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I. Policy (Educational reforms: what modern educational policy really means? What educational policy should contain in order to provide what people and their societies need)

2) How should we understand the relationships between education and work? The limitations of neoliberal models and education policy focused on economic production. Tendencies for education to be incorporated into the interests of global and cognitive capitalism and neoliberalism, so that technical skills and capacities (eg for 'entrepreneurialism') are played up and human qualities and human understandings are neglected.

There is something wrong with the Finnish school system, although it is widely admired. The teachers are happy and motivated; they think their work is appreciated and their status is ok. But the disturbing symptom is that the students are not motivated; in fact disciplinary problems are very bad, and the teachers suffer from this. Also, learning results, say, in mathematics are low. The Finnish students' problems are the worst among those studied recently. Also, the parents' attitudes tend to be problematic. What should be done?

KEY THEMES

The limitations of neoliberal educational models and education policy focused on economic production. Tendencies for education to be incorporated into the interests of global corporations, capitalism, and neoliberalism, so that work related technical skills and capacities are played up.

1) The Finnish school educational system has been successful because (a) the teachers are academically trained, and (b) the nation has always respected learning and knowledge, although this "always" has a very short span.

2) Theoretically speaking, the Hidden Curriculum is all important: is it learning oriented or not?

In many cases the HC aims at wrong targets, but apparently this is not the case in Finland.

3) Finland is a nation without history and this has something to do with our emphasis on equality and welfare for all: education exemplifies this. All children get the same basic education. Education is not supposed to support elite formation. 4) Mathematics learning is a major problem.

5) Teachers report worsening ability to read and comprehend texts.

6) The ideology of learning for work and career, and not for learning's sake may prove to be detrimental.

7) One of the dangers is what I call "storage schools" where students are stored before they enter the lowest and most underprivileged social positions.

ABSTRACT

Education is in crisis in the Western democratic countries because global economic competition puts so much stress on the educational system. Obviously, rich countries cannot spend too much for education, especially if education does not directly benefit economical life – not all aspects of education do. For instance in Finland, where schools are supposed to be very good and universities reasonably good, the economic sector or complex sets strict demands to the whole education system, which is not yet geared or designed to satisfy them however eagerly and honestly the system tries to do that.

- QUESTION:1 Is education crisis really the consequence of global economic competition itself? If so, the results of the changes in education will be in favor of economically competing parties. But it is not a case! Could it be, that it is rather a consequence of a misunderstanding of the economic needs and needs of global economic competition?

- ANSWER: I am not sure that this question means; but, as I see, the argument is from necessity: we do not adjust our educational policy so that it strongly promotes our economic efficiency we will lose; that is why the change of policy is necessary. There is no alternative. This argument is very difficult to refute. How can it be refuted? We should change our key ideas of needs, desires, and happiness, which is a task for the educational system. But if this system is seriously constrained by the ideology of free market capitalism, it cannot work effectively on the value change. But try we must! (Who are “we”?)

- Q: What could you say about mentality of global competition, especially about the role of desire in it?

- A: It is like war, the losers will vanish and the winner takes it all. Collateral damage cannot be avoided. There is no ethics in business, except as window dressing.

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- Q: Should we emphasize the need to explicitly differentiate between vocational part and comprehensive general part of education?

- A: Conceptually yes but practically absolutely not: everyone has an equal right to good all-round education. Such a differentiation is one of the crucial problems just now. The values of enlightenment must touch and move us all.

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- Q: Is there a need to better ground the content of comprehensive part of education? (for vocational purposes too).

- A: Yes, of course. Only comprehensively educated people can be free, critical citizens (this is what happiness is). An American friend of mine, an engineer, gave me his definition of life: “Birth, School, Work, Death.” It is a good warning, as sarcastic as it is. We need to distinguish between education and training in school. No would like to be a well-trained Sisyphus, I suppose.

It follows that the Educational systems suffer from internal tension, conflict, and contradiction. The system should produce free and critical citizens who reproduce the best aspects of the democratic society without sacrificing economic progress. This set of demands is hard to realize in real life and society. However, we have seen that it can be done in welfare societies that have been so successful after the WWII. However, the middle class has suffered long-term set-backs and, in Finland, welfare society is slowly withering away. Society is polarizing in many dimensions at the same time.

- Q : Is economic progress really contradicting the educational values? democratic ideals? production of critical citizens? managerial values? short term private profit?

- A: Not economic progress as such but global competition and its related values and desires yes.

- Q: Why and how it can be fought in welfare societies?

- A: The values should be “softer” and at the same time more realistic: more understanding, care, and compassion in action and not only in speech. Yet, we should avoid utopianism.

- Q: What is special about desire in welfare societies’ mentality?

- A: The citizens are ready to sacrifice some of their own share to help other they are in no way related to. This willingness is absolutely crucial. Also, we need less egoism, less nationalism, less militarism, less superstition, less authoritarianism, a more open mind-set, freedom, honesty, critical attitudes, awareness of what is going on, etc. All this produces a high level of social capital.

Now, the situation today is becoming more problematic. The work force of big corporations don’t seem to require much schooling or even training before they start working and leaning at work the specialist skills they will need at the work place. The corporations have sold their managerial ideas and ideals to the Finnish Ministry of Education, who seems more or less eager to agree, always depending on which parties happen to be in power at a given moment.

For example, in the great Finnish university reformation (2017-18) the leading posts in the Uni Governments were given to corporate players and their agents. The idea was that they know best what the country needs in the future: more limited uni programs, less demanding degrees (esp. doctorates), shorter study times, more international experience for students, and in general sharper focus, more restrictions, less freedom, and strict planning at all levels. After this is done, schools will follow suit, for instance more and more emphasis on e-learning and e-learning competences. This will be useful in the future uni studies and then in working life.

Q: The work force of big corporations, etc. – considering developing machines in general and artificial intelligence in particular should be understood as “human work force,” whose specific (human) properties should be recognized. As a consequence, this implies the need of an education relevant to humans, not just learning at work the skills. – Do we need to raise a question about who and how must be empowered with authority to make decisions for education?

A: Yes, of course; that authority belongs to a democratically elected agency who listens educational specialists and takes into account the needs of the business and industries. But business is getting too much power just now in educational matters. They cannot make correct decisions for the good and happy future for the people. They have their own unholy special interests. They aim at short term profit when education looks deep into the future. Church looks too deeply into the past, which is another problem. Engineers cannot be trusted because they serve their employers.

All what I said above, is familiar stuff. But in Finland the populist party, Real Finns (2. largest party in the Parliament just now), is very much anti-education. Is it not remarkable that the Party of Underdogs promotes educational ideals that are consonant with those of the corporate elites? The Real Finns wanted educational funding slashed, and they got it. The most recent government initially promised (a campaign promise!) a hefty growth in educational funding but in reality they cut the funding drastically and justified their actions by saying “better results with less money,” that is, they wanted to cut out all the unnecessary branches of schooling and education so that what is left is then (much) better. Actually, almost miraculously, what is funded now is what was wanted by the elite, or the big corporations – and the anti-elitist Real Finns as well. I find this kind of situation truly amazing.

My prediction is that this is just the beginning and we’ll see many draconic policy changes in this direction in the near future. And the basic justification is always the same: (i) we need the cuts in order to stay competitive in the world market, and (ii) the cuts will not hurt us because what is lost is what is not so important anyway. Nobody will miss the critical democratic citizens and their all-round humanist education. Work horses do not need that much.

Qs: ... a wiser policy based on a wiser social (and political?) system? Does the latter have its roots in some matured mental attitudes of the Finnish society? It is based on Finnish social values and mental history? May I also ask you to touch upon these specific mentality prerequisites in your theses?

A: Finns have a long tradition of popular education, that is, education for all regardless of class and sex. The Lutheran Church used to promote this. Also, democratic processes are taken seriously (free and critical citizens), equality is absolutely essential, the values of modesty, thrift, work, education, learning are important – competitiveness less so. This used to be based on the Lutheran religion, especially in the countryside. Also, Finns have a very short history as a nation, no imperialist or colonialist past, and the idea of social elite classes is not acceptable. We have a lot to lose these days.

On the basis of what is discussed above, think of the following example: In the Spring 2019 in Finland the Social Democrats won in the parliamentary elections and therefore it is their privilege to form the Government. One of the main worries is unemployment, which is not high but should be lower if we want to be competitive in the world market. In order to cope with youth unemployment they suggested that the compulsory school attendance age should be raised from 15 to 17 across the board. Why? Because then the youth unemployment statistics will look better. The motivation to raise the compulsory school attendance age is definitely not educational but economic. This shows in what sense the school system is in crisis: its freedom and autonomy are under a threat.

Now, one can argue that this is a win-win situation. The unemployed youths will get additional school education that helps them in their future occupational and professional life and efforts. At the same time, the unemployment statistics will look better. Why is this not the case?

Many types of schools and schooling exist: one quite common type of school as a container, or a “container school”: You do not know where to put these young people, hence you put them in a container school and keep them there for a while. They are not really meant to learn

much, or anything, but they are supposed to be there under supervision and surveillance until they are released and put under the rule of some other agency of the welfare society.

This may sound cynical – perhaps it is cynical? But this is what happens to underprivileged youth: they are kept in storage until they are released to the labor market where they have preciously small chances of success. In fact, the hidden curriculum of any storage school makes it clear to the students that their adult life will be spent without much hope of work and success.

The government should make a real effort to help these youngsters, but this is not easy. The section of people I have been discussing here are problem children who have no real abilities to profit from extended schooling; their situation should be looked at from a non-economic perspective that aims at helping them to live a productive and happy life as full-fledged members of a democratic society. A container school is not where they should be.

Finnish Educational System:

- Q: BUT – what exactly is valued by others in Finnish education?

- A: It all started from PISA and the admiration was simply based on the high score we got. It was a big surprise in Finland too. I don't think anyone had a good explanation. But I can try to look for what experts said about it when they tried to explain it.

- Q: Is this advantage based on a wiser educational policy?

- A: The main thing seems to be the fact that all teachers have an MA in educational science, or they are well trained theoretically and practical. Teachers have a good/high social status. Schools are no charge. All schools are supposed to be of equal quality and similar curricula.

-Q: Is this policy based on a wiser social (and political?) system? Does the latter have its roots in some matured mental attitudes of the Finnish society?

- A: It is based on Finnish social values and our mental history. But it was then and today the future will be different. We must look into the future and new generations. The Finnish society is changing rapidly.

-Q: What do you think is a wiser educational policy? And so, what do you criticize?

- A: A high PISA score might indicated that educational results are better than average, but they don't tell that the Finnish schools are good and go into the right direction, especially in higher education. The True Finns are a leading party and they do not appreciate education. Education as the nation's main concern is wishful thinking, it no longer figures in practice.

Let is not fall for the old fallacy: "Better means good"!

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