

Editorial

Dear readers,

We are glad to present you the third newsletter of the GOETE research project. GOETE aims at analysing how educational trajectories of young people are regulated as a result of complex interactions in different European education systems. The study “Governance of educational trajectories in Europe” (GOETE) investigates how access of children and young people to different stages of education is enabled or restricted, how coping with educational demands is being facilitated through formal and informal support and how it is being negotiated between different actors what kind of education actually is relevant for society at large as well as subjectively for the learners.

This GOETE newsletter brings an update on the progress in our research, and articulates some reflections on policy issues on European and national policy discussions as well as links to relevant policy developments at EU level. If you want to subscribe to the GOETE newsletter please click here.

With best regards from the GOETE coordination team

(1) GOETE Project News

Recent activities in the GOETE project

The GOETE Consortium Meeting in Turku, Finland, June/July 2011

The GOETE Consortium Meeting was held in Turku, Finland, from June 29th to July 02nd 2010. Prof. Dr. Risto Rinne, head of the Finnish team, welcomed as many as 40 representatives from all partner teams who attended the meeting to discuss research related issues such as comparative analysis and dissemination strategies of the GOETE project. Turku was a particularly convenient place to meet, since the city hosts the European Capital of Culture 2011.

One topic pervading all discussions during the Turku meeting was the preparation of comparative analysis. GOETE addresses the research question by adding different components of quantitative and qualitative data collection that allow for an articulation of different perspectives. The coordinators of the different research components developed proposals for the design of the respective research tools including an operationalisation of the main themes of the project in order to be addressed in surveys, qualitative interviews, and document analysis with different actors. These proposals were discussed within the whole network and subsequently developed further among the partners involved in the respective work package. Nevertheless, the individual country and disciplinary contexts in which the coordinators of the research may be still influential which meant

Comparative analysis enables analysis of how local, regional, national, and supra-national levels interact and how EU policy is interpreted and implemented by different actors across Europe.

that design and questions had to be modified in some cases at country level. The comparative analysis of these data needs to take these contextual variations into account. In order to be able to make statements valid for the different national contexts, the tasks for comparative analysis will include re-translating the dimensions of operationalisation necessary for data collection back to the general research themes.

The general meeting was preceded by a meeting of the Young Researchers Group in which the young researchers involved in the GOETE project attended a Capacity Building workshop on methodology provided by Prof. Dr. Susan Robertson, from Bristol University and discussed current issues concerning the research activities in which they are involved in GOETE.

The GOETE “High-level Governance Analysis” Working Group meeting in Frankfurt am Main, April 2011

In April GOETE started a new sub-study that aims at analysing *Educational governance* with a view to understanding governing discourses, policies and practices and how they shape and regulate educational trajectories, especially at each transition point. This sub-study seeks to answer questions such as: What decisions are made and practices initiated by whom, at what levels, with what consequences? What are the roles of actors at national level (government, national school administration, professional organisations, employers’ associations, policy consultants) in relation to local actors (schools, local economy, policy makers, administrators, social and youth services)?

Delegates from all GOETE teams involved in the analysis on high-level governance analysis came together in Frankfurt am Main (Germany) to discuss the current development and issues regarding sampling and methodology of the sub-study. In the coming newsletters more information will follow.



Photo 1: University of Frankfurt, GOETE Coordination

(2) Reflection: International Education Policy: Teacher Training Reform

By Colin Cramer and Marcelo Parreira do Amaral

Teacher education traditionally falls under the responsibility of national or regional educational governance and legislation. There are no centralized political requirements, guidelines, or competences on a law giving sense at the European or global level. Nonetheless, currently one may observe international trends in reforming teacher education globally and within Europe across the different national teacher education systems. A starting point to understanding this may be seen in the fact that all European countries have provisions of compulsory schooling. It implies the necessity of educational policy and research to be engaged in reflecting, evaluating and reforming teacher education, thus providing the basis for a successful education system. The increasing competition among nations in providing their labour markets with highly educated and qualified professionals leads to an increased political attention to reforming teacher education. In general, a close link between school quality and teacher training is assumed. However, there are many controversies over whether and if then how teacher training has a direct impact on the quality of instruction and on student outcomes.

Also, it is important noting that globalization and the knowledge society are important contexts for the current discourse on reforming teacher education worldwide. These contexts have been influencing

how on-going reform processes are discussed and implemented on the national level, but also the reason for many similar debates, ideas, and policies across the countries. A commonly held assumption undergirding the international discourse on teacher education reform is that teacher education is key to quality education and, in turn, to a successful society in terms of an effective and efficient economy. As such, it is part of a globalization process that affects almost every area of modern societies – such as policy, economy, culture or religious pluralism. This is why the reform of teacher education within a specific country may also be seen as a case of reforming teacher training worldwide. Apart from common beliefs and knowledge about teacher education, reform pressure result from the activities of international organisations such as the OECD, the World Bank, and not least the European Union. For instance, the TALIS project (the OECD's *Teaching and Learning International Survey*) provides a range of structural and statistical information regarding teacher training all over the world. Periodic reports such as the 'Education at a Glance' series also by the OECD supply the system with additional information on teacher education. Further, the report '*Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers*' provides a comprehensive, international analysis of trends and developments in the teacher workforce. The World Bank is a key disseminator of 'evidence' about teacher education reforms all over the world. Moreover, the European Commission also supports 'peer learning' on teacher education; a group of experts from EU Member States and other European countries meets regularly to examine specific aspects of teacher education, discuss common challenges and exchange good practice.

From a bird's-eye view, teacher education in Europe might look as a straightforward system, not least as an effect of the extensive European activity on the education & training sector. Actually, every European member state has its own way of educating future teachers – in some countries there are even multiple and completely separated training systems within one and the same country. This goes back to the responsibility of the single federal states (16 of them in Germany) or countries (England, Scotland and Wales in the United Kingdom) that account for the education system in a sovereign way. On closer consideration, European teacher education proves to be highly diversified on account of different linguistic, cultural, and historical traditions.

In its conclusions of the Lisbon European Council of March 2000, which emphasised that investing in people was crucial to Europe's place in the knowledge economy, the European Commission called upon Member States to 'take steps to remove obstacles to teachers' mobility and to attract high-quality teachers' (Lisbon Declaration). By 2010 the Directorate General for Education and Culture issued a handbook for policymakers titled '*Developing coherent and system-wide induction programmes for beginning teachers: a handbook for policymakers*'. The handbook aims at presenting 'practical information for policymakers on developing structured induction programmes for all new teachers, together with examples of measures that can be taken to implement or improve such programmes'.

As what regards European educational research, the most visible activities are initiated by the Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE). ATEE is a non-profit organization that aims to enhance the quality of teacher education and the professional competences of teachers during initial, induction and in-service phases of their careers. The exchange of research and practice is facilitated by the publication of the *European Journal of Teacher Education* and by the organization of conferences. Furthermore, the information system Eurydice provides statistical information about teacher training in Europe. In 2008, the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) also published a policy paper on '*Teacher Education in Europe*' that offers interesting information on several aspects of European teacher training, its challenges and prospective direction.

The most relevant documents for coordinating and harmonizing teacher education in Europe were prepared by the Council of the European Commission. The latest position regarding teacher education is the paper Council conclusions on the professional development of teachers and school leaders. The council (EU 2010, 11) invites the EU member states: (1) to ensure that teacher candidates are of the highest calibre, and that teachers receive sufficient preparation and support; (2) to offer both professional and personal support during their first years in a teaching post; (3) to reviews of teachers' individual professional development needs on the basis of evaluation, and make available sufficient opportunities for continuous professional development; (4) to offer teachers exchange and mobility at both national and international level; (5) to support school leaders with a view to lightening their administrative workload so that they focus on shaping the overall teaching and learning environment; (6) to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes required by both prospective and practising teachers.

These conclusions go along with the Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, the so called ET 2020. The paper emphasises that

(1) education and training have a crucial role in meeting the socio-economic, demographic, environmental and technological challenges and that efficient investment in human capital through education and (2) training systems are essential to deliver the high levels of sustainable, knowledge-based growth and jobs and to promote personal fulfilment, social cohesion and active citizenship. Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training (strategy objective 2) requires professional development of teachers and trainers. The focus should be on a high quality of initial training and support for new teachers as well as on increasing the quality of continuing professional development.

The policy statements regarding the reform of teacher education in Europe mentioned above show that there are lively debates and discussions on reforming teacher education. However, since there are no binding legislation that force member states to reform their teacher training systems in a specific way, research on European teacher education reform tends to be very superficial. There is no in-depth analysis that compares relevant elements of the single teacher training systems or programs in a range of European countries. GOETE takes on the challenge of researching and comparing teacher education in eight European countries (Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia and United Kingdom), and focuses on the in-depth structure of the different systems as well as on a content dimension. Regarding contents the emphasis is on clarifying if and how teacher training prepares teacher students to handle educational disadvantage in schools. Document analyses and expert interviews are used to tackle these questions. A questionnaire was used to gather background information from the involved partners in the project. That offered the possibility to produce relevant knowledge for researchers and policymakers, and to suggest major reforms in teacher education.

Further Readings:

Council of the European Union (2009): Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'). In: *Official Journal of the European Union* 2009/C 119/02.

Council of the European Union (2010): Council conclusions on the professional development of teachers and school leaders. Document 15098/09 EDUC 166 SOC 631.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2000): Teacher Quality and Student Achievement. A Review of State Policy Evidence. In: *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 8 (1). Online at: >><http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v8n1/><<

OECD (2005): The report Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers. Online at: >>www.oecd.org/edu/teacherpolicy<<

OECD (2008): Teaching and Learning International Survey. Online at: >>www.oecd.org/edu/talis<<

European Commission (2010): Developing coherent and system-wide induction programmes for beginning teachers: a handbook for policymakers. European Commission Staff Working Document SEC 538 final. Online at: >>http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/doc/handbook0410_en.pdf<<

(3) National Education Policy in Focus

Teacher Training in the Netherlands

By Manuela du Bois-Reymond

Initial teacher training courses in the Netherlands are part of higher professional education or university. Higher professional education caters for full-time, part-time and dual (i.e. work-study) teacher training courses which lead to qualifications as primary school teacher, secondary school teacher grade two (for lower secondary education and first three years of senior secondary and pre-university education), teacher for vocational education, and as a special education teacher (postgraduate course). Universities provide full-time, part-time and dual training courses leading to qualifications as a secondary school teacher grade one (upper secondary education). University students can also follow special courses in pedagogy to qualify for teaching in lower educational levels. Another way of entering the teaching profession is through lateral entry. This allows people with

higher education qualifications to enter the teaching profession through an alternative admission procedure. They then receive training and supervision aimed at equipping them with the necessary skills within two years.

Primary school begins with five years and ends after eight years when the pupils are twelve and enter general or vocational secondary education. Primary teachers are qualified to teach all subjects at primary level and in special education, with the exception of physical education. Most teachers working at special schools have also completed a master's degree course in special educational needs. They may take the course after completing their initial primary or secondary teacher training, or another higher education course, and students can specialise in a particular field of work (e.g., teaching children with hearing disabilities or maladjusted children).

Almost all secondary school teachers have specialised in one subject taught at secondary schools. Courses are available in general subjects, arts subjects, technical subjects and agricultural subjects. The subjects on offer vary from one institute to the next. Courses in technical and agricultural subjects only lead to a grade two qualification. The training courses for physical education and fine arts teachers lead to a grade one qualification. Grade one secondary teachers are qualified to teach at all levels of secondary education. Physical education and fine arts teachers can also work as specialist teachers in primary education.

Teacher training is decentralized; each institute can thus, within basic requirements such as length of study (four years) and first/second grade qualification, determine their own profile. The conditions of service and legal status of education personnel in both public-authority and privately run institutions are determined at decentralised level in sectoral collective agreements. Where possible and desirable, these agreements leave room for further elaboration at school-board level. Staff in schools and institutions under public authority are formally civil servants. The same does not apply to staff in the private sector, who sign a contract with the board of the legal person, governed by private law, whose employment they enter. They fall under the provisions of the civil law, insofar as the relevant educational legislation and the regulations based thereon do not differ from these provisions. Private sector staff can be deemed to share the status of public sector personnel in respect of those conditions of service that are determined by the government (Kosar Altinyelken et al. 2010).

There are pressing teacher shortages; the number of unfilled vacancies in the primary as well as secondary education sector is rising although this problem concerns schools and regions to different degrees (Meesters 2003). There is a shortage of gymnasiums which are supposed to offer the best pre-university education while there is also discussion about a better fit between teacher education and what a teacher will need to know and manage in lower vocational education classrooms. The latest report of the inspection of education offered severe criticism on the inability of teachers in lower vocational education to cater to the needs of their student population, many of whom perform below their intellectual capacities and complain about too low learning demands. Almost one fourth of teaching personnel works without a teaching certificate (Persbericht LAKS 2011).

Dutch teacher training institutes are in the course of thoroughly reforming with the aim of raising the quality of the teacher profession. Although teacher training is decentralized, the institutes are in a process of developing a common "knowledge basis" to determine what ever institute must teach in each subject. Essentially that knowledge consists of two components: a) subject knowledge and b) pedagogical knowledge. This knowledge basis will to a certain extent unify the curriculum of all institutes, but will leave room for special profiles.

One quarter of the teacher training course is devoted to the practical part. Teacher trainers delegate the qualification of students to a very large degree to the schools themselves; they rely on the school's evaluation of the accomplishments of the students. Already in their first year, students are confronted with the practical part of their studies: they are sent straight to schools for class and individual pupil observation and to getting to know the teaching approach of the team. As they progress, the tasks in schools involve more responsibility, ending with self-responsible teaching in the last year. Practical experiences are intensely reflected and documented in a digital portfolio which every student has to keep and put on an institute website accessible to the teacher trainers. The digital portfolio is the major instrument to assure that students learn and reflect on their achievements and gain insight in their own personality and capacities as future teachers. They constantly evaluate their study accomplishments, individually and in small groups with co-students and under the supervision of their teacher trainers.

In the pedagogical part of the teacher training course, students learn about pedagogical theories and teaching approaches like individualized teaching, but they are not trained in special teaching methods, diagnosing learning disabilities or behavioural problems. Those are regarded as specializations which lie outside the regular teaching curriculum and can be acquired in special courses during or after the

teacher training programme and through practical experience at school. Generally, it is assumed that the young teacher will learn about such problems by doing. The same holds for career counselling; some institutes pay attention to this aspect of teaching, others do not. Again, this is something to be learned in the daily practice in school. The inspection report quoted above complains about insufficient career counselling and therefore wrong school choices, especially from lower to secondary vocational education.

The knowledge basis defines the pedagogical component as consisting of seven competencies which now every teacher training institute conveys to its students and which bridge the theoretical knowledge with practical application in the classroom. The competencies are:

- 1) interpersonal competency,
- 2) making school and class a safe place,
- 3) providing a powerful learning climate,
- 4) providing structure and a task oriented climate,
- 5) coordinating own work as teacher with that of the team and the school organisation,
- 6) establishing a relation with the parents, the living quarter of the students, local economy and other relevant actors, and finally,
- 7) reflecting on all these competencies with the objective of becoming a professional in teaching.

During the past few years the BA/MA-structure has introduced in teacher training as part of the Bologna Process. The MA-degree is only allowed for a restricted number of colleges and entitles holders to teaching in higher school levels or progress to a Ph.D. programme. Some institutes cooperate closely with universities in this respect. Students, who qualify for MA-degree will later want to teach at higher school levels. That may result in a certain brain-drain of excellent teachers for lower educational tracks.

In interviews with teacher trainers conducted by the author in the context of the GOETE research project (see: Cramer April 2011), some interviewees responded to the question as to how far students are prepared to become teachers in schools of lower vocational education and with students who are disadvantaged in many respects, by arguing that it might be worthwhile introducing special study tracks for those who will eventually work in such schools. For them and their pupils, the approach of primary school teachers with less subject differentiation and more attention for the needs of the individual would be more suitable, it is argued, than subject teachers and a more anonymous school climate.

The more directly training institutes are confronted with schools with high percentages of disadvantaged pupils, the more attention they will pay to those problems in their curriculum and the more directly teacher students will meet all problems involved simply because the attached in-service schools have more pupils with problems than schools in more affluent cities or city quarters.

Although the Netherlands is a society with high numbers of migrant students – in some schools in the larger cities of Rotterdam and Amsterdam, Utrecht and Den Haag, more than 170 different languages are spoken – the curriculum of teacher training courses does not reflect this diversity, neither in offering courses on these matters – or only by exception – nor is this diversity reflected among the teacher students; there are very few students of migrant background in teacher institutes (15% - Sectorbetuur Onderwijsarbeidsmarkt Juli 2010) and even fewer teacher trainers, accordingly. In a recently published report, the five teaching institutes of Amsterdam commit themselves to pay more attention in their training programs to the ever more diverse student population in multicultural society (Multicultureel vakmanschap 2010).

One of the serious problems of teacher training institutes in the Netherlands is the high percentage of drop-out students, especially during the first year of the study. One quarter of students in the sector pedagogy in higher professional education does not finish their study. And while 60% of students with non-migrant backgrounds get their diploma, only 44% of students from migrant backgrounds do so (Multicultureel vakmanschap 2010: 13).

The institutes are not allowed to select their students from the pool of applicants; they must admit every student with accomplished general secondary education. In order to reduce drop-out rates, some institutes work with entry interviews to find out about study motivation and discourage (but not force) beginning students, when they feel they are not truly motivated or apt for their teacher training programme. Teacher trainers also complain about low or even very low language proficiency and math capacities as do educational politicians, who demand to “go back to basics” in disfavour of so-called soft competencies of non-formal education like learning to communicate, work in teams, reflect on their learning process etc. Teacher trainers, although agreeing to the necessity of improving basic

knowledge (they would even have to offer special courses for students who perform insufficiently in language and basic mathematic proficiency) would emphasize that social skills have to be taught as well and are of particular relevance for teachers in lower vocational education, where it is most important to establish a sound and stable relationship with the pupils and among the team.

In order to conclude, there is an on-going and broad discussion in the country, not only among educationalists and politicians but also among parents and students, about the misery at schools (too large classes, too low achievement, overworked teachers, too many quasi reforms which do not solve problems but rather aggravate them through hasty implementation and still more work for teachers, etc.). On the other hand, it seems that there is a spirit of renewal and energy among teacher training institutions which are determined to modernize their curriculum to serve the needs of an advanced post-industrial society as the Netherlands. It remains to be seen if they will succeed.

Further Readings:

Cramer, C. (2011) Emerging issues of teacher training, deliverable Nr. 7 of GOETE research.

Kosar Altninyelken, H., du Bois-Reymond, S., Karsten, S. (2010) Country report the Netherlands. Amsterdam.

Meesters, M. (2003) Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers. Country background report for the Netherlands. Paris: OECD.

Multicultureel vakmanschap (2010) www.multicultureelopleiden.nl

Sectorbestuur Onderwijsarbeidsmarkt Juli 2010 www.stamos.nl

RECENT TRENDS IN FINNISH EDUCATION

By Risto Rinne & Jenni Tikkanen

1. Introduction

Finnish education and science policy stresses quality, efficiency, equity and internationalism, and it is geared to promote the competitiveness of Finnish welfare society (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2011a). Finnish education policy, educational legislation and the entire education system have changed significantly during the last two decades as part of a general restructuring of public administration due to economic, regional and demographic constraints. The former tradition of a system of regulation that was founded on detailed legislation and the principle of equality has been replaced with new governance, which is based more on individual choice, efficiency and evaluation. The emphasis is now on the development of a high standard of education as a necessity in the light of global competition. A cornerstone of this development was the reconstruction of educational legislation in 1998 (Varjo, 2007, III-IV; Helle & Klemelä, 2010; Poropudas & Volanen, 2003, 42). The current trends are based on neoliberalism, an internationally prevailing ideological paradigm that extends market logic also into education policy (Helle & Klemelä, 2010), and education is seen as a prerequisite for sustainable economic development.

There are only few private educational institutes and even those are part of the formal educational system, receiving state subsidies on the same grounds as municipal institutes. (Kumpulainen, 2010, 221) It can be argued that the very limited level of privatization of education providers is one example of the fact that neoliberalism has not fully penetrated Finnish education system. (Vanttaja & Rinne, 2008, 24)

Internationalization has facilitated spreading of transnational education ideas and ideologies, and it has also created pressure to unify and standardize education systems. This has been the case also in Finland, especially after joining the European Union in 1995. Transnational organizations are becoming increasingly influential in shaping national education policies. In addition to the EU, also the OECD

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has had significant influence on the Finnish education policy. In the 1990's OECD had a key role in the establishment of polytechnics, which has been seen as the most substantial education reform in Finland after establishing the comprehensive school system in the 1970's. The influence of OECD could also be seen in the implementation of a pilot project exploring comprehensive secondary education, i.e., a combination of general upper secondary education and vocational education and training (Vanttaja & Rinne, 2008, 21, 48; Helle & Klemelä, 2010).

2. Basic education with parental choice

Finland provides nine-year basic education with no ability grouping, and each age group is taught as a whole. Basic education has been mostly provided in neighbourhood schools as school districts but recently the principle of parental choice has become more and more the mode of action. Virtually the entire age group (99.7 per cent) completes the syllabus but the schools and classes have been differentiated (Kumpulainen, 2010, 221; Rinne & Järvinen, 2011; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2011c). The principle underlying basic education is still to guarantee basic educational security for all, irrespective of their place of residence, language and economic standing.

The number of comprehensive schools has shrunk by an average of a hundred per year during the 21st century. Because the number of pupils has not decreased to the same pace, downsizing the comprehensive school network has led to increase in the number of pupils in some of the schools, and also to the growth of class sizes (Vanttaja & Rinne, 2008, 28f.). Although most of the discontinued schools have been small village school, still over 40 per cent of schools have less than 100 pupils. The average school size has grown over the last few years, while the number of the largest schools with more than 500 pupils has increased (Kumpulainen, 2010, 27f.).

Although different tracks leading to different educational outcomes are not in main role in the Finnish basic education system, inside the common comprehensive school is an extensive special education system for at risk pupils, which has expanded systematically and rapidly since the comprehensive school reform in the 1970's. Approximately 8 per cent of comprehensive school pupils can be classified as full time special education pupils and some 22 per cent as part time special education pupils. The proportion of pupils transferred to special education in Finnish primary schools has consistently increased over the past ten years (Rinne & Järvinen, 2011.). More severe competition has contributed to the increased need for screening the pupils, and special education is one form of this screening (Vanttaja & Rinne, 2008, 32f.).

The proportion of pupils transferred to special education in Finnish primary schools has consistently increased over the past ten years
(see figure 1)

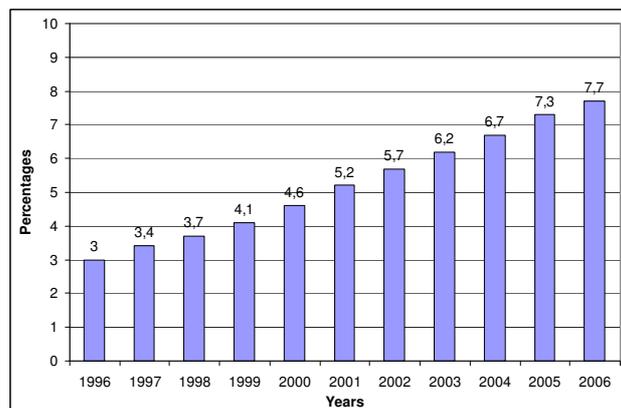


Figure 1: The share of pupils transferred to special education (n=44 699 in 2006) in Finnish primary school throughout the years 1996-2006 (Finnish National Board of Education 2008).

Free school choice policy introduced to comprehensive school system in the mid 1990's has sparked a lot of public debate in Finland. According to this supranational policy, parents can make a preference over the school that their child attends to and schools can partly select their pupils. Free school choice policy is seen to contradict the goals of equal educational opportunity and equality also mentioned in the law (Vanttaja & Rinne, 2008, 26). According to Seppänen (2006, 4) the features of the lived education markets, where the school choice policy is conceptualized to take place in, in the Finnish

cities are similar to those in other countries. Selection of pupils by their ability is vastly used, and on average, every other family considers applying or applies to another school than the neighbourhood school. Comprehensive schools have started to specialize and create individual profiles, but one of the goals is to strengthen the neighbourhood school principle and prevent inequality of schools (Vanttaja & Rinne, 2008, 26f.). In addition to the free school choice policy, another distinctive feature in the new Basic Education Act is the role of evaluation. The law obliges education providers to evaluate their education and its effectiveness. Education has to be evaluated also by external evaluators (Vanttaja & Rinne, 2008, 27).

Finland has repeatedly succeeded well in OECD's PISA evaluations of 15-year-old school pupil's scholastic performance. In the latest PISA evaluation Finland scored well above the OECD average in all the scales, and placed second in sciences, third in reading and sixth in math. According to Aho, Pitkänen and Sahlberg (2006, 126-133), there are six possible factors in the Finnish education system and society that may contribute to these PISA achievements. The factors include the following: 1) comprehensive school is same for all, 2) teachers are highly educated and teacher education stands out in international comparison for its depth and scope, 3) sustainable political and educational leadership, 4) recognition and appreciation of existing innovations (i.e. a culture of innovation in the education system), 5) focusing on deep learning instead of testing (the only standardized test in Finnish education system is the matriculation examination in the end of the upper secondary school), and 6) a culture of trust which is enabled by an environment that is built upon good governance and close-to-zero corruption. However in 2004 in an international comparative study by the World Health Organization, only a small minority of Finnish children and adolescent truly enjoy being at school (Rinne & Järvinen, 2011).

3. Upper secondary education in two tracks

After basic education compulsory school leavers can apply to upper secondary education, which is post-compulsory and comprises general upper secondary education and initial and further vocational education and training. Annually more than 95 per cent of Finnish comprehensive school graduates continue their studies (Rinne & Järvinen 2011; Ministry of Education, 2011f).

Vocational education and training and general upper secondary education constitute in principle two parallel streams with no dead ends to higher education, that is universities and polytechnics, because since early 2000's also vocational qualifications have led to general eligibility for further studies. In practise, only a very small minority of vocational school graduates continue their studies in universities, polytechnics being the more common alternative, in addition to going to the labour market (Rinne & Järvinen 2011; Helle & Klemelä, 2010; Vanttaja & Rinne, 2008, 35, 46).

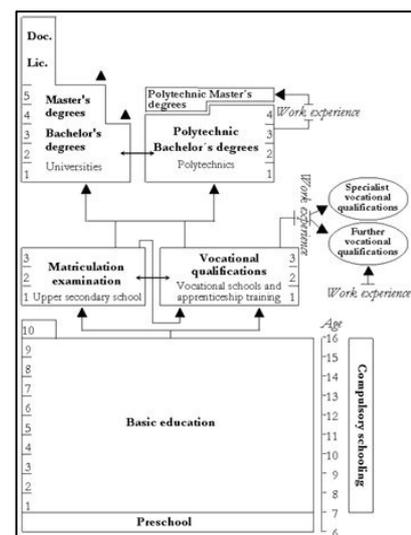


Figure 2: The Structure of the Finnish educational system

Most providers of general upper secondary education are local authorities (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2011b) whereas the providers of vocational education are highly diversified including local authorities, municipal training consortium (i.e., joint municipal authorities), private providers and the state. According to Helle and Klemelä (2010), the most salient trend of the last two decades also in Finnish upper secondary education has been and still is the constant reduction of education providers and institutes. For example the number of providers of vocational education and training decreased by 25 per cent and the number of vocational institutes by 35 per cent in the period 2000-2008. The reductions have mostly been implemented by merging institutes together, upgrading institutes to the status of polytechnic or closing them down altogether. Experts have estimated that the also the network of general upper secondary schools will be substantially cut down so that in the next couple of years approximately 100 schools, that is one in four or five schools, will be closed down (Vanttaja & Rinne 2008).

The relationship between general upper secondary education and vocational education and training has been considered to be one of the most persistent problems of the Finnish education system,

mainly because general upper secondary education has for decades been the more popular choice amongst adolescent. The aim of the general upper secondary schools has been to prepare students for higher education and especially university studies with higher status, whereas the objective of vocational schools has been to produce mostly manual skilled workers for different sectors of the labour market. General upper secondary school has been a popular choice especially among girls and young people from more advantaged social backgrounds, while boys and working-class youth have been over-represented in vocational schools (Rinne & Järvinen 2011).

In the reform of 1999-2001 the duration of vocational studies was extended from two to three years and demonstrations of vocational skills were incorporated as a part of the regular curriculum. Also the regulations system underwent a major change when the providers were liberated from direct state control. The objective was to strengthen the collaboration between vocational institutes and working life. Adding a compulsory module of on-the-job learning (minimum of six months) to all vocational study programmes was another way of trying to assure closeness of the collaboration (Vanttaja & Rinne 2008, 44; Helle & Klemelä 2010). The meaning of international cooperation to Finnish vocational education has increased due to the Copenhagen Process launched by European Union in 2002. The goal of the process is to enhance the quality of vocational education, increase the attractiveness of vocational education and training, and to promote internationalization i.e. mobility of students (Vanttaja & Rinne 2008, 47).

Despite the increased popularity of vocational institutes, and the fact that dropout has diminished during the first decade of the 21st century, vocational schools still have the greatest dropout in upper secondary education in Finland. In the whole country approximately 11 per cent of vocational institutes' students drop out of school. In addition, among vocational school dropouts, interruption of studies almost exclusively means dropping out of the whole education system more or less temporarily. Almost 50 per cent of the vocational education dropouts do not continue their studies in any other school and do not get employed either (Rinne & Järvinen 2011; Vanttaja & Rinne 2008, 45). During the last few decades, there have been attempts to reduce young people's dropping out of education as well as interruption of vocational schooling, for example by increasing vocational guidance and individual counselling both in basic and secondary education, and by paying special attention to the teaching and learning of certain 'risk-groups' of young people. Similar kind of special education that has been available in basic education for decades has now been put to practice in vocational education and training as well (Rinne & Järvinen 2011; Vanttaja & Rinne 2008, 45).

Speeding up the transition from general upper secondary education to further education has been in the spotlight of the Ministry of Education (Helle & Klemelä, 2010). The scope of general upper secondary studies is three years, but since the general upper secondary education reform in the 90's, instruction has been organized in a non-graded form, which means that the students may proceed in their studies at their own pace and graduate in two to four years. Although majority of the students complete their general upper secondary studies in three years, during the last ten years approximately 14-16 per cent of the students have needed over three years to graduate (Kumpulainen, 2010, 98). Thus the transition to non-graded organization of teaching has led to prolonging of the average study time to over three years (Vanttaja & Rinne 2008). According to recent evaluation by the Finnish Education Evaluation Council the non-graded general upper secondary school mainly fulfils its educational objectives and is of uniform quality. Although

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students are relatively satisfied with general upper secondary schools and especially with their teachers, the downside is that almost 75 per cent of them find studying hectic and consuming. So even though in theory there is a chance to study at one's own pace, the system has remained rather stressful and exam-oriented. Even though the general upper secondary education has been non-graded for over 15 year, the issue still remains subject to public debate.

The essential feature of the development in general upper secondary education in the 1990's was specialization; specialized general upper secondary schools are

institutions, which have received a special mandate from the Finnish Ministry of Education to emphasise particular subjects in their curriculum. They also have the right to set the special criteria for student enrolment (Rinne & Järvinen 2011). Currently, approximately 15 per cent of general upper secondary institutes specialize in a particular subject area. Specialized schools hold the strongest position and status as they can offer more specialized courses than other schools in addition to which they receive additional state funding. Large units, usually situated in large cities, hold second position as they can specialize in certain strength areas even without additional funding. Smaller general upper secondary schools end up easily in a vicious cycle of waning student numbers and a waning number of courses offered with very limited possibilities of specialization (Helle & Klemelä 2010). The establishment of these specialized schools is in line with the current educational policy thinking in Finland. Allocating more resources to the education of the gifted students, which are the target group of these schools, has been seen as a way of increasing the economic competitiveness of the nation in the long run. The specialization of upper secondary general schools can also be seen as a part of the larger tendency towards individualization in the Finnish school system (Rinne & Järvinen 2011; Vanttaja & Rinne, 2008, 39f.). The critics are convinced that specialization has led to stratification of general upper secondary schools, and that giving extra funding to specialized schools is jeopardizing the principle of equal opportunities for all (Helle & Klemelä, 2010). There is also a close connection between social background and selection into the specialized upper secondary schools (Rinne & Järvinen 2011).

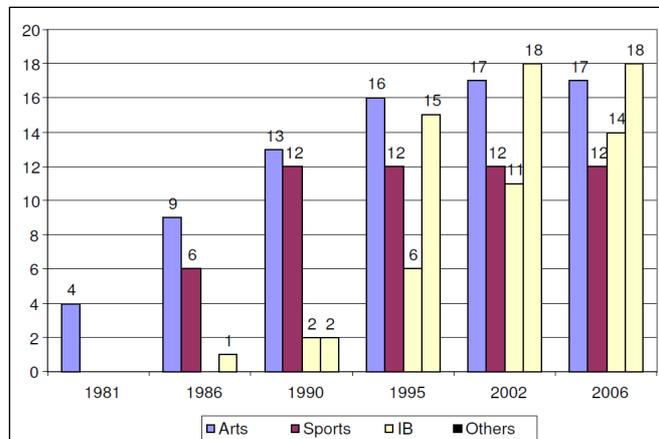


Figure 3: The share of specialized general upper secondary schools in 1981-2006

4. Future challenges and development plans

In international terms, young Finns spend a long time in education. In 2008, 43 per cent of people aged 20 to 29 were in education, whereas the OECD average for this age group was 25 per cent (Kumpulainen, 2010, 226). Long duration of studies is seen as a major problem, and speeding up transition from secondary education to higher education, graduating from higher education, and proceeding into working life is an important goal of the Ministry of Education and Culture. One problem related to this issue is that substantially more upper secondary school graduates aspire to higher education than the system admits. The Ministry of Education and Culture has recently reacted to this transition problem between secondary and higher education, and its objective is to eliminate bottlenecks by developing admission procedures. Several measures have been proposed, for example putting more weight on achievement in secondary education instead of entrance exams of universities and polytechnics, and creating an integrated system for applying to higher education including a separate channel for those already in higher education (Helle & Klemelä 2010) in order to expedite graduation, and thus proceeding into working life.

In its strategy for 2020 the Ministry of Education and Culture emphasizes that the wide-ranging changes taking place in today's society due to development of global economy, climate change, new technology, aging of the population and social and cultural transformation, require the Ministry to set guidelines that exceed the terms of the upcoming governments. According the Ministry of Education and Culture, the most substantial challenges for Finnish society and thus for Finnish education will be maintaining the society's commitment to education, changes in the

The most substantial challenges for Finnish society and thus for Finnish education will be maintaining society's commitment to education, coping with changes in the economic structure and labour market, and with the regional polarization between large urban growth centres and rural areas as well as multiculturalism and the polarization of the whole society.

economic structure and labour market, regional polarization between large urban growth centres and rural areas, and multiculturalism and polarization of the whole society. In response to these challenges the Ministry of Education and Culture will launch strategic programs to assure Finland's competitiveness, to maintain the valuation of education, to enhance the economic vitality of all geographic and demographic regions, and to ensure participation, involvement and sense of community of all members of the society (Ministry of Education and Culture 2009).

Currently National Coalition Party chairman, former Minister of Finance and the new Prime Minister of the new government (2011-) Jyrki Katainen has formed the government in which, in addition to the National Coalition Party, the Social Democratic Party, the Swedish People's party, the Christian Democratic Party, the Green League and the Left Alliance will participate (the Six Pack). The populist and euro sceptic "Basic Finns", who gained massive amount of votes and 34 new seats in the parliamentary elections held in April 2011, have surprisingly announced that they will drop out of the government formation talks and remain in the opposition. The Ministry of Finance will propose cuts of 800 million Euros that would mainly be directed to state subsidies for municipalities. This would strongly affect the funding of comprehensive and upper secondary schools. The composition of the new government, as well as whether or not the budget cuts even in the field of education will be implemented as planned, remains to be seen.

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