public employment in 29–30; public trust of institutions in 26; sorting in 102–4
- Swift, Adam 87
- Teacher Education Reform 36
- teacher professionalism 96–8
- temporal aspects 8
- testing, intelligence 91–2
- Thatcher, Margaret 120
- theoretical ambitiousness 6–7
- time 8
- trust: public, in institutions 26; punctuated 54–8, 67–8, 113–14, 114t; social 116–17
- Turku Cathedral School 23
- Tyack, David 9, 124, 126
- uncertainty 7–8
- UNESCO 1
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights* 76, 115
- Varjo, Janne 74
- vuosiluokkiin sitomaton opetus (VSOP) 95, 104–5, 112n9
- Weber, Max 13–14
- welfare state 28–9
- Whitehead, Alfred North 14
- Wilkinson, Richard G. 115
- Wodak, Ruth 10
- world-cultures approach 9
- Yariv-Mashal, Tali 5
- Zanten, Agnès van 78