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Finland Study Visit

23 – 27 September 2013, Helsinki

A study visit was organised in Helsinki between 23 and 27 September 2013 in the scope of the Joint European Union and Council of Europe Project on Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. Among the participants were the representatives of the Ministry of National Education and Board of Education, teachers and principals of pilot schools and teachers who developed the five best activities in the “Educational Activity Competition”, which was organised in the framework of the project. In order to ensure proper recording and documentation of the impressions during the visit, three people were held responsible each day to note down their observations. Daily accounts were brought together and presented below as a short report of the visit.

23 September 2013



Ms Kristina Kaihari, who is responsible for curricula in the Education Department, informed the delegation about Finnish education system. The presentation could be summarised as follows:

1. Unlike the continuous change in Turkey, curricula are changed/ revised on a long-term basis, every 10 years or so, in accordance with the regional and global needs of the society.
2. Curricula are developed and defined by the ministry of education and handed over to local administrations. Local administrations (municipalities) adjust the curricula to the needs of their own





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region in a human-centred manner. Schools may also make amendments to the curricula based on their specific needs and conditions.

3. Teacher training is considered crucial. All teachers are selected from a group of people who have completed their post-graduate degrees. There has been no inspection at schools for 25 years because teachers are regarded as experts in their field and their actions are valued and trusted.

4. Curricula are not subject to prior pilot implementation. Rather, they are developed by a commission comprising all stakeholders (academicians from pedagogy departments, school principals and teachers) and then put into practice.

5. Ms Nina Vântänen, a history teacher in a secondary school, made a presentation on secondary education. In this context, she explained that high school students attend 75 different courses and 11 elective courses during their high school education (3 years). When students move up to high school, apart from academic success they are also assessed based on their social skills and overall performance. It was explained that students have to pass an examination at the end of high school and high school can be completed between 2-4 years. It was further added that students should take and pass this final examination at least in four courses and only Finnish is obligatory. These examinations are centrally conducted, open-end questions are preferred and the results are evaluated by a group of different teachers anonymously.

6. Students' councils are obligatory at high schools. They have a say in the functioning of teaching and education. The system is designed to function from bottom up. The council has a budget and this is maintained by the money gained from the activities organised by students and it is also supported by the municipalities.

7. Elective courses are defined and offered by high schools and it may differ from one school to another.

Ms Liisa Vaaskalainen also talked about equality in education. She further added that curricula are also based on the regional, economical and gender related differences aiming to ensure equality for all.



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All speakers underlined that the main factor in their success in education is having good teachers. Consequently, from north to south, in all regions there is the same level of academic success. In case of disadvantaged environments or conditions, more investment is made in these areas and inequalities are eliminated to a great extent. It should also be underlined that students' councils, especially those at high schools, are highly important in establishing the notion of active citizenship in the country. These councils carry out their activities without an organic bond or dependency on political parties, which is not the case in Turkey.



Yusuf Pařaođlu
Mine Bodur
Burak Kaya





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First Impressions

How can I do better?

- In a changing and developing world, the Finnish education system also needs to reform its curricula every 10 years. The main problem on the educational agenda is how to improve the existing structure.
- Finland is very sensitive about the selection of teachers. Those who want to become teachers have to go through a challenging education and then they are subject to an interview where “their willingness to become teachers” is questioned and their teaching skills are tested.
- In Finland there is a national ministry of education, which defines the main framework.
- In practice, municipalities and schools are responsible. Each school define its own curricula based on the conditions and needs of the region where the school is located. Municipalities meet the needs of schools.

We trust our teachers!

- In Finland all teachers are supposed to finish their post graduate studies before they are 40 years old. Teachers are highly praised and respected by the society.
- Education is provided free of charge and is financed by taxes. (from preschool to university) (10 billion Euro).
- Multiple choice questions are not preferred in measurement examinations in schools.
- Teachers are not appointed by the ministry. Each school published a vacancy note in the newspaper for vacant posts and teachers are recruited by the school management board.

Students' Council - Voice of the students!

- Every high school should have a students' council. This council is free to organise any kind of event as long as it is in conformity with school rules. Councils receive 3000 Euro subsidy from the municipality and it also has the chance to raise funds by means of its own activities; such as organising events and selling tickets for these. The council sends representatives to the teachers' meetings and it can make direct requests to the school management. School management always asks for the opinion of the students' council.
- 1/5 of the Finnish parliament has a teaching background.

Burak Kaya



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24 September 2013

Viiki Teachers' School

Constructivist approach is practiced in the whole school. We had the opportunity to observe history, English and philosophy courses and it was remarkable that students were active in all three. It was explained that students always do their homework and assignments because of the established culture. Students accomplishment when passing on to the next grade is not evaluated solely based on their performance, several other criteria are considered (grades, performance, participation in the lesson, etc.). It is believed that students may express themselves in different ways and this is taken into consideration when evaluating their performance and their outcomes.

In the second grade of primary school, the religion teacher uses a variety of visual materials to help them contextualise the topic in a better way. For example, when she talks about the time when Jesus Christ was a shepherd she uses small plastic figures of sheep, wolves and Jesus Christ.

In the English lesson, the teacher uses technology very efficiently. She practices reading, speaking and synonyms at the same time. She uses photographs to get the ideas of the students and asks them to explain what they see in the picture. Later on they read a relevant text to each other. The teacher is more in a guiding and monitoring position and she involves all the students in the lesson by getting them to do pair work.

When we meet the students' council of a high school, we learn that their ideas are also taken into consideration when they revise the curricula. We also observed that all the students in Viiki School look very healthy. When we asked about their nutrition we learned that they are only provided with healthy food and they are not allowed to have any fast food. They have milk at lunch time.

We also observed that the school building was constructed in a way to eliminate all the noise coming from the outside.



Both students and teachers are very punctual. It is not only the courses that matter to students. Every morning they come together in the conference hall for fifteen minutes to listen to a presentation/performance. (This performance could be a story-telling, musical performance, a drama, etc.). Students attend this session willingly. However, due to the fact that mobile phones are allowed in the classrooms, some students do not get involved in the lesson. We observed that the students who take part in the students' council have high self-confidence. Students can communicate their ideas and views on all platforms in the school and with NGOs.

Hulusi Artıkoğlu/Kamil URAL/Oğuz BUHARALI



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25 September 2013



We visited Latokartanolu Primary school in the scope of Helsinki study visit on 25.09.2013. The school is located in one of the new residential areas of Helsinki. As it is a new building it has been designed to meet the needs of an educational environment. The halls and corridors between the classrooms were surrounded by glass rather than walls, which make both classrooms and inner space transparent. These halls are called “lobbies” and designed to be used by students for educational purposes. They can either do their assignments or their preparatory work in these lobbies. In each lobby, there is a teacher who guides and assists students.

The school is designed in a thematic way in accordance with its location. It is divided into five sections and each section is given a different name. Names were defined by the students. It has been observed as a striking practise in terms of taking students’ attention. It was also notable that students take off their shoes and wear slippers and/or socks in the school.

For students with special needs also take the courses with other students in the same classrooms with the support of a specialised teacher. Students’ councils are designed as two separate councils for the primary and lower secondary section. The school makes sure that these councils function properly. There is no restrictive dress-code for the teachers and students.

In the second half of the visit Lumo general high school in Vantaa was visited. The group observed that the physical conditions and educational facilities of the school were sufficient. It was explained that most of the needs of the school are covered by the local authorities. Its rich library also serves the public. At the same time, adult training seminars are organised in the building which is shared with the municipality. Students’ council also participates in the drafting of weekly lesson plans and in the designing of the curricula.



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There is no restriction on clothes/dressing for the personnel or for the students in this school.

Alim Uzun
Mehmet Gever
Muhittin Daş

26 September 2013

1. We visited the Nöyökkönlaakson koulu, which is a basic education school comprising grades 1 – 6. We were welcome by Turkish flags at the entrance of the school. First of all the school principal informed us about the school. There are 15 classrooms, 320 students, 22 teachers, 1 principal, 2 deputy principals, 1 secretary, 1 security officer, 3 kitchen workers, 2 assistants, social services officer and 1 nurse. She further explained that in the beginning of the academic year the school sends the annual plan to all parents and as for their signature. Grades 1 and 2 take 20 hours, grades 3-4 take 23 hours, and grades 5-6 take 25, 27, 28 hours a week.



- 2.
3. After the regular hours, students can stay at school for three more hours, but this is not free of charge. General parents meetings are held bi-annually. In addition, they keep regular contact with all parents on the electronic platform in the scope of the “Vilma Project”. In grades 5-6, they have a workshop activity for one hour per week. School excursions or similar activities are usually covered in this one hour. Students of different religions take religion courses based on their own religion. Those who do not want to take religion courses take the course on ethics.
4. Students evaluate their own activities and outcomes. When they evaluate they use symbols such as “happy face – sullen face” or “green light – red light”. If they use a “sullen face” or a “red light” to assess their work, then the reasons are questioned in detail. Students are encouraged to be aware of and pay attention to the learning process and learning outcomes. When they do a project work, they define their own objectives, they plan the process and decide about the materials to be used. Assistance is provided only when the student asks for it. When a subject is taught, the correct answer is not given directly and students are guided to negotiate and discuss possible answers and solutions with his/her classmates and teacher.





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CLASSROOM VISITS

1. In our first classroom, we observed peer-to-peer learning. Grade 5 students were helping grade 1 students to read.
2. In the crafts workshop, students were building small nests to feed little bugs inside. Some time later they will collect bugs and insects from the nature and feed them in these small nests. In addition, they will organise a charity sale in November and sell the goods/materials they produce in this workshop. They are allowed to produce what they want. Also they can get help from the assistants during workshops where they have plenty of materials.



PRESENTATION ON EQUALITY

- Providing equal opportunities for learning, respecting and encouraging students' talents and abilities, and helping students to participate in educational life, to take responsibility in the society and to establish social relationships are the main objectives of the school. In order to give students a sense of responsibility, they are enrolled on duty at the school cafeteria. Every day two students are responsible for cleaning the tables. In addition, three times a week, students assigned by the teacher help the cleaning personnel clean the classrooms.
- Students' council is established by electing representatives from each classroom in October and this Council deals with the problems of the school and they organise various activities. Moreover, the school publishes an on-line bulletin. Students draft the content and this bulletin is sent to all parents via the school's website.

AGGRESSION MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME – COMBATTING AGAINST BULLYING (KİVA)

Grades 1 to 4 take a special one-hour course on fighting against bullying once month. A team consisting of a teacher and some students is established. The team gives helps victims of bullying and give the message "We are on your side" to the victims and the message "Stop behaving this way" to the bullies. For further information www.kivaprogram.net

IMPRESSIONS ABOUT THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Dr Jari Lavonen, Head of Teacher Education and at the same time a professor of physics and chemistry, gave information about the school in general. He further explained that there are 22 employees and 3500 students in the school and he further added that teacher education makes a



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great contribution to the development of the country. He explained that teacher education is well planned and designed based on the country's needs.

He also explained that the teacher education lasts five years in total, which is composed of a 3-year graduate education followed by a two-year post-graduate education. During this period, candidate teachers are required to write 3 theses and those who want to be a teacher in the primary level has to complete a 14-week internship, while those who would like to become subject teachers in secondary education should completed an 18-week internship. Candidate teachers have to complete their credits in their major, their minor and in pedagogic studies.

Following the presentations, we had some time for questions and a comparison of Turkey and OECD countries was presented. It was concluded that there are some similarities between Turkey and Finland in terms of teacher education.

Adıgüzel Şarman
Cengiz Soytorun

27 September 2013

Meeting with UNICEF

UNICEF representatives made a presentation about their cooperation with schools. They also talked about important projects about the how the future of education should be. In the second session, there was a presentation about another non-governmental organisation called "The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare", which is mainly dealing with peer support programmes.

In the last session which was held in the afternoon, representatives of the Finnish Education Department made a wrap-up presentation on the Finnish education system and the activities of the Council of Europe in this field.

Muhittin Ay
Hamza Gürbüz

