THE CURRICULUM REFORM OF BASIC EDUCATION GIVES STRONG MANDATE TO GLOBAL EDUCATORS IN FINLAND

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Abstract

In Finland the national core curricula are the most influential steering tools concerning teaching in primary schools, lower secondary schools, upper secondary schools as well additional classes to the lower secondary schools and preparatory education for migrants. The Finnish National Board of Education is the agency with responsibility for the preparation of these documents. I work in the unit and general education in the Board. As a secretary of the core working group of the curriculum reform of basic education and as a member of the coordination group of the whole working process I had good possibilities to provide a contribution to the whole reform. Having had for a long time many tasks in global education and related themes I tried to guarantee their visibility in the reform.

The main purpose of this article is to inform the international audience about Finnish solutions concerning global education in the newest reform. In this article I also give some reflections on the process of the reform. Additionally I also analyze the global education solutions through a preliminary theory on how we in Finland understand global education. This preliminary theory - often referred as a competence flower of global education - was constructed in a national education development process called As a global citizens in Finland. I also want to awaken interest among researchers, curricula developers and decision makers to study the potential of our preliminary theory on global education as well as Finnish curriculum solutions.

Keywords: Global Education; Global Citizenship Education; Curriculum Reform; Basic education; Eco-social civilization.

Open dialogue in key role

A ground-breaking curriculum reform of the entire general education sector is in the making in Finland and will continue to the end of 2016. The new national core curricula for pre-primary and basic education and as well as for the additional classes of basic education were approved by the Finnish National Board of Education in December 2014. In the Finnish education system the core curricula are key steering instruments for basic and secondary education. We have no system of school inspection and in basic education there is no regular national testing. The core curricula are renewed every 10 – 12 years, generally covering all aspects of school work. The reforms are preceded by and based on government decrees concerning the general aims of education and the allocation of lesson hours. The Decree\(^3\) on basic education was passed in the summer of 2012 and the new curricula must be in place in all basic education schools in the autumn of 2016. This will take place after the local adaptations of the core curriculum will have been completed, a great number of in-service training courses organized and new learning materials published\(^4\).

Children start basic education in Finland in the year they turn seven. Almost all of them will have participated in pre-school classes before this. Basic education lasts nine years. Basic education is most often provided by the municipality. There are a few private schools but they, too, follow the same National Core Curriculum, with their own adaptations. So, the National Core Curriculum is for all children from 7 to 16 years.

It has been our serious effort to organize the reform of the core curriculum\(^5\) in the form of a process that as such reflects the qualities we value most in good education, including global education. This is why the core curricula were drafted in an open and comprehensive dialogue and collaboration with education providers, researchers, teacher educators, teacher training schools and regional administrations. Civil society organizations played a most active part in the process and their voice was also well heard\(^6\). In an article on the process of the curriculum reform, Heikkinen, Huttunen and Kilakoski\(^7\) concluded that the process observed to a high degree the principles of democratic will creation as proposed by Jürgen Habermas in his discourse theory. In his works Jürgen Habermas has discussed the tasks and ethics of intellectual discussion and dialogue as action to transform a public sphere and how open dialogue and opinions agreed in public debates create legality to the decisions done through them.

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\(^3\) Government Decree on the general aims of basic education and allocation of lesson hours (422/2012).


\(^6\) In their open letter, dated 23.3.2015, to Ms Krista Kiuru, Minister of Education and Culture, 11 civil society organizations headed by KEPA (umbrella organization in development cooperation and global education) thank her for the open preparation process and the integration of global education to the National Core Curriculum. The organizations also appeal to the Minister for similar process and quality for global education in the National Core Curriculum for the upper secondary schools which is in the making.

Key words in the reform include: meaningfulness, authenticity, joy of learning, participation, dialogue, interaction and trust. The core curriculum describes schools as learning communities in terms that echo the spirit and formulations of the chapters on value basis (each child is unique and has a right to quality education, ethics of human rights and democratic society, necessity of sustainable lifestyle, cultural diversity as a richness) and conception of learning – bearing in mind that also these will be subjects of continuous reflection and dialogue in order to develop both. If the learners and the teachers do not have a chance to participate in and influence the planning and crafting of their own work how could they teach and learn about these qualities. The messages and qualities of the processes in the schools need to comply with the results aimed at. Learning is seen as an inseparable dimension of an individual’s growth as a human being as well as in the construction of the good life of a community. Basic education is not committed to any religion, denomination or party politics. Violence, racism, harassment and exclusion are not to be tolerated and should they occur they are to be dealt with immediately.

The general parts of the core curriculum include, among others, chapters on the obligations concerning the provision of basic education, the value basis, the school culture, the overall tasks of basic education, and the transversal competences as goals. As a Finnish national interpretation of the so called 21st century skills, we have defined seven transversal (or generic) competences for learning. Among others they comprise: learning to learn, intercultural competence as well as participation, influencing and construction of a sustainable future.

One of the aims of the reform was to carefully accommodate what is stipulated in the general parts into the subject-specific curricula. For instance, what is said about the subjects is to reflect, in quite some detail, the value basis and the conception of learning. As the value basis is essential in global education I repeat here the questions that were posed to the developers of the subject curricula during the process:

- how does your subject consolidate core social and political values such as respect of human rights, democracy, welfare of all and active participation in an open civil society?
- how does your subject contribute in the forming of schools as meeting places for pupils coming from different linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds?
- how does your subject contribute in laying the foundation for global citizenship based on the universal values of human rights?
- which are the angles (insights, core understandings) in your subject that will help pupils understand the interdependence of nature and human beings; how does your subject help create an understanding of the concept of eco-social education; how does your subject help corroborate a sustainable lifestyle?

Recent developments in global education and global learning

Global education and global learning were integrated in a number of ways into the new core curriculum - both in the process and as regards the formulation of the final texts. I find it not possible to draw a line in

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8 Texts in italics have been directly translated from the National Core Curriculum.
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between what is quality education in general and what is global education in particular. A variety of specificities of global education have been embedded in so many parts of the texts. Let me point out some of the most obvious ones.

The definition of global education that we mostly use in Finland is the one from the Maastricht Global Education Declaration 2002\textsuperscript{10}. This definition can be now found in the core curriculum amongst the principles of developing schools as learning communities. Let me quote: \textit{[School as] a learning community will constitute hope of a good future by helping establish the foundations of an eco-social competence (sivistys in Finnish)}\textsuperscript{11}. \textit{It will encourage pupils to meet the diversities of the world around them in an open and curious manner and it will help them act for a more just and sustainable future.}

Just a few years ago, the FNBE carried out a national project called “As a Global Citizen in Finland” in cooperation with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs as well as 15 schools and some other actors. The main results of the project were published in a scholarly journal “Schools reaching out to a global world”\textsuperscript{12} where you can find a chapter discussing from multiple angles the competencies of a global citizen. This preliminary theory is often referred in colloquial as a competence flower of global education. Here I ask the reader to imagine a flower. The general aim (corolla of a flower) can be seen as the identity of a global citizen. Competences in this monograph are understood in line with the DeSeCo process of the OECD\textsuperscript{13}. They have been labelled as follows:

- global citizen’s ethics
- intercultural competence
- sustainable lifestyle
- global citizen’s civic competence.
- global responsibility and partnerships
- global citizen’s economic competence.

Due to the fact that ethics should be part of each competence of a global citizen it has described in the drawing as a calyx. In the unjust and unsustainable world we should learn to orientate ourselves critically and ethically. All the other competences are drawn as petals. Because the future is open and we cannot know in advance what the world challenges us to learn one petal is marked with a question mark.

The project and the work with the competencies provided a great inspiration to our work in the curriculum reform, but it also gave impetus to our next project with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and some new


\textsuperscript{11} The Finnish concept “sivistys” (Bildung in German, utbildning in Swedish) has no exact translation into English. It means education, competence, cultivation, civilization and enlightenment. The concept was introduced into Finnish language during the era of national romanticism in the 19th century.


\textsuperscript{13} OECD. DeSeCo. Definition and Selection of Competences.
schools. This time we have been working on competencies regarding global education and partnerships in a project called “Schools as Development Partners”\textsuperscript{14}.

The competences of a global citizen have been further elaborated also in the two Hanasaari Symposia with GENE in 2011\textsuperscript{15} and 2014\textsuperscript{16}.

The concept of global citizenship matches elegantly with the Finnish educational tradition as there is a clear interrelationship between the concepts of active citizenship and sivistys\textsuperscript{17}. It is of certain interest that global education is one of the very few “educations” mentioned in the 549-page core curriculum. The text on the task of basic education reads as follows: Global education will provide for its part for the preconditions for just and sustainable development in line with the development goals of the UN. Where feasible, schools will work in cooperation with schools and education developers in other countries. Basic education is a positive and constructive agent for social change both nationally and internationally.

While the new National Core Curriculum was in the making, a keen eye was kept on the discussions and policy statements concerning UN’s post-2015 development agenda. For quite a long time now, Finland has regarded global education and education for sustainable development as complementary elements in education. The Global Education First Initiative by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon coupled with UNESCO’s\textsuperscript{18} work on ESD, were greeted with enthusiasm. According to UNESCO, global citizenship “refers to a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity, promoting a “global gaze” that links the local to the global and the national to the international. It is also a way of understanding, acting and relating oneself to others and the environment in space and in time, based on universal values, through respect for diversity and pluralism.” The FNBE had portrayed global citizenship in nearly identical phrases in the publication “Schools Reaching out to a Global World”\textsuperscript{19}.

**Competences of a global citizen in the core curriculum**

In the Finnish National Core Curriculum for basic education 2014, several aspects of global citizenship are elaborated in the texts on value basis, transversal competences, school culture and subject curricula. In the following I point out samples from these texts in the light of how the competences of a global citizen were first drafted in the FNBE publication “Schools Reaching out to Global World”.


\textsuperscript{17} One of the etymologies of the Finnish word “sivistys” is that it has been coined from “siveä” which is Finnish for virtuous, and “civic”, which is Latin, meaning a citizen. Thus “virtuous citizens” can be seen as the ultimate aims of education.

\textsuperscript{18} UNESCO. Global Citizenship Education. Preparing learners for the challenges of the 21.st century.

The National Core Curriculum gives a lot of emphasis on ethics the way it is based on universal human rights. In the education of a global citizen, ethical competence will constitute the core and foundation of all other competences. According to the National Core Curriculum pupils will learn to know and respect human rights and protect them. Basic education will set out the foundation of global citizenship based on the respect of human rights and it will encourage pupils to act as agents of change. Pupils will also be guided to question which kind of behavior can and cannot be accepted. Seven documents on human rights are referred to, with special attention given to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The text on value basis in the National Core Curriculum opens as follows: Each child is unique and valuable exactly as he or she is. Each child has the right to reach his or her full potential as a human being and as a member of the society. Each child has the right to quality education and the right to be successful in his or her school work. The Finnish education system as a whole is highly inclusive and basic education is the most inclusive part of it.

Among the subject curricula we can find a strong contribution to the universal ethics of human rights in religious education (the core curriculum provides options in Evangelical Lutheran, Orthodox, Catholic, Islamic and Jewish religious education and more) and in the subject of ethics for those children who do not belong to any religious group. Teaching is non-confessional and shall include information about other religions and denominations in a respectful and analytical manner.

The new Core Curriculum deals with the global citizen’s intercultural competence in a variety of ways. Pupils are encouraged to build on an identity that is dynamic as it draws strength from the diversity and plurilingualism of both individuals and communities. Schools are seen as integral parts of culturally evolving and transforming societies where the global and the local are constantly intertwining. Pupils learn to live in a world which is linguistically, culturally and denominationally diverse. Pupils are guided to learn to see things and situations through others’ eyes.

For the first time, the Core Curriculum introduces schools’ international activities as a natural resource for bringing up interculturally savvy global citizens in basic education. In order to achieve this, schools’ international cooperation is to be carried out through purposeful networks. The cultural and linguistic diversity that are present in every classroom, at least through the media and ICTs, can be accessed with the help of internationalization at home.

Intercultural competence has always been seen as part of foreign language teaching. The new Core Curriculum introduces a paradigm shift concerning teaching and learning of ALL languages. The language curricula open now with a text on language education, stipulating that pupils will get support in appreciating their own plurilingualism and ability to exploit all the linguistic capacity they have, including the languages they use in their free-time. Even when pupils’ linguistic skills are limited, they should be encouraged to use them [without fear of being mocked]. The significance of minority languages and vulnerable languages will be dealt with. The language curricula repeat what has been underlined already in the chapter on School culture: Basic education in a linguistically conscious school makes every adult a linguistic model and also the teacher of the language of the subject they teach.
All language curricula now also include much greater emphasis on interactive skills than before, reflecting what has been said in the generic part of the Core Curriculum on value basis and school culture. Language learning is key in helping pupils communicate in manners that underline cultural awareness, curiosity and appreciation of the other.

The competence of sustainable lifestyle is also repeatedly discussed in the National Core Curriculum: Schools are to construct hope for a good future by creating capacity for ecosocial sivistys\textsuperscript{20}, a sustainable lifestyle and circular economy. Pupils are guided in how to live modestly and to share what they have. They will also learn how to act as enlightened consumers. The intangible elements of welfare will be highlighted. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on how to transform their lifestyles so that raw materials and energy can be saved and biodiversity safeguarded. Special attention is to be paid to climate change. Basic education will open views to global responsibility beyond generations. Through their choices and actions schools express their responsible relationship to the environment, and choices that may be harmful to the existence of raw materials, energy or biodiversity are to be altered in a sustainable manner.

Sustainable lifestyle is set as an umbrella goal for the development of school culture. In the subject curricula for environmental studies, chemistry, physics, geography and biology, there is a lot of detailed evidence on how this competence is embedded in teaching and learning. The subject of home economics teaches both girls and boys as environmentally sophisticated consumers, also in the spirit of fair trade. One of the transversal competences, participation, influencing and constructing a sustainable future is aimed at building bridges across the problems we identify and the solutions we have the potential to develop in school, in society and through international cooperation and even globally.

The civic competence of a global citizen is also written in many ways into the National Core Curriculum. Pupils’ rights to participate in decision-making will be respected taking into consideration their age and maturity. Basic education will promote democracy and active agency in a civil society. The aims of basic education support pupils’ growth towards … justice and peace. Basic education will promote economic, social, regional and gender equality. Basic education will consolidate pupils’ participation… and growth towards a [full] membership in a democratic society. Pupils are encouraged to think, to construct knowledge, to be critical and to express their opinions. Pupils will participate in the planning of their school work including phenomenon-based project studies. … Pupils learn to make agreements, to take on responsibility, to appreciate the value of trust, to encounter and solve conflicts, to mediate, to do voluntary work and to participate in the work of pupils’ councils.

Pupils are encouraged to relate to globalization in wise ways as citizens and as consumers. Global responsibility is a heavy word, especially for a child. In basic education the idea is to support every child in building a sound, informed and brave relationship with the surrounding world. Pupils are not supposed to feel guilty about the injustice and inequality of the world but instead, already at school, learn to know what life is

like in different parts of the world and how to take on a positive approach to collaboration across borders. The FNBE has been working on a project on the competence of development partnership called “Schools as Development Partners”\textsuperscript{21} and will publish a book on the results and suggestions in spring or summer 2015.

Concluding remarks

In the Conclusions of Hanasaari Symposium of 2011 the participants stated that “Curriculum development or reform is best understood as a critical, participatory learning process”. With the development process of Finland’s National Core Curriculum for basic education in 2012 - 2014 we Finns have experienced that this high goal is possible to achieve. The Hanasaari Conclusions also state that “global education is primarily about the formation of key competencies for global citizens. Our understandings of key competencies for global citizens should continue to be clarified, contested, debated and mainstreamed.” This is what we have tried to accomplish in our new core curriculum in Finland.

The Hanasaari Conclusions from the year 2014 state that “the ethical aspect of all competencies of Global Citizens, we (the participants of the Symposium) emphasize the need to put justice, equity and sustainability at the core of all that we do in Global Education”. I think our new curriculum bears clear witness of such solutions. Sustainable lifestyle and eco-social civilization are seen as the next phase of the cultural evolution we are aiming at. The recent Hanasaari Conclusions also point out that “Focusing on the dimensions of civic competence, we (the participants of the Symposium) recognize that within the process of Global Education and Global Citizenship Education there is a need to build on understandings of the multiple perspectives present in local, national and global communities; and to give access to knowledge and practice in order to facilitate participation in decision-making and to encourage civil-society action”. To achieve this, our future basic education graduates will have a better foundation in life than any generation before in Finland. And one more quote from Hanasaari 2014: “Focusing on the intercultural competence of Global Citizens, we (the participants of the Hanasaari Symposium) recognize that linguistic and cultural awareness, pluri-lingualism and valuing diversity are key learning goals in enabling sustainable identity-building, communication and actions at both individual, local and global levels.” This challenge has been taken onboard in the new curriculum in an exemplary way, fully knowing that it is a generation of teacher in-service training and a full set of new teaching materials that it may take before “all teachers are language teachers”.

To conclude, let me say that I am very happy with the curriculum reform as it has been carried out in Finland –especially from the viewpoint of global education. The solutions give a strong mandate for global educators to do their work well. I would like to see a strong mandate to be formed also for global educators at the secondary level of general education with which we are working this year. Finnish specialists of global education would also like to have possibilities to compare our solutions – as they will always be in the making – with the solutions made elsewhere.

References

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