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2. TRACING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND ITS PREREQUISITES IN THE FINNISH EDUCATION SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION

The values underlying the goals of the education systems are perpetually negotiated and developing. In the current postmodern world, there are two competing trends in education. First, there is a trend of advocating a market-like education service that emphasises freedom of choice, the need for competition and cost-efficiency (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Second, there is a trend of striving towards inclusive education by encouraging versatile teaching methods, aiming to improve learning for all students and emphasising caring in schools (Hargreaves, 2000; Spratt, 2017). Guiding this trend of education is the political and ethical movement towards ensuring that education is socially just (cf. Norwich, 2013). The improved knowledge of the social nature of learning processes (e.g. Vygotsky, 1979; Thomas & Loxley, 2001) and the increased awareness of diverse cultural and belief systems resulting from globalisation and migration (Hargreaves, 2000) have strengthened the need for inclusive education.

The goal of this chapter is to describe the nature of inclusive education in Finnish compulsory education and identify what types of barriers prevent inclusive education. Here, inclusion is understood as a desired, ongoing societal reform towards social justice and social sustainability (UNESCO, 2017). Inclusion is about increasing the participation of all children and adults in society. Inclusive education supports schools to become more responsive to children's diverse backgrounds, interests, experience, knowledge and skills (Booth & Ainscow, 2002) and aims to enhance social justice and equality in education and to offset the disadvantages caused by students' socio-economic backgrounds (e.g. Lingard & Mills, 2007).

Although it is a desired goal and has a powerful position in many countries' educational policy, inclusive education involves several tensions and dilemmas. For example, because inclusive education is guided by general values of equality and social justice, it can often ignore the various facets of diversity by oversimplifying the necessary differences in teaching strategies for children with special educational needs/disabilities, such as learning difficulties or attention deficits (Norwich, 2013; Cigman, 2007). Another tension is related to measuring the actualisation of inclusive education. Although inclusive education is an ethical movement, it is often measured

quantitatively rather than qualitatively. For example, in the European Agency's Statistics on Inclusive Education, one measure involves comparing the percentage of students who are taught in special classes to the percentage of students who are taught in general education. This measure may become a major index of the success of "inclusion", and yet inclusion is not about replacing special needs children to general education (Norwich, 2013).

In this chapter, I determine the prerequisites of inclusive education in Finnish compulsory education using a metatheoretical approach. The trends of the Finnish compulsory education system are explored based on previous research, legislation, curricula and statistical information. In my analysis, the indexes of inclusive education are based on previous research. I will analyse the development of collaborative school culture and inclusive pedagogy, and the changes in the teaching profession (e.g. Lakkala, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2016; Tomlinson, 2014; Slee, 2014; Lakkala & Määttä, 2011).

The European Commission (2015) states that Finland has an equitable education and training system that yields good learning outcomes. Although the level of basic skills has remained high, there have been slightly less positive results in recent international surveys than before. Despite the European Commission's positive statements, Finland's results on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015 (Vettenranta et al., 2016) show that the outcomes for students with an immigrant background have decreased, boys have been less successful than girls and the differentiation in outcomes between the Finnish schools has increased. Furthermore, according to PISA 2015 results, Finnish children's school success is increasingly dependent on their parents' socio-economic position. This raises the question of what kind of support the poorly performing students need. This question especially concerns southern Finland, where there are densely populated urban areas. In northern Finland, the population is decreasing, the distances are long, and the student support services are sparse.

The Finnish basic education system was implemented in the 1970s with the goal of decreasing the differences in learning outcomes caused by family backgrounds and increasing educational equality in Finland (e.g. Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006). Based on my analysis, the development of the Finnish basic education system has been two-fold: On one hand, the Finnish education system has succeeded in taking steps to make its education system more socially just. Finnish legislation and norms have deepened the understanding of the characteristics of inclusive education by emphasising socio-constructivist learning, learning skills and social interaction and by paying attention to developing a collective and supportive school culture. On the other hand, the problems in big Finnish cities and the remote areas in northern Finland have been diverging and growing. The demand for cost-efficiency has been competing with the human values of education, which has caused educational inequality in Finland and has possibly enhanced the misinterpretation of inclusive education by quantitative measures.