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## **CURRENT TRENDS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN FINLAND**

### **Inclusive education today**

In many ways the Finnish school system is inclusive by nature. Development towards the school for every-one has begun years ago. Legislation that directs the Finnish education system is based on equality, justice of learning and on the principle of inclusion. The most important goal of education is to support growth and development of unique personality in all possible ways. Schooling is provided first and foremost in context with mainstream education. Also the main goal of education is to guarantee the best possible learning to everyone. Every child is important and all the decisions are made from the children point of view.

In this presentation concept of inclusive education means that the education is organised so that every pupil gets an adequate and well-timed support to her/his learning and growth. It is a question of both developing the system and structures and developing the school culture and pedagogical methods that promote the success of all pupils in their studies.

### **Tools for Inclusive Education**

#### **1. Education policy**

##### ***Administration system***

The Finnish Parliament decides on educational legislation and the general principles of education policy. The government, the Ministry of Education, and the Finnish National Board of Education are responsible for the implementation of this policy at the central administration level. The government participates in the costs of schools by paying the so-called statutory government transfer to the education provider. The role of the Ministry is to prepare strategic policy guidelines for education, to prepare and share budget and to prepare educational laws. The main responsibility of NBE is to prepare and decide about the National Core Curriculum for the Comprehensive School, for Upper Secondary General and Vocational Education and for Adult Education. NBE is also responsible for the development of the Finnish education system. Universities have autonomy and they are guided straight by the Ministry of Education.

Basic education is governed by the Basic Education Act (628/1998) and Basic Education Decree (852/1998) and the Government Decree on the General National Objectives and Distribution of Lesson Hours in Basic Education (1435/2001). These regulations stipulate such matters as the core subjects taught to all pupils, and the distribution of teaching hours between various subjects. The core subjects taught to all pupils in the basic education syllabus are the mother tongue and literature (Finnish or Swedish), the other official language, one foreign language, environmental studies, health education, religion or ethics, history, social studies, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, geography, physical education, music, art and crafts, and home economics. Guidance counselling must also be provided for students. In addition, optional subjects are taught, which are determined locally by local authorities and schools.

### ***Education Policy Definitions***

The key objective of Finnish educational policy is to provide all citizens with equal access to education – regardless of age, place of residence, economic circumstances, sex, or mother tongue. Education is considered to be a fundamental right of all citizens. Statutes guarantee everyone residing in Finland – not only Finnish citizens – the right to free basic education. They also prescribe compulsory basic education.

The basis of instruction is Finnish culture, which has developed in interaction with indigenous, Nordic, and European cultures. In the instruction, special national and local attributes, the national languages, the two national churches, the Sami as an indigenous people and national minorities must be taken into consideration. The instruction must also take into account the diversification of Finnish culture through the arrival of people from other cultures. The instruction helps to support the formation of the pupil's own cultural identity, and his or her part in Finnish society and a globalizing world. The instruction also helps to promote tolerance and intercultural understanding.

Basic education helps to increase both regional equality and equality among individuals. In the instruction, the diversity of learners is taken into consideration, and gender equality is promoted by giving girls and boys the ability to act on the basis of equal rights and responsibilities in society, working life, and family life.

In basic education, instruction in the different subjects is nondenominational and politically neutral. In the local basic education curriculum, the values that underlie education are to be specified. They are to be incorporated into the objectives and contents of basic education, and into everyday activity.

Basic education is part of fundamental educational security. It has both an educational and an instructional mission. Its task on the one hand is to offer individuals the chance to acquire a general education and complete their educational obligations; and, on the other, to furnish society with a tool for developing educational capital and enhancing equality and a sense of community.

Basic education must provide an opportunity for diversified growth, learning, and the development of a healthy sense of self-esteem, so that the pupils can obtain the knowledge and skills they need in life, become capable of further study, and, as involved citizens, develop a democratic society. Basic education must also support each pupil's linguistic and cultural identity and the development of his or her mother tongue. A further objective is to awaken a desire for lifelong learning.

In order to ensure social continuity and build the future, basic education assumes the tasks of transferring cultural tradition from one generation to the next, augmenting knowledge and skills, and increasing awareness of the values and ways of acting that form the foundation of society. It is also the mission of basic education to create new culture, revitalize ways of thinking and acting, and develop the pupil's ability to evaluate critically.

## **2. Provision of Education**

### ***The underlying values and conception of learning***

The underlying values of basic education are human rights, equality, democracy, natural diversity, preservation of environmental viability, and the endorsement of multiculturalism. Basic education promotes responsibility, a sense of community, and respect for the rights and freedoms of the individual.

At school level, values can be seen especially in three levels that are linked to each other: in school culture, in social relationships and in the content of education.

Our conception of learning has changed during thirty years. At the moment one could call it socio-constructivist and situational learning conception. The National Core Curriculum has been formulated on the basis of a conception of learning as an individual and communal process of building knowledge and skills. Learning takes place as purposeful study in a variety of situations: independently, under a teacher's guidance, and in interaction with the teacher and peer group. In addition to new knowledge and skills, both learning and work habits are to be learned that will serve as tools of lifelong learning.

Learning results from the pupils' active and purposeful activity, in which they process and interpret the material to be learned on the basis of their existing structure of knowledge. Although the general principles of learning are the same for everyone, learning depends on the learner's previously constructed knowledge, motivation, and learning and work habits. Learning that occurs through interactive cooperation aids individual learning. In all its forms, learning is an active and goal-oriented process that includes independent or collective problem-solving.

### ***Compulsory education***

All children living permanently in Finland are legally obligated to complete the compulsory education syllabus. The syllabus can be completed by either participating in basic education or by acquiring a corresponding education through some other means. Therefore, there is no compulsory school attendance in Finland.

Before compulsory studies, children may participate in one-year preschool education. Today more than 96% of children go to preschools. Preschool education is organised by either social or education authorities. Children do not study different subjects during preschool year but they learn through play and strengthen their learning abilities.

The Finnish comprehensive school was created in the beginning of 1970s but it reached the entire age cohort only recently, in the 1990s, when also severely mentally handicapped children were included. In terms of the curriculum, basic education forms an integral whole. Compulsory education starts during the year when the child turns seven years old, and ends when the basic education syllabus is completed or when ten years have elapsed from the start of compulsory education. The guardian of a child of compulsory education age is responsible for ensuring that the pupil's compulsory education is completed. Almost all children (99.7%) complete the basic education syllabus. The drop-out percentage is very small, less than 0.5%. Basic education gives everyone who completes it the same right to further education. Extra, voluntary tenth year is offered for those who need support to be able to go on with their studies on the secondary education.

Basic education and teaching aids are provided to children free of charge in schools near by the children home. In addition, students receive a free meal at school every day. As a rule, if the distance to the school is over five kilometres, the education provider will pay for and arrange the transportation. Local authorities can also provide voluntary morning and afternoon activities for pupils in basic education.

Basic education is provided by local authorities and they have lots of autonomy in organising education. Educational administration is flexible and supportive. Instead of control, the Finnish system emphasizes support and development.

The network of educational establishments covers the whole country. For the 5.2 million inhabitants in Finland, there are 4300 comprehensive schools, almost 500 upper secondary schools. The average age cohort at basic education level is today approximately 64 000 children.

Local authorities assign pupils a place in a local school, but pupils are free to enrol in some other school if it has places available. The smallest schools have less than ten students, while the largest have over 900. In addition to public schools, there are also some private schools.

Usually, children are taught by a class teacher for the first six years and by specialized subject teachers for the next three years. All students study the same core subjects with similar syllabus and the same cross-curricular themes. The national Core Curriculum gives basic guidelines and main elements of subject syllabus and cross-curricular themes but local authorities and schools can modify them and emphasize those areas they see important. About 20% of teaching hours is reserved for elective studies that children and their parents may choose. Every school decides what elective studies are included in the school curriculum.

Students are not streamed in any way, and they study in heterogeneous groups. Students' socio-economic background does not affect the selection of schools because basic education is the same for everyone and between-school differences are very small. The results of PISA study showed that the influence of family background is less marked in Finland than the OECD average. In the PISA 2000 and 2003 studies, Finnish students have reached very high learning results in reading literacy, in mathematics, science and in problem solving. In Finland, the gap between high and low performers was relatively narrow, and the variation between schools was the second smallest among OECD countries. The Finnish comprehensive school seems to be successful in reaching both high quality and equality at the same time. And Finland does this with rather low costs. The level of expenditure is below OECD average.

Education at secondary and higher level is national by nature, so it is possible to apply to study in any part of the country. General and vocational upper secondary schools, polytechnics, universities, and various forms of adult education cover all parts of the country.

### 3. Curriculum

#### *Short History and Main Steps of Curriculum Development*

Thirty years ago Finland moved from the parallel, selective education system to the comprehensive, totally non selective system in basic education. During thirty years Finland has shifted from centralised to decentralised system and then a little bit back again towards more central guidance and support.

In 1994 the renewed National Core Curriculum gave only very broad national guidelines. Every local authority and school was expected to draw up their own specific curriculum on the basis on it. The idea was that local needs could be better taken into consideration, and that special features of a school and its surroundings could be made use of in teaching and learning.

This curriculum was created both nationally and in the local level in new way. Working became more interactive and cooperative. Head teachers and teachers were inspired; finally they had influence on the whole education system. They also felt that their expertise was valued, appreciated and utilized in developing processes at both the national and the local level. NBE wanted to get not only local authorities and schools but also teacher trainers, researchers, publishers and people representing different areas of our society and economy to work with national authorities.

At the same time the system of inspecting schools and textbooks by the National Board of Education was abolished. It was not only to strengthen the autonomy of local authorities but also the autonomy of teachers in choosing their working methods and materials grew remarkably. The culture of trust started to take form.

Our legislation concerning education has been reformed during the years 1998-2003. There is a good political consensus in the field of basic education and this makes the long term curriculum policy possible. The national legislative and curricular norms were made more strength again, for purposes of even better equality.

The latest guidelines for the National Core Curriculum for basic education were issued in 2004. The basic goal of the latest Core Curriculum has been to create better and more solid ground to local authorities and schools responsible for organizing education in practise. This is the way to take better care of equal opportunities and at the same time of high quality education in the whole country. Finland does not have any inspection system or national tests during basic education. The culture of *trust* is important. We trust that our people do their job well and think that for this they need more *support* than control.

### ***Conception of the Curriculum***

It is important to understand that *curriculum is seen as more of a process than a product* and it has a central role in school development. The cooperative way of drawing up curriculum both at national, local and school level is typical to the Finnish system.

The Finnish conception of curriculum is *goal-oriented* and *extensive*. Goals/objectives for teaching and learning are more important than detailed contents.

### ***Curriculum as a best strategy document in school***

The National Core Curriculum covers all the areas of school life. It does not include only the objectives and main contents of teaching in different subjects but it also describes common values, the mission and structure of education, conception of learning and goals for developing learning environments, school culture and working approaches. Beside traditional subjects it defines seven cross-curricular themes, which are themes that integrate upbringing and education. The cross-curricular themes help to respond to the educational challenges of the time.

The curriculum guides the school's practical teaching and educational work. Some elements of the curriculum are central and common to everyone working in a school, and they influence all other elements. Especially of interest are basic values and tasks, school culture and learning environment, conception of learning and working approach.

When local authorities and schools are planning their own curriculum, they are expected to do it on the basis of the national core curriculum. It obliges local authorities and schools to *cooperate with social and health authorities* especially in pupil welfare matters and in home-school relationships. This cooperation is needed both in planning and in implementing curricula in all levels.

At the same time they have to take into consideration other important plans of the community – for instance the local strategy for sustainable development, for safety, for family welfare, local authorities ICT-strategy, strategy for drug prevention etc. They have to describe carefully how education is organized in the community and in every school. So teachers are supported both by national and by local guidelines. They have to think how they are going to reach important objectives in practice, how they are going to organise the school work and what methods they need to use. But they still have a lot of freedom to decide about their own work.

Also parents have the opportunity to participate in drawing up the school's curriculum and in determining educational objectives.

## **4. Implementation of instruction**

During the 1990s, the Finnish educational policy began to put more emphasis on individual opportunities and needs and on freedom of choice.

### ***Teachers***

The basis of the Finnish success story lies in good, highly qualified, motivated highly qualified and autonomous teachers. Teacher profession is very popular and valued in Finland. All Finnish teachers have academic degree; they are highly qualified and valued in their profession.

According to National Core Curriculum it is the duty of all teachers to guide pupils in learning, help her/him to learn the important learning –to –learn abilities and skills and try to prevent the possible problems dealing with the studies beforehand. They ought to guide pupils to use different learning strategies and to develop their learning skills.

### ***Learning environment***

Learning is situational, so special attention must be given to the diversity of the learning environment. The term *learning environment* refers to the entirety of the learning-related physical environment, psychological factors and social relationships. It is not only the classroom or school that is important in learning but the whole village and all the surroundings that can be used as a learning environment. In learning, new possibilities open up for understanding culture and the meanings that culture contains, and for participating in social activity.

The learning environment must support the pupil's growth and learning. It must be physically, psychologically, and socially safe, and must support the pupil's health. The objective is to increase pupils' curiosity and motivation to learn, and to promote their activeness, self-direction, and creativity by offering interesting challenges and problems. The learning environment must guide pupils in setting their own objectives and evaluating their own actions. The pupils are given the chance to participate in the creation and development of their own learning environment.

### ***Interaction between teacher and pupil***

Fundamentally, every social relationship has an ethical nature. Teacher's values can easily be seen in the way she talks to other people; to children and to colleagues.

The learning environment and school culture must also support interaction between teacher and pupil, and among the pupils. It must promote dialogue and guide the pupils in working as members of a group. The objective is an open, encouraging, unhurried, positive atmosphere, for whose maintenance the teacher and the pupils share responsibility.

### ***Learning***

Learning is seen as an individual and communal process of building knowledge and skills. Through this process, cultural involvement is created. Learning takes place as purposeful study in a variety of situations: independently, under a teacher's guidance, and in interaction with the teacher and peer group. In addition to new knowledge and skills, both learning and work habits are to be learned that will serve as tools of lifelong learning.

Learning results from the pupils' active and purposeful activity, in which they process and interpret the material to be learned on the basis of their existing structure of knowledge. Although the general principles of learning are the same for everyone, learning depends on the learner's previously constructed knowledge, motivation, and learning and work habits. Learning that occurs through interactive cooperation aids individual learning. In all its forms, learning is an active and goal-oriented process that includes independent or collective problem-solving.

### ***Working approaches***

In instruction, methods characteristic of the subject are to be used, as are versatile working approaches that help support and guide the pupil's learning. The function of the working approaches is to develop social, learning, thinking, working, and problem-solving skills, and to foster active participation. The approaches must further the development of skills with information and communication technology.

They must also provide opportunities for the creative activity, experiences, and play characteristic of the age group in question.

The pupils' various learning styles and backgrounds, as well as the developmental differences between boys and girls and among individuals generally, must receive consideration.

### ***School culture***

A school's operational culture has a significant impact on education and instruction at the school, and thus on learning. The objective is that all the school's practices be developed uniformly, so as to support attainment of the objectives established for the educational and teaching work.

The school culture embraces all the school's official and unofficial rules and operational and behavioural models, as well as the values, principles, and criteria on which the quality of the schoolwork is founded. It also encompasses extracurricular school activities such as celebrations, theme days, and various events. The school's values, educational objectives, and cross-curricular themes must assume concrete form in its culture.

Every school should seek for to develop to a community where interaction is based on respect and common values and positive atmosphere. School's culture has to give the pupils an experience of their dignity as human beings but also as the members of society.

The objective is an open, supportive and interactive school culture that supports cooperation both within the school and with the home and the rest of the society. The pupils must also enjoy the opportunity to participate in the creation and development of the school's operational culture.

Every local authority and every school must describe what this means in their everyday context.

## **5. General support for studies**

Teaching arrangements are highly inclusive by nature. The Finnish Education Act says that every student has a right to be supported in learning and in personal development. Every student has a right to get special needs education and student welfare support if needed. Good quality of basic education and support is the best way to prevent the need of special support. Finding balance between high academic achievement and student welfare is one of the basic questions. We want our schools to be academically inspiring and demanding whilst at the same time being safe, friendly and caring learning environments. For this reason the support and guidance needed by students both in learning as well as in their personal development and growth are regarded as extremely vital.

### ***Guidance and counselling***

Every student has also a right to student guidance and counselling. Schools are expected to guide students in study skills, in choosing their elective subjects and in planning their post-compulsory studies.

### ***Pupil's welfare***

Pupil welfare includes attending to the child's or young person's basic learning prerequisites and his or her physical, psychological, and social well-being. Pupil welfare consists of both communal and individual support. The objectives are to create a healthy, safe learning and school environment, protect mental health, prevent social exclusion, and advance the well-being of the school community.

Through pupil welfare, an operational culture of care, concern, and positive interaction is promoted in the school community, and an equal opportunity to learn is ensured for all. Pupil welfare helps to main-



tain the individual's and the community's ability to function in situations that threaten physical and psychological security.

Pupil welfare promotes the learning and balanced growth and development of the child or young person. The objective of pupil welfare is the prevention, recognition, amelioration, and earliest possible elimination of obstacles to learning, learning difficulties, and other problems connected with attending school.

Pupil welfare is the concern of all persons working in the school community, as well as those authorities responsible for pupil welfare. It is implemented in close cooperation with the home. The work can be coordinated and developed by a multi-professional pupil welfare team.

### ***Early support***

Early support means that differentiation in teaching, part-time special-needs education, remedial teaching and all student welfare services are used in the highest possible way from the very moment the need of special support is noticed.

Early interference means giving support already at early years of the childhood or giving the support in any stage on studies, as soon as possible the difficulties are noticed. Support is planned and carried out by multi-professional cooperation and always with parents. A real sense of community is needed.

Plan for the preschool education is made for the child if the special support is needed.

Learning plan: The pupil, parents, teacher and other specialists will together make the learning plan, when needed. The main reason is to describe how the adults together guarantee the child's possibilities to reach the curricula goals.

### ***Cooperation between home and school***

Children and young people live within the spheres of influence of school and home simultaneously. This requires these two educational communities to cooperate and interact in supporting the pupil's healthy growth and good learning in a holistic way. Interaction with the home adds to the teacher's knowledge of the pupil and helps the teacher to plan and implement the instruction. The parents or guardians carry primary responsibility for bringing up the child or young person. The school supports the home's educational task and takes responsibility for the pupil's education and instruction as a member of the school community. The school must cooperate with the parents or guardians so that they can, for their part, support their children's purposeful learning and schooling. The objective of education under this joint responsibility is to advance the child or young person's prerequisites for learning, as well as his or her feeling of security and well-being in school.

The opportunities that parents or guardians have for working with the teacher and pupils in the planning and assessment of the school's educational and instructional work promote home-school cooperation. The parents or guardians must be given information about the curriculum, the provision of instruction, pupil welfare, and opportunities to take part in home-school cooperation. This calls for the teachers to take the initiative in the cooperation; it also requires the discussion of, and provision of information about, the rights and responsibilities of the parents or guardians, the teacher, and the pupil. Mutual respect and equality among the parties must serve as the starting point for cooperation.

## **6. Special needs education**

Special education has still a role in comprehensive education. In Finnish legislation the education is divided to mainstream education and to special needs education. To be a pupil in special needs education, one has to have an administrative final act. This act means that the status of a pupil will change

and the education provider will get an extra financial resource to cover all the expenses of the support needed.

Special schools and classes as an educational choice require a careful evaluation and solid justification. Only less than 2% of children are studying in special schools for disabled children. Primarily, according to the current legislation, it is first and always clarified whether it is possible to organise the teaching and support in mainstream education. However, one shouldn't forget that in some cases organising the schooling in a separate group might still be the best support to child's development.

The realization of the inclusion is more up to the guidelines and school culture than external resources. Support from the local administration – both local and school authorities – is needed when planning and carrying out the development towards inclusive school.

## 7. Assessment

Pupil assessment in Finland goes together with the concept of learning. When the learning is seen as a process, the target of assessment should also be in the learning process: in the progress of the learners learning path. Assessment is ought to be supportive, versatile and guiding. Assessment is always based on and related to the goals.

### *Supporting and guiding pupil assessment*

The tasks of assessment during the course of studies are to guide and encourage studying and to depict how well the pupil has met the objectives established for growth and learning. It is the task of assessment to help the pupil form a realistic image of his or her learning and development, and thus to support the pupil's personality growth, too.

Assessment during the course of studies must be truthful and based on a diversity of evidence. The assessment is to address the pupil's learning and progress in the different areas of learning. The assessment takes into account its own role in the learning process. Pupil assessment forms a whole, in which ongoing feedback from the teacher plays an important part. With the help of assessment, the teacher guides the pupils in becoming aware of their thinking and action and helps them understand what they are learning. The pupil's progress, work skills, and behaviour are assessed in relation to the curriculum's objectives and descriptions of good performance.

The function of assessment is also to strengthen the learner's confidence on herself as a learner. She will learn to trust herself when she learns to observe the process of learning and begins to understand that she is able to influence these things. Self-assessment is a central part of the whole assessment family.

There are neither tests nor inspections in the Finnish education system. In order to safeguard the equality of students studying in different schools and to support the quality of teaching in all comprehensive schools, and also to enable fair and just treatment of students when school report marks are used in selecting students for studies on the secondary level, the NBE prepared uniform evaluation criteria for each compulsory subject in basic education. These criteria are included in the national Core Curriculum 2004. They give guidelines for schools and teachers in defining the skill and knowledge levels that students should master at the end of the ninth grade of the comprehensive school so as to get the mark 8 (good) on the school grading scale 4-10.

At the national level, the sample-based assessments of students' learning results in different subjects and in learning-to-learn abilities and research oriented evaluations of different phenomena of education are versatile, coherent and intensive. They give valuable information about the quality and effects of the Finnish education system. This information is used, not for comparing schools, but for development

purposes. The results tell us if there are differences between boys and girls, between different language and ethnic groups, between different areas of the country etc. They also tell, how we are doing in different subjects and in specific areas of these subjects, what kind of problems students seem to have learning these subjects and so on. The average information is enough. Schools that have been included in the sample will get their own results and information about the average results of the whole sample. They can compare their results to the national average and make conclusions about what they should do better.

### ***Evaluation of school's operation***

Local authorities are obliged to take care of the *continued evaluation and development* of the local education system and curriculum. They evaluate their own work and the effects of their work. The aim of self-evaluation is to make activities transparent to parents and other external interest groups. It also helps people working in education to form a common, integrated understanding about the main aims, working procedures and effects of their school and the whole local education system.

This self-evaluation is supported by national evaluations in student achievement (learning results), in students' health and well-being and by thematic, research-based evaluations.

## **8. Challenges**

Inclusive education requires systemic changes. Unlike what one may think, the whole Scandinavian region is also working on improving inclusive education. To fulfil our goals of equity and equality we need still to focus on individual support in learning. We believe stronger than ever before that growing up and studying in heterogeneous groups is good both for individuals and for the whole nation. The idea of inclusive pedagogy is important. Developing the good models and procedures will need enthusiastic work.

### ***Curriculum***

Curriculum development is an important tool for to reach the future needs of the school. We will have to connect the needs of everyday school life to the future challenges of the national and international education policy.

The role of national guidance and development work and the importance of the national Core Curriculum become more evident in this situation. It is also important to follow and evaluate the results of the curriculum reform and the effects of different development programmes. This can be done by analyzing local authorities and school curricula, by collecting information about curriculum implementation processes in local authorities and schools, and finally by evaluating learning results and the state of well-being of students. All these elements are included in the working programme of the Finnish National Board of Education. This information is vital when NBE is figuring out the main challenges of the learning for sustainable future.

### ***Comprehensive school***

The big issue in basic education has been to abolish the division of comprehensive school into primary and secondary years and to emphasize the educational *unity* and *coherence* of the nine-year comprehensive school and also the coherence of the preschool education and the basic education, the continuum between these two.

### ***Teachers***

Teaching heterogeneous class is task of every teacher. Still supporting students individually is a big challenge for many teachers. There is a lot to do in this area. National, regional and local guide and service system needs still be developed to guarantee the support teachers need. Especially, when there are pupils who need special support.

The school life doesn't develop unless new changes will happen in the teachers' professional and pedagogical thinking. It is very important to educate new teachers into the inclusive thinking and spread the good news of inclusive education among the teachers of today through the nation.

Today teachers are still working by themselves in the classrooms, but they are affected by the school culture. To manage with the teaching it is not necessary to cooperate with others. Because everyone is thou responsible for developing the school, we should get rid of the teachers' old-fashioned autonomous thinking. This calls for strong skills in cooperation and pedagogical leadership.

### ***Sense of community***

In the future it will be more and more important to have the essential skills for getting along with other people; working together, coping over conflicts and approve differences. Basic education should educate our sense of community. It means more than succeeding in cooperation. It means mutual cohesion, trust, joint responsibility and positive dependence. It arises from common values, provisions, structures, operation modes and common contents of the work.

### ***Participation***

Active participation of students in planning and developing, not only their own studies, but the whole learning environment and good cooperation among students helps students to grow responsible people who are motivated to learn through their entire life.

### ***Exclusion***

One of the big challenges at the moment is to focus on the years following right after basic education and find better ways to encourage all students to go on with their studies in upper secondary education. Even though the drop-out percentage is very small during basic education, after basic education we lose some 5-6% of students. The number is not so high internationally but for a small nation it is important to be sure that all young people get at least basic and upper secondary education.

### ***Changes in society***

Changes in society have an effect on education in many ways. While people are moving from the countryside to towns and nationally the number of children is falling off, it will be big economical and pedagogical question to maintain the sufficient net of schools and quality of education and welfare services in the future.

Nowadays schools must carry a larger responsibility of pupil's well-balanced development, welfare and health. The work at school is getting more demanding every day. The National Core Curriculum for basic education emphasizes the wide task of schools. We are developing the tools to fulfil the challenge.