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Culture of teaching in Finnish schools in context of educational change

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ABSTRACT

After the economic recession in the nineties, the Finnish government followed world trends and built national competitiveness policy. Finland has developed a high quality of teachers' work along with high social trust to this profession at every level of education. Teachers' profession is as prestigious as the profession of doctors or attorneys. The article reveals the relationship between the change in Finland's education policy, so called Alternative Reform Movement and the Finnish culture of teaching.

KEYWORDS:

educational change, Fourth Way, culture of teaching, Alternative Reform Movement

*"Great works are performed not by strength but by perseverance".
(Samuel Johnson)*

The economic success of Finland and the Finns' cosmopolitan openness contributed to the goal-oriented educational policy in the era of globalization and educational changes. What was the beginning? After the economic recession in the nineties, the Finnish government followed world trends and built national competitiveness policy. Finnish educational achievements are a consequence of mentality of the Finnish society, which combines a pragmatic lifestyle with unhurried consideration of what should be adapted and whose pedagogical experiences should be used. After taking into account national needs, the Finnish society adapts and introduces changes in the educational policy.

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Finland has developed a high quality of teachers' work along with high social trust to this profession at every level of education. Teachers' profession is as prestigious as the profession of doctors or attorneys. Teachers' professional capital together with economic and political capital supported successful educational reforms.

In my article, I am going to reveal the relationship between the change in Finland's education policy, so called Alternative Reform Movement and the Finnish culture of teaching. I will pay attention to the themes of culture and organizational culture. I will take into account culture of individualized teaching in primary school. I am going to present teachers' preparation to the job and cooperation between schools and teachers.

My one week Erasmus visit in 2017 enabled me not only to use the library sources of University of Eastern Finland but also consult with academics at this university the legitimacy of their use.

The themes of culture and organizational culture

The term culture was used from school perspective by Willard Waller (1932, pp. 10–36) to present and describe life inside school. He showed that schools have not only their own identities but typical rituals and moral codes existing in personal relationships. According to Teddlie and Stringfield (1993, pp. 18–21) "School Climate refers to a number of variables in the school social environment including, but not limited to, student sense of academic futility, student perception of teacher push, student academic norms, teacher ability, teacher expectations for students, teacher-student efforts to improve, perceptions of the principal's expectations, parental concern for quality of education, perceptions of present school quality, and efforts of the principal to improve". The Creemers and Reezigt (1999, p. 35) presented their model of school climate with "the physical environment of the school" (buildings, corridors, etc). They paid attention not only to relationships but also interactions between people at school. In their point of view, there is seen the balance between the teachers' expectations about behavior and students outcomes. Hoy et al. (1997, pp. 290–311) claimed that schools have their own personalities. In this context, they used term healthy schools to describe climate in schools.

On the other side, Andrew Brown (1995, p. 9, 33, 1998, p. 176) presented definition of organizational culture: "Organizational culture refers to the pattern of beliefs, values and learned ways of coping with experience that have developed during the course of an organization's history, and which tend to be manifested in its material arrangements and in the behaviours of its members."

Schein (1985, p. 12) introduced his own approach to the concept of organizational culture". A pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learns as it solves its prob-

lems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems". Moreover, Schein divides culture into three areas. Firstly he introduced "External Survival Issues with schools's "mission, strategy and goals". Secondly, Schein added "Internal Integration Issues", which included: language, concepts, "Group boundaries and identity, The nature of authority and relationships, Allocation of rewards and status". Moreover, in the third group he described "Deeper Underlying Assumptions like Human relationships to nature, The nature of reality and truth, (...) The nature of human relationships with time, space and unknowable and uncontrollable" (Schein, 2009, pp. 39–40).

Culture of teaching in Finland

In 1970, according to Statistics in Finland, only 7% of high school graduates continued their studies in higher education, in 1990 this number increased to 32% of graduates, and in 2010 to about 28% (Statistics Finland). In the seventies, the level of education in Finland was close to the level of education in Malaysia and Peru and was far behind Denmark, Norway and Sweden. They had to find a way to solve this problem.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s there were launched in Finland development projects and several research in comprehensive schools which led to waves of criticism of the current pedagogical practices. The main aim of public education was to teach how to "think critically and independently" (Sahlberg, 2015, p.43). Moreover, the other aim was conception of knowledge.

Furthermore, information and communication technologies were important for this change. In this light, Finnish educational researchers admired the emergence of constructivist theories of learning and neurosciences which help them take into consideration existing conceptions of knowledge and learning which were common in Finnish schools. Teachers, in service training tried to find answers for questions: "What is knowledge?, How do pupils learn?, How do schools change?" (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 43).

Education in Finland has been always perceived as a significant part of society and culture. Martti Ahtisaari, who was a graduate of seminar for teachers in the 1950s, was a primary school teacher, too. Moreover, he was an international diplomat and the president of Finland from 1994 to 2000. He was a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and global peacemaker. In this light, Finns perceive the importance of teachers' values and their professional skills in creation of educational achievements of Finnish children. Finns trust teachers' professional insights and ways of solving school problems. Furthermore, famous Finnish educator, Matti Koskenniemi, used the term "pedagogical love".

(...) Teaching is, perhaps more than any other job, a profession that you can successfully do only if you put your heart and personality into play. (...) There will be motives to become a teacher. My own is that I want to do good for other people, to care about and love. I do love them and thus I will be a teacher" – Veera Salonen, Primary School Teacher, Helsinki (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 102).

In the context of Fourth Way which is a global educational change, Finland "paid special attention to the quality of teachers' work, which shaped the resilience of the education system and ensured the success of the student" (Suwalska, 2017, p. 159). The Fourth Way "is a way of inspiration and innovations, of responsibility and sustainability" (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009, p. 71).

To sum up, decision about choosing a teaching profession in Finland is not a temporary commitment. Finnish teachers claim that teaching is a permanent commitment for the whole working life. Graduates of secondary schools are aware of the highest social trust that teachers enjoy. They also see the highest level of responsibility which is related to this profession.

It is undisputed that in the postmodernist era full of challenges and threats teachers have to understand not only their own emotions, but their colleagues and students, too. Teachers who work in schools "should strike "a balance between classroom teaching and collaboration with other professionals in school" (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 98). Their professional autonomy is based on creation of their own plans and curriculum at schools. It is possible due to the fact that all teachers from kindergarten teachers to teachers at research universities are publicly financed.

According to Sahlberg (2015, p. 146) there are observed loose standards in teaching in Finland. It results in clear but open-ended standards for each school. It is common that each school is able to pioneer its own local solutions to all national goals in creation the greatest educational options. In Finnish culture of teaching there is observed high level of risk-taking and creativity not only among leaders of schools, but between teachers, too. Schools are encouraged to look for successful ways which can be used in the process of teaching. Teachers try to find out the most efficient ways of teaching for each student. Moreover, it is popular to place emphasis not only on learning from the past but to honour conventional pedagogical values, too.

Becoming a student

Finland is a country which was able to create the best working conditions for teachers. They were able to select the best and "the most motivated young people for primary school teacher education programs year after year" (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 104). In Finland it is very popular to work as a teacher. In this light, it is really hard to fulfill per-

sonal dreams in this profession. There are eight departments of teacher education in Finnish universities. It is needed, that successful candidates to these universities, must have certificates of upper-secondary education with positive attitudes towards teaching personalities and interpersonal skills at the highest level. It is highly competitive due to the fact that each year only one per 10 candidates will be successful and accepted to "primary school teacher education master's programs in Finnish research universities" (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 103). According to Sahlberg there were only 340 candidates accepted, in 2013 at the university of Helsinki, from total number of 3200 applicants to different teacher education programmes (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 103).

There is an accurate quality control system at the entry into applying to teaching profession in Finland. It is indispensable to acquire solid knowledge and skills to teaching with appropriate commitment to work as a teacher. The first part consists on a written exam at the beginning of May. The exam is the same for all eight universities. It is conducted according to the set of articles not only scientific, but professional, too. The articles are announced in late March. Those students, who received the best grades are invited to the next phase of recruitment process. The exam mark is a measure of the quality of the first phase, it does not take into consideration students' grades or merits.

The second phase checks personalities of candidates, their knowledge and "suitability to become teacher" (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 104). Candidates to all universities in Finland are checked according to the ability to create ideas, his or her own planning and cooperation with other people. There are individual interviews conducted to all candidates, which involve candidates' explanation of reasons to become teachers. The final decision about successful candidates measures not only results at Matura Exam, students' grades and their skills in sports, but arts together with first and second phases of entrance exam, too.

Great teachers

Teachers in Finland have a high level of professional autonomy, similar to medical doctors, engineers or attorneys. They have time for planning the process of teaching, diagnosing and evaluating. In Finland, teachers expect that they "will experience professional autonomy, prestige, respect, and trust in their work" (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 106). On the other hand, if they experience lack of moral professional environment they will look for another posts, outside schools. Finnish educational policy is an example of the country which knows how to make teaching profession attractive for school leavers.

Following its way of educational change, so called Fourth Way, Finland "paid special attention to the quality of teachers' work, which shaped the resilience of the

education system and ensured the success of the students" (Suwalska, 2017, p. 159). It is obligatory for teachers to understand not only emotions of their colleagues and students emotions, but their own emotions, too. It is embodied in their relationships full of challenges and threats of the XXI century, which are characterized by "new patterns of consumption, the development of the Internet, and innovations in services, technology, and organization, along with the changing structure of employment, influence the necessary creation of market-oriented educational services" (Suwalska, 2017, p. 159).

Cooperation between schools and teachers

In the context of the Global Education Reform Movement specific to the USA and England and the Alternative Movement of Refom in Finland, it should be noted that changes in the work of Finnish teachers are associated with a high level of cooperation between schools. Schools in this country work together, help each other and support culture of teaching among teachers. Finnish teachers are professionals due to they follow the highest standards of teaching. Moreover, they spend less time teaching than Polish teachers, about 600 hours per year and they know how to self-regulate working discipline. In this light it is needed to mention that not only teachers, but mass media contributed to creation of high-quality and high-trust at each level of education.

Finnish teachers are autonomous and work together to solve the school problems. There is seen the highest level of interaction between teachers to meet. Furthermore, teachers can change the frameworks of teaching and curriculum to introduce innovations. Teachers diagnose students with special learning needs and prepare needed instructions and changes.

Social capital in Finland is seen by the prism of intensive cooperation between teachers. Teachers, head teachers and workers of the National Board of Education meet together to consult and discuss current problems on seminars. Presented above, system of Finnish education, is "based on cooperation and pervasive feelings of trust among teachers as well as between teachers and those who work in a wider system, and in a collective sense of moral responsibility" (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012, p. 52). It is undisputed they follow the same values about vision of education and they organize their work in a cooperative way.

Finland disposed of its external schools system of inspection. Finnish society trusts its teachers and it claims that it is unnecessary to monitor and inspect them. As a consequence, Finnish teachers are successful.

Alternative Reform Movement in Finland

The Finns had been preparing for this reform for thirty years. This change was characterized by being immune to the trend of market-driven policy typical for the UK and the USA. The nature of Finnish educational development was based on Finnish work related to knowledge and ideas which were brought from abroad. Finland took into consideration the rules of teaching and students assessment methods.

As a result, they developed their own education system far different from the public education systems of England and the United States. In this light, competent teachers are the greatest treasure of education in Finland. Successful educational change, contributed to multi-dimensional climate of school in Finland which is based on high-trust to teachers' job at school, media and social life.

Model of Educational change in Finland, according to Pasi Sahlberg, is based on some clear factors: "Collaboration among schools, Personalized learning, Focus on the whole child, Trust-based responsibility and Equity of outcomes" (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 149).

Collaboration between schools in Finland is a collaborative process which contributes to the highest quality of education. It is possible due to existing networks, cooperation and sharing ideas between schools. "When schools collaborate, they help one another and help teachers create culture of cooperation in their classrooms" (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 149).

Secondly, *Personalized learning*, is perceived as flexible and clear Finnish framework for planning curriculum at schools. Each school is encouraged to create the best solutions to personalized learning in the frames of national goals. Moreover, there are prepared plans, using individualized learning, for students with special educational needs.

Thirdly, there is omnipresent in Finland. *Focus on the whole child*, with an emphasis on all aspects of growth. Teaching and learning is led deeply and broadly, taking into account not only moral character, but each student personality, skills and knowledge. Finns try to find out each student's talents and develop them.

Trust-based responsibility means a culture of "responsibility and trust within the education system" (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 149). Finnish society and parents trust their teachers and heads of schools in using the best ways to teach. "We trust the expertise of our principals and teachers. We respect that expertise and we try to understand what is happening in the everyday life of schools and what questions have to be worked with, and we try to combine that with issues, interests and needs of the future at the national level". If school has problems, the head of local municipalities ask: "How we can help the school? What were the things that went wrong? The knowledge (of how to solve the problem) is in the school and we have capable principals. You have to trust. Trust is the first thing" (Hargreaves, et al., 2007, p. 86). Municipalities want to help

rather than count the money in the budget. They prefer to sit together and analyze the problem. Finns claim that principals are priceless in their society.

Moreover, Finland got rid of its external schools system of inspection. In the 1980s there were initiated strategies which improve the quality of teachers' work. Finns believe that teachers " could be trusted to monitor themselves and would no longer be in need of external inspection" (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012, p. 64).

There is used self-correcting system of support and assistance which means that government does not want to intervene, it wants to help, because there is presumption that "people are acting in good faith but need assistance and support to be more effective" (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012, p. 65). As a result, in Finland there is not used strategy of identifying bad and good teachers.

Moreover, the Finnish Model contains *Equity of outcomes*, in which " Basic premise is that all children should have equal prospects for educational success in school" (Sahlsberg, 2015, p. 149). The success of schools depends on the the ways how schools overcome inequalities like children's family background and related to it factors. In this light, it is significant to underline that in Finland differences between schools exist but there is no reason to create good and bad schools. The omnipresent support and assistance in Finland is the answer if the problem arises.

The Finnish educational system is also self-correcting. There exist a process of school self-evaluation, which is embedded in country's evaluation. Moreover, the self-correcting educational system is also guided by collective professional responsibility. As a result, the system is informed when there are weak signals. The local municipality and other schools respond in a form of training, support and assistance. There is observed self-correctness of Finland's educational system with high-trust, high quality and collective commitment. All arising problems are solved "by broad participation and constant interaction rather than through public exposure and top-down intervention" (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012, p. 65).

Presented above clear factors of Alternative Reform Movement contributed to loose standards and individualized teaching. Each school, which knows the best its students, wants to create the best learning opportunities and develop clear, flexible standards based on national goals. In addition, teachers and can plan their own curriculum taking into account local problems.

Culture of individualized teaching in primary school

In the light of culture of teaching, it is worth to mention the personalized learning in Finland. Each student has the development plan of personalized learning. Individualism in teaching means, the possibility of adapting tasks, exercises or books to the

possibilities and interests of each child. Individualized teaching is related to the level of difficulty, too. There are used tasks at different level of difficulty, within the same teaching material, for students. As a consequence, individual teacher's work with the child during school activities helps not only avoid stressful situations, but it promotes the atmosphere of cooperation and better understanding, too.

The fundamental principle of Finnish primary education is to help the child at the initial education. School and teachers adapt the methods of teaching to the needs of children. Moreover, in Finland there is no transfer of a child to another school or removal from school. Each school has a caring team, which consists of a social worker, a guidance counselor and a school nurse. The team's cooperation builds not only close relationships with children, but also promotes the comfort of teaching and support at schools.

There are created individual or small groups programs for children with learning difficulties. Teaching can be special in one, several or all subjects. It depends on the child's needs and abilities. Children in Finland are assessed according to the knowledge level they actually present. If the child today can not solve the task from the basic level is not a problem. He or she the next day will return to the lower level. As soon as possible, he or she can solve the task from the higher level.

In Finland, it is not embarrassing to repeat the school year, due to the fact that the main aim of school is to prepare a young person for adult life, and not only for exams, as it is seen in GERM reform countries. Individualization of teaching is also reinforced by free tutoring in primary schools during lessons or directly after them. The Finns believe that the state school should help to teach the student how to build a successful private life and independence in professional life. In this light, each student is treated holistically. The school puts emphasis not only on his or her independent thinking, but on solving problems, too. Students, unlike in Poland do not learn by heart, they learn how to find it in books or on the Internet. An interesting feature of the Finnish system is that teachers do not mix into conflicts between students. Thanks to it, teachers allow students more effectively prepare for the difficulties of adulthood and learn about effective ways of defense.

A delicious school meal as a part of climate of teaching

Finland introduced serving of free school meals in 1948 (Finnish National Board of Education 2008, p. 2). Today free school meals are served to preschool children (6-year-olds), students, from 7 to 15 years, who attend basic comprehensive education and to high or vocational schools' students. The menu includes such various options as: "sausage, chicken, spaghetti, rice, mashed potatoes, simple green salad (based on

lettuce and simple dressings), grated carrots, ground meat (meatballs), water, milk fish and liquid yogurt, crackers and high-fiber bread, butter, and fruit. Once a week fish should be served, too (Finnish National Board of Education, 2008, p. 4).

Conclusion

To be successful in building up the culture of teaching is significant to take into consideration contemporary Finnish challenges and changes. Moreover, it makes sense to honour traditional pedagogical values. All described above factors has contributed to Finland's iconic status and position of educational leader in the world. From this educational perspective, there is need to analyze successful reforms in Finland to understand how better build up educational changes in Poland.

To sum up, there is important to follow innovations in culture of teaching of Finland and engage them into Polish schools.

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