

New Environments in Finnish Education – Developing a Digital Perspective

Pre-reading for the Workshop. This paper includes only parts of the following documents; Strategic Programme of the Government and a new Core Curriculum for basic education.

Finland, a land of solutions. Strategic Programme of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's Government 29 May 2015

FINLAND'S VISION FOR THE FUTURE: FINLAND 2025 – BUILT UP TOGETHER

In 2025, Finland is an inventive, caring and safe country where we all can feel important. Our society is based on trust.

In Finland, personal obligations and society's responsibilities are in an ethically sustainable balance. We share a strong feeling of community. Help and care are given to everyone. People have freedom and responsibility for their own and their families' lives. We trust each other. We respect each other. We find common solutions. We regulate less.

In public finance, revenues and expenditures are in balance. We maintain a healthy level of debt. Effort, work and economic activity are rewarded. Economic growth is based on good leadership, strong entrepreneurship and ownership, and utilisation of the whole country's resources.

Finland is open and international, rich in languages and cultures. Finland's competitiveness is built on high expertise, sustainable development and open-minded innovations based on experimentation and *digitalisation*. We encourage renewal, creativity and interest in new ideas. Failure is acceptable and we learn from our mistakes.

The public authorities make even difficult decisions together with Finnish people to ensure future wellbeing. An open and positive attitude towards each other and the surrounding world makes Finland a unique, good country.

KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION – OBJECTIVES

Ten-year objective: Finland is a country that encourages people to continuously learn something new. Skills and education levels in Finland have risen, promoting the renewal of Finnish society and equal opportunities. Finland is in the vanguard of education, skills and *modern learning techniques*.

Government-term objectives:

- Learning environments have been modernised and the opportunities offered by digitalisation and new pedagogical approaches are grasped in learning.
- The number of young people who have dropped out of education or working life has fallen. The drop-out rate in education has declined.
- Dialogue between educational institutions and working life is more active.
- The quality and effectiveness of research and innovation have begun to improve.
- Education and research have become more international and obstacles to education exports have been removed.

Key projects for the government term: New learning environments and digital materials to comprehensive schools:

The learning methods and environments in basic education will be updated to meet the challenges posed by the latest developments. The future knowledge base will be emphasised. This project will aim to improve learning outcomes and reduce differences between them. Steps will be taken to improve the learning environments so that students enjoy being at school and to raise the level of emotional and physical wellbeing of children and young people.

- The introduction of digital learning environments will allow a wider range of learning styles.
- New pedagogical approaches will be introduced. Development programmes for teacher training and continuing professional education will be launched.
- Classroom discipline will be improved by ensuring that teachers can focus on their core task, which is teaching.
- The 'Schools on the Move' project will be expanded across the country to ensure one hour of physical activity each day.
- The provision of language studies will be increased and diversified.

The New Core Curriculum for Basic education

(in use 1.8.2016)

Transversal competences: Competence in information and communication technology

Competence in information and communication technology (ICT) is an important civic skill both in itself and as part of multiliteracy. It is an object and a tool of learning. Basic education ensures that all pupils have possibilities for developing their ICT competence. ICT is methodically exploited in all grades of basic education, in different subjects and multidisciplinary learning modules, and in other school work.

The pupils develop their ICT competence in four main areas. They are guided in:

- 1) understanding the principle of using ICT and its operating principles and key concepts, and supported to develop their practical ICT competence in producing their own work.
- 2) using ICT responsibly, safely and ergonomically.
- 3) using information and communication technology in information management and in exploratory and creative work.
- 4) gathering experience of and practise using ICT in interaction and networking.

In all these four areas, it is important that the pupils themselves are active and that they are offered opportunities for creativity and for finding working approaches and learning paths that are suitable for them. The joy of doing things together and making discoveries, which influences learning motivation, is also vital. ICT provides tools for making one's own thoughts and ideas visible in many different ways, and it also develops thinking and learning-to-learn skills.

The pupils are supported in familiarising themselves with various ICT applications and uses and in observing their significance in their daily life, in interpersonal interaction and as a channel of influence. The pupils together with the teacher consider why ICT is needed in studying, work and society and how these skills have become a part of general working life competence. They learn to assess the impact of ICT from the perspective of sustainable development and to be responsible consumers. During their years in basic education, the pupils also gather experiences of using ICT in international communication. They learn to perceive its significance, potential and risks in a global world.

Learning environments

Learning environments refer to the facilities, locations, communities and operating practices where learning and studying take place. The learning environment also includes the tools, services and materials used for studying. Learning environments must support the growth, learning and interaction of the individual and the community. All members of the community influence the learning environments by their actions. Well-functioning learning environments promote interaction, participation and communal building of knowledge. They also enable active cooperation with communities or experts outside the school.

The objective is to develop learning environments that form a pedagogically versatile and flexible whole. The specific needs of various subjects are taken into account in the development efforts. The learning environments must offer possibilities for creative solutions and the exploration of phenomena from different perspectives. In addition, the fact that the pupils also learn new knowledge and skills outside the school is taken into account in the development and selection of learning environments.

In the development, planning, implementation and use of facility solutions for basic education, factors to be accounted for include ergonomics, ecological qualities, aesthetics, accessibility and acoustic conditions, as well as the lighting, indoor air quality, comfort, order and tidiness of the premises. The facility solutions of the school, including the furniture and equipment, can be used to support the pedagogical development of instruction and active participation of pupils. An effort is made to give the pupils access to the facilities, tools and materials as well as library services so that they can also provide opportunities for independent study. Not only the indoor and outdoor facilities of the school, but also nature and the built environment, are utilised in the instruction of various subjects. Libraries, sports, art and environmental centres, museums and many other partners offer diverse learning environments.

Information and communication technology is a key part of versatile learning environments. It can help to reinforce the pupils' participation and skills in communal work and support their personal learning paths. The diverse media culture is taken into consideration in the development of learning environments. New ICT solutions are introduced to promote and support learning. The pupils' own ICT devices may be used to support learning in a manner that is subject to agreement with the guardians. At the same time, it must be ensured that all pupils have possibilities for using information and communication technology.

Feeling successful and experiences gathered in various environments and learning situations inspire pupils to develop their personal competence. The pupils take part in developing their learning environments, and the pupils' individual needs are taken into account in the planning. This way needs of support for learning and school attendance may be prevented. Learning environments tailored to meet support needs of pupils may be part of systematic support offered to them.

The holistic well-being of the school community and each pupil is taken into account in the development of learning environments. The environments must be safe and healthy and promote healthy growth and development as indicated by the pupils' age and capabilities. The pupils are guided to act responsibly and safely in all learning environments. Learning is supported by a peaceful and friendly working atmosphere and a calm, peaceful mood.

Working methods

The starting point for selecting working methods are the goals set for teaching and learning and the pupils' needs, capabilities and interests. Varied working methods support and direct the learning of the entire teaching group and each pupil. Working methods suitable for different ages and various learning situations are used. Varied working and assessment methods give each pupil a possibility of demonstrating their competence in different ways. In the selection of working methods, attention is also paid to recognising and modifying gendered attitudes and practices.

Versatile working methods bring the pupils joy of learning and experiences of success and support creative activities characteristic of different age groups. Experiential and functional working methods, the engagement of different senses and the use of movement increase the experiential nature of learning and strengthen motivation. Motivation is also strengthened by working methods that support self-regulation and feelings of being part of a group. Drama and other forms of artistic expression promote the pupils' growth into persons with self-knowledge, healthy self-esteem and creativity who can express themselves in versatile ways and engage in constructive interaction with different people and groups. The selection of working methods may also be used to support communal learning where competence and understanding are constructed in interaction with others. The pupils are guided in acting in various roles, sharing tasks among themselves and assuming responsibility for both personal and shared goals.

In the selection of working methods, the characteristics of different subjects and the development of transversal competences are taken into consideration. The use of working methods typical for each subject promotes both the formation of organised knowledge structures and the adoption of skills. Skills in finding, processing, analysing, presenting, applying, combining, evaluating and creating information are important for learning. An exploratory and problem-centred work approach, play, use of imagination and artistic activities promote conceptual and methodological competence, critical and creative thinking, and skills in applying one's competence.

The selection of working methods is guided by differentiation of instruction. Differentiation is based on the teacher's knowledge of their pupils' personal needs. It is the pedagogical point of departure for all instruction. It concerns the extent and depth of learning, the rhythm and progress of the work and the pupils' different ways of learning. Differentiation is based on the pupils' needs for and possibilities of planning their own studies, selecting different working methods and progressing at an individual pace. The individual and developmental differences between pupils are also taken into account in the selection of working methods. Differentiation supports the pupils' self-esteem and motivation and promotes a peaceful setting for learning. Differentiation also pre-emptively addresses needs for support.

Diverse and appropriate use of *information and communication technology* expands the pupils' possibilities for developing their working approaches and networking skills. This builds their capabilities for independent, interactive and critical acquisition and processing of information and its creative production. The possibilities offered by games and gameful learning are exploited in the selection of working methods.

The teacher selects working methods in interaction with the pupils and, in particular, guides the pupils in the use of new working methods, strengthening their ability for self-regulation. The learning-to-learn skills are developed optimally when the teacher also guides the pupils in planning and evaluating their working methods. This motivates and helps the pupils to assume responsibility for their learning and work in the school community.