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# Hungry to learn: A critical analysis of New Zealand’s debate and inconsistent approach to school meals, with lessons from Finland’s broadly supported universal programme.

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Hungry to learn: A critical analysis of New Zealand’s debate and inconsistent approach to school meals, with lessons from Finland’s broadly supported universal programme.
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The impact of poverty and hunger on children's education and life outcomes is a pervasive problem in Aotearoa New Zealand, but effective action to ensure all children are well fed at school is obstructed by debate about who is responsible. I investigate this issue with a critical lens and seek to identify conditions for consensus and collaboration to address it. To do this, I explore the potential of school meals to alleviate the impact of inequalities, food insecurity and hunger on education globally. I also map the tension between ideological arguments about individual or collective responsibility that inform different countries’ approaches to food in schools. Finland provides an example of a universal free school meals programme long upheld by social and political consensus about its value for individuals and the country, and the collective role of government and society to provide it. To consider Finnish lessons for New Zealand, I broadly compare the two countries’ respective attitudes and approaches within their sociohistorical contexts, highlighting unintentional happenings and intentional acts that contributed to their development. Finally, I identify common ground and points of divergence in a critical thematic analysis of competing arguments and ideologies embodied in two New Zealand parliamentary debates that ultimately saw proposals to legislate government responsibility for targeted food in schools being narrowly defeated. I conclude it is both necessary and possible to bridge the deep-seated divide and foster consensus in Aotearoa New Zealand. Evidence, common perspectives, lessons from Finland and our own unique opportunities can advance cooperation so all children on these islands can be nourished and supported in their learning and development.

Keywords: consensus, debate, education, Finland, New Zealand, responsibility, school meals

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# 1 Chapter 1: Introduction and purpose

The impact of poverty and hunger on children's education and life opportunities confronts governments the world over. Beyond the individual suffering, it is a problem for society because "childhood and adolescence are crucial periods for acquiring knowledge, behaviours and skills to cope and live within our modern communities" (European Commission, 2007, cited in Løes & Nölting, 2011, p. 92; Quigley & Watts, 2005, p. 7). Global food production poses environmental and ethical challenges (JAMK University of Applied Sciences, n.d.), and the COVID-19 pandemic has forced school closures and job losses, heightening existing inequalities and further threatening millions of children's access to sufficient and healthy food (FAO et al., 2020).

International comparisons of social and education systems seek to learn how countries might meet these challenges, including through school meal programmes (Bray, 2014a, p. 63; OECD, 2018). How these programmes are legislated, funded, and implemented varies, according to countries' needs and the ideologies and discourses that have developed in their unique contexts. The language and strategies decision-makers use when talking about social issues such as child poverty and school meals can directly determine policy possibilities; embed or challenge dominant ideologies; influence social attitudes, norms and voting behaviours; and tangibly improve or worsen people's lives and social disparities.

In New Zealand, a child's family background strongly influences their education and life outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2012), yet a long-running political and social debate about government versus individual responsibility for children's meals at school obstructs collective and sustained action on the causes and effects of hunger and scarcity on these outcomes. Conversely, Finnish society and parliamentary parties broadly agree on the government-funded universal lunch programme that has ensured for over 70 years that every Finnish child can eat every school day. This is often cited as a reason for the comparatively weak impact of a Finnish child's family background on their education (OECD, 2020, pp. 3–4; Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 6). This research sets out to learn from Finland and join the voices of organisations such as the Child Poverty Action Group, Eat Right Be Bright, Feed the Need, and others calling for consensus-driven action in New Zealand towards the United Nation's Zero Hunger Sustainable Development Goal (United Nations, n.d.). As the 'team of five million' came together across

the political and social spectrum to eliminate COVID-19 in our communities, so we must with child hunger (Child Poverty Action Group, 2020, p. 3).

## 1.1 Debate obstructs action to alleviate child poverty and hunger in New Zealand

In 2014 international surveys hailed New Zealand as the best country for raising children and for children's health (HSBC, 2014) but that same year nearly one in four New Zealand children and their families suffered from material deprivation, food insecurity and other lacks enforced by poverty (Simpson et al., 2014, p. 12). The aspirational reputation projected to the world is not realised in the lives of many children here, and the influence of family background on social and education outcomes is a persistent challenge (Biddulph et al., 2003; OECD, 2018). Certain population groups are overrepresented in the statistics, with 35 percent of Māori children and 28 percent of Pacific children from under-resourced families, compared with 16 percent of Pākehā (of European descent). In these situations, children may have limited access to fresh fruit, vegetables and sufficient healthy food, as well as other higher rates of preventable diseases and (Simpson et al., 2014, pp. 12, 15–16). Although these problems are widely documented and popular media has exposed stark differences between lunches brought by children across the socio-economic spectrum to school, debate about what to do (and who should do it) continues to divide decision makers and the public (Barback, 2012; Campbell Live, 2012; Fleming, 2017a).

### 1.1.1 A mixed approach and limited collective/government responsibility for school meals under National-led governments, 2008-2017

An inability to find agreement and take collaborative action to alleviate children's hunger at school resulted in a fragmented combination of public, private and charity provision of milk and food in school under the previous National-led Government 2008-2017. Tens of thousands of children received some form of food assistance in school through these avenues but access was uneven, the variety and quality of food was limited, and provision was unable to meet the widespread need (DPMC, 2018, p. 18; Fleming, 2017; O'Callaghan & Ferrick, 2012; Spray, 2021). In 2012 the issue was highlighted in the public sphere when the prime-time current affairs show *Campbell Live* broadcast images of children's full and varied lunchboxes in a decile 10 classroom, and juxtaposed them with mostly bare desks, some chips and cookies, and

a few sandwiches and pieces of fruit in a decile 1 classroom (Campbell Live, 2012). In New Zealand funding schools is currently determined by decile calculation; a lower decile reflects the lower socioeconomic situation of the school's community and allocates it more funding than schools in wealthier areas (Ministry of Education, 2021d). The reality of many children's lives in New Zealand was exposed to others more comfortable and became the focus of public conversation.

Responding to this situation, two opposition Members of Parliament Hone Harawira (leader of the indigenous and socialist Mana Party) and David Shearer (leader of the centre-left Labour Party) separately proposed to amend the *Education Act 1989* to include government responsibility for food in low-decile schools. Both proposals were debated, voted on, narrowly defeated, and withdrawn from consideration on 18 March 2015 (Education (Breakfast and Lunch Programmes in Schools) Amendment Bill — First Reading, 2014; *Education (Food in Schools) Amendment Bill — First Reading - New Zealand Parliament*, 2015).

Commonly referred to as the 'Feed the Kids' Bill, the *Education (Breakfast and Lunch Programmes in Schools) Amendment Bill* was a political and legal mechanism to publicly fund breakfast and lunch programmes in all decile 1 and 2 schools, and other designated schools. Harawira introduced the Bill in November 2012 at the height of public discussion about the issue; two months after the *Campbell Live* expose (Harawira, 2012). Over two sessions, members on both sides of the House argued whether the Government should take more responsibility for feeding children in school Disagreement split the 120 politicians and concluding its first reading on March 18 2015, the proposal to 'feed the kids' lost in a vote of 61-59. Later that evening, Shearer introduced the *Education (Food in Schools) Amendment Bill*. This also proposed to make food in schools available through the law, but for all decile 1 to 3 primary and intermediate schools. Parliament was again divided on the extent of need for school meals and who should be responsible for them. The tied vote of 60-60 halted the progression of this Bill too; both were defeated early and very narrowly by. This meant they were not put forward for public consultation, nor deliberated and refined through a cross-party Select Committee process. Although progress was halted and the status quo maintained, the same arguments spilled out of the Chamber into news editorials and social media commentaries.

### 1.1.2 Ka Ora, Ka Ako and more collective/government responsibility for school meals under Labour-led governments, 2017 – present

The sixth Labour Government was sworn in October 2017, and one year later, one in five children in New Zealand still lived with severe to moderate food and income poverty (Ministry of Health, 2019a; Statistics New Zealand, 2019). Labour had campaigned on these issues, and the new Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern pledged from her own office responsibility to lift children out of poverty. In December 2018, Parliament passed the *Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018* and the *Children's Amendment Act 2020* "…to encourage a Government focus on child poverty reduction specifically, and child wellbeing more generally" (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), 2020). The New Zealand Government is now required specifically to measure child poverty, set reduction targets regularly, and report annually on progress.

Echoing the Prime Minister's sentiments (Ardern, 2019), the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy aspires for "New Zealand [to be] the best place in the world for children and young people" (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), 2019). The strategy aims to "help families with the costs of essentials" so "children and young people have what they need" and to "reduce food insecurity by providing access to a nutritious lunch in school every day" (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), 2019; Ministry of Education, 2021e). A year after its launched in February 2020 and rapid expansion as part of the COVID-19 response, the Ka Ora Ka Ako | Healthy School lunches programme provided a daily free and healthy meal to 88,000 children in schools and kura, selected for their communities' high levels of disadvantage as identified by an Equity Index instead of decile. Its goal is to reach more than 215,000 learners across the country by the end of 2021 and extend the offer to secondary students. Individuals are not targeted for their eligibility; all learners in participating schools will receive a daily meal. The trial will assess challenges and successes of different provision models in a variety of settings, and the impact on children's hunger and engagement at school will be evaluated so the programme can be refined, improved, and possibly expanded (Ministry of Education, 2021e).

Despite enjoying a largely positive response from participating schools, learners and families, Ka Ora, Ka Ako has revitalised debate about whether the State should provide a free lunch to

hungry children at school. Opposition MPs have described it as a "nanny state policy" that would "take away the autonomy of parents to provide lunch for their children" (The New Zealand National Party, 2019). Similar sentiments are also shared and debated more widely on social media (see @BexGraham, 2021; @dbseymour, 2021; @dreadwomyn, 2021). Without broad social and political support or protection in legislation, the potential for government-funded school meals to alleviate children's hunger and reduce barriers to education is vulnerable to the election of another government formed by these parties.

## 1.2 Consensus protects Kouluruokailu, the universal free school meals programme in Finland

### 1.2.1 Broad consensus about education and collective/government responsibility for school meals in Finland

In Finland, however, a consensus of support protects Kouluruokailu, the 72-year-old universal free school meals programme. Kouluruokailu and the Finnish education system seek to improve equity and excellence and reduce the impact of family background on children's education outcomes (OECD, 2016, 2018; Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 3; Schleicher, 2009, p. 253). Finnish leaders have consistently worked to maintain a general agreement about a long-term vision for the purpose of education in Finnish society, centring equality of access to education (Chung, 2019, p. 119; Hannele Niemi, 2016, p. 23; Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 3; Sahlberg, 2007, p. 153, 2018b; Scott, 2014, p. 121). It is argued that "Finland's political system lends itself to consensus", and that this "in turn influences the continuity and consistency in Finland's education system" (Chislett, 1996, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 119; Sahlberg, 2018b), though there have been challenges to this (Hannele Niemi, 2016, p. 23; Scott, 2014, p. 103). The long-standing aim of Finnish education is "to provide all citizens with equal opportunities", and that "all people must have equal access to high-quality education and training" (OPH - Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017, p. 6). This is embodied by free public education for all students at all levels from pre-primary through to tertiary. Providing a warm and nutritious meal to every student every school day is considered a fundamental element of free high-quality education in Finland, and essential for equal access to education for all (Ahonen, 2014, pp. 78–79; OPH - Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017, p. 6; Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 3). Over

the decades, Finland's school meals have grown increasingly varied and nutritious. Although discussions about nutrition, student choice and cost are present in Finland, universal free school meals are generally supported across society and politics for its individual and collective benefits. Successive Finnish governments have committed to the programme since 1948, and the official position is that school meals "will continue to play an important role in shaping the future" (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 3).

### 1.2.2 International interest in Finnish education and universal free school meals

While other countries' education systems have favoured neoliberal features such as competition, privatisation and accountability as levers to lift academic achievement, moves towards similar reform in Finland were cut short by the phenomenon of its somewhat unexpectedly high ranking in the OECD's first Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test in 2000 (Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 725). These showed that excellence and equality are not mutually exclusive, and that it is possible to reduce the influence of a child's family background on their education outcomes (OECD, 2018, 2020; Sahlberg, 2012, p. 28). Finland's public comprehensive school model, free universal lunches and other government policies based on "equity, flexibility, creativity, teacher professionalism and trust" are offered as explanations for the country's education successes (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 147; Schleicher, 2009, p. 253). This 'miracle' of Finland's government-funded education system is studied globally, with Finnish organisations and government agencies actively supporting the export of their education policies (see Darling-Hammond, 2010, Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012, & Ravitch, 2013, cited in Sahlberg, 2015, pp. 22, 24; Sahlberg, 2018a). For example, Finnish government agencies publish case studies with the United Nations World Food Programme promoting free education and school lunches as "among the key factors in strengthening economic growth and transforming Finland into a knowledge-based society" (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 3). Thousands of educators and policy makers have visited Finland on 'edu-tourism' trips (Chung, 2019; Sahlberg, 2015), and can attend courses about the Finnish school lunch model and how to "build a healthy and sustainable school meal system promoting children´s health" in their own countries (JAMK University of Applied Sciences, n.d.). This international interest is the cause of some bemusement among Finns since "10 or 15 years ago everyone went to New Zealand to study the school system …. planes full of teachers and other school people have flown from Finland to study the New Zealand school system" (Chung, 2019, p. 179).

Now roles are reversed, and Finland is often referenced in discussions about education and social policy in New Zealand, (Frame, 2000, p. 1; Nikula, 2018; Sahlberg, 2018a). Professor Martin Thrupp is collaborating with Finnish and Swedish educationalists on the Hollowing Out of Public Education Systems? (HOPES) research project (HOPES, n.d.), but despite the interest, there is little comparative education research from New Zealand that reflects on and aims to learn from Finland. Where studies have compared Finland and New Zealand, they have usually looked at several other countries alongside, such as meta-analyses of *PISA* results (see Aydin et al., 2011; Bristow & Patrick, 2014). In response to this gap and contribute to research about Finnish education from a New Zealand perspective I moved to Oulu in 2016 to study and experience the Finnish attitude and approach to school meals, equity and education.

### 1.3 My multiple and intersecting positions as a researcher

Researchers must clearly position themselves in critical and comparative education research. My own interest in Finland and concern with hungry children at school comes from professional and personal investment in the intersecting roles I occupy. My ability to study and live there investigate the Finnish approach to equity in education was made possible only by Finland's commitment to free education for all. My positioning is reflected in the critical approach that advocates for transformative action for social justice, and guides my decisions and value judgements throughout the research process; this includes the questions I ask, the literature and data I select and review, the thematic codes I ascribe, and my interpretation and presentation of findings. A critical qualitative approach is interpretive and value-laden, and true objectivity is not possible nor necessarily desirable as the purpose of critical research is to support transformative and positive change for subjugated and exploited groups of society (Fairbrother, 2014, p. 72; Yang, 2014, p. 292). To avoid "intellectual and methodological flabbiness" (Sweeting, 2014, p. 178), I strive to be transparent about my positioning and reflect on my "own interpretive tendencies and social reasons for them", and how this may shape my research (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 12; Fairbrother, 2014, p. 77; Fairclough, 1992a, p. 35, cited in Locke, 2004, p. 12). My different roles bring unique insights, approaches and varied but coherent aims (Bray, 2014a, pp. 25, 38). All of them lend me interest in the importance of addressing child hunger and removing barriers to education in New Zealand, the potential of government-funded school meals to do this, and the lessons Finland could offer.

While completing my studies at the University of Oulu in Finland I also currently work as a policy analyst with the New Zealand Ministry of Education. This has developed my knowledge of our education system at national and more strategic level, and my understanding of the possibilities and constraints of policy making in this environment. There are inherent risks if policy is borrowed uncritically (Noah, 1984, pp. 158–159, 163, 553–554; Sweeting, 2014, p. 179), but looking to other countries' education systems' and shared challenges and opportunities can help to inform policy objectives and practices in New Zealand. Policy makers also compare across time to learn from previous governments' successes as well as "obstacles to avoid and the dangers of over-ambition" (Bray, 2014a, p. 25), noting the dangers of looking back on the past as a golden age ideal. An understanding of context is essential, because understanding the material and socio-historical conditions of a problem informs a more effective response to it (Horkheimer, 1972, p. 246, cited in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005). A key aim from the inception of this research has been to contribute to the public discussion and body of research to support policy makers, but my current occupation requires I keep a distance from the work of my colleagues who plan and implement Ka Ora, Ka Ako to mitigate potential conflict of interest, perceived or real. I also ensure all information used in this thesis about the programme and other education issues comes from publicly available sources. Additionally, it is important to note that as a public servant I work for the government of the day, so I must be clear about my positioning and ground the research in the theoretical framework (see Chapter 2). Some political parties in New Zealand support more collective/government responsibility for food in schools and align with the findings and arguments of this research, and other parties' views and actions diverge. I do not seek to wave a party flag but rather hope to contribute to broader understanding and agreement on effectively tackling child hunger in New Zealand, an issue that I argue should not, nor have to, be politicised.

Previous professional roles have also informed my interests and aims. As a secondary school history teacher I witnessed and dealt with the impact of hunger and scarcity on a young person's engagement, learning, and behaviour at school. Many schools organise and fund breakfast or other food in school programmes for their learners with a mix of government, community, corporate and/or charity support, and like other teachers I kept a snack drawer in my office. In 2014 I ran for Parliament as the education spokesperson for the Internet MANA Party. Hone Harawira was the leader of the alliance between the two parties, and "Feed the Kids" was a joint headline policy. My motivation was not from a strong Party attachment, but more the

opportunity of two outwardly dissimilar groups making a decision to find consensus and work together on the shared goal of eradicating child hunger. My involvement with rights-based and social justice organisations, particularly Amnesty International and the Child Poverty Action Group, also impel me to research this issue.

Being Pākehā, a New Zealander of European settler descent, I live in Aotearoa New Zealand because Te Tiriti o Waitangi | The Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840. Te Tiriti and the colonisation of Aotearoa New Zealand by my European forebears have allowed my life here, and it is essential to understand this "was a historic process predicated on assumptions of racial religious, cultural and technological superiority" (Walker, 2004, p. 9). In less than a century, the colonial governments' acquisition and confiscation of Māori land, suppression of resistance, exclusion from political representation and power, and policies of assimilation resulted in "impoverishment of Māori…and a structural relationship of Pākehā dominance and Māori subjugation" (Walker, 2004, p. 10). Māori have persisted in their struggle for justice, and reconciliation processes like the Waitangi Tribunal attempt to address claims. However, significant and enduring inequities exist between Māori and non-Māori in health and education outcomes. As a Pākehā / Tauiwi (non-Māori) researcher and citizen of this country, I have a responsibility to recognise and give effect to the historical legacy of my role as a partner in Te Tiriti o Waitangi. "A Te Tiriti perspective is about contributing to putting things right" (Came, 2013, p. 69) and requires transparency, reflexivity and vigilance about "issues of privilege, power, authority and control" (Came, 2013, p. 71). The fundamental principle of tino rangatiratanga | Māori sovereignty that was never ceded in *Te Tiriti* is central and complex in the debate about food in schools as a Treaty issue, and must be dealt with more meaningfully and thoroughly than this research is able to due to limitations of scope and size.

### 1.4 Purpose, questions and structure of the research

My intersecting roles and theoretical framework guide my overall purpose to support consensus-building and collaboration to alleviate the immediate and long-term effects of child poverty and hunger through government-funded universal school meals in New Zealand. This deliberately practical aim is grounded in my experiences, the evidence reviewed in the literature, and a critical approach interested in how dominant ideologies, discourses and power relations interact and reproduce so we can effectively challenge the divisive debate (Cannella

& Lincoln, 2015, p. 259, cited in Lawless & Chen, 2019, p. 97). With a comparative lens I look to Finland's broadly shared attitude and universal approach to school lunches; not to lift and shift the Finnish model, but to consider its lessons for the unique New Zealand context. Critical and comparative studies must explore context and the influence of social, economic and political events and trends over time, especially if they aim to learn from one country to inform policy in another (Sweeting, 2014, p. 179).

Three questions guide the research towards this purpose:

1. What are points of common ground and divergence in New Zealand's debate about responsibility for school meals?
2. How has New Zealand's debate and inconsistent approach to school meals developed compared with the broadly supported and sucessful model in Finland?
3. What can we in New Zealand learn from Finland considering the different contexts?

To answer these questions, I:

– outline the critical and comparative framework that grounds the research purpose and perspectives (Chapter 2)
– review evidence about inequalities, food insecurity, education and the potential benefits of school meals to establish the premise of the thesis (Chapter 3)
– map the arguments of the ideological debate about responsibility for food in schools (Chapter 4)
– present Finland's universal approach to free school meals, the consensus that supports it, and the development of these through history (Chapters 5 and 6)
– compare this with New Zealand's inconsistent approach to school meals, the debate that threatens it, and the development of these through history (Chapters 7 and 8)
– critically analyse competing themes and ideologies in two parliamentary debates that narrowly defeated proposals for government-funded school meals, to identify common ground to reinforce and divergent views to bridge (Chapter 9)
– explain and discuss the findings to consider how we could learn from history and Finland to build consensus and collaborate to ensure no child goes hungry at school in New Zealand (Chapter 10).

# 2 Chapter 2: A critical and comparative framework

I embrace the flexibility and multidisciplinary possibilities of qualitative inquiry, drawing on literature and understandings from history, sociology, education, public policy, linguistics and public health. There are valuable insights to be gained from this holistic approach (Fairbrother, 2014, p. 75) as it invites an analysis of a problem from a range of positions (Levin & Young, 1997, p. 8). There is no single standard set of measures to assess the variety of qualitative inquiry, so I follow communications professor Sarah Tracy's 'Big Tent' guidelines for good qualitative research that can be universally agreed upon and applied without dampening the diversity: (a) a worthy topic, (b) rich rigour, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence (2010, pp. 139–140). These guidelines allow this research to take a critical and a comparative lens to the investigation of New Zealand's debate and inconsistent approach two school meals.

## 2.1 A critical perspective on the social justice issue of school meals

> *"The different social, demographic or economic circumstances in which children live, learn and develop drive inequities in health outcomes that are unjust, unnecessary and preventable."* (Duncanson et al., 2018, p. 13)

### 2.1.1 The heritage and influence of critical theory

The theories that ground research provide perspectives through which we view and interpret ourselves, society and the wider world. Beyond research and into daily reality, these ways of seeing influence our behaviour, actions and reactions (Tyson, 2006, pp. 2–3). Values and understandings of critical theories guide this research process from inception to conclusion. Critical researchers must be transparent and reflexive as they seek to understand the material and socio-historical conditions of an injustice, and providing a descriptive and normative foundation to "create a world which satisfies the needs and powers of human beings" (Duffy & Scott, 1998, pp. 184–185; Horkheimer, 1972, p. 246, cited in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005). This is praxis, or "the pure rational act of self-reflection coupled with action" (Willis, 1993, p. 137 cited in Duffy & Scott, 1998, pp. 184–185). Critical theorist Jürgen Habermas, for example, was motivated by his concerns about fascism and "chose to be 'the

person who is engaged in the public political struggles for a more just social form of life'" (Matuštík, 2001, p. xix, cited in T. Fleming, 2012, p. 3). Children going hungry and insufficient nutritious food in these abundant islands of New Zealand is "unjust, unnecessary and preventable" (Duncanson et al., 2018, p. 13), and decisions and actions, and indecision and inaction, have led to the current situation. A core premise of this critical perspective is that we have created these systems that shape our lives, and as self-creating producers of our own history we can change and improve them.

The development of Critical Theory is attributed to a group of 'radical' scholars including Max Horkheimer at Goethe University in Frankfurt. They had recently lived the experiences of World War I and faced the effects of war reparations and fermenting fascism in 1920s Germany. A decade after its founding, the Institute moved to New York away from the threat of the rising Nazi Party. The Critical Theory developed by the Frankfurt School evolved and spread with following generations and scholars such as Habermas in the 1970s, laying the groundwork for new critical theories such as feminism and post-colonialism, focussed on transforming their own oppressive scenarios (Hendricks-Thomas & Patterson, 1995, p. 596 cited in Duffy & Scott, 1998, p. 188; van Dijk, 1993, p. 251).

Critical theories share a variety of understandings and purposes (Tyson, 2006, pp. 5, 281). They are not isolated nor exclusive from one another, and it is possible to draw on more than one concurrently "in order to analyse the myriad forms and processes of oppression and the resistance to oppression" (ibid., p. 454) and enrich possible insights. They are varied and flexible, but Horkheimer defines three criteria for a critical theory: it must be explanatory, normative and practical (1993, p. 21, cited in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005). The following assumptions and features demonstrate the explanatory, normative and practical nature of critical theories and how this relates to the research.

### 2.1.2 Power and ideology are central in critical research

A critical perspective understands power as not only derived from the top but circulating through society in ideologies and discourses (Foucault, 1980, cited in Jørgensen and Phillips,

2002, pp. 13-15; Tyson, 2006, p. 284). A key vehicle to reinforce power is the education system, which for this reason cannot be neutral; the processes and practices of education are political, influencing what is learned and how, promoting certain ideas, values and norms while suppressing others. Responsibility for public education traditionally falls to governments, and schooling is used to reinforce preferred ideological understandings and attitudes, support and limit the development of individuals, and form and reform the nature of societies (Desjardins, 2015, pp. 134–136; Giroux, 2016, p. 58; Ray, 2009, p. 17). A critical perspective in education recognizes inequality is built into the system and can be dismantled (E. Rata, 2009, p. 111), and "that there is no individual emancipation without societal emancipation" (Biesta, 2004, p. 55).

Ideologies are frameworks of belief that seek to make sense of the social and political around us. They direct what we see and conversely what we do not see, what we value, and how we understand and perceive particular issues and society more broadly. Common ideological perspectives and attitudes are often shared by members of political or social groups, such as parliamentary parties (van Dijk, 1993, p. 258; Wodak, 2015, p. 4). Ideologies are sometimes understood as fairly coherent (Donald & Hall, 1986, pp. ix-x, cited in Levin & Young, 1997, pp. 9–10), but others argue they are riddled with contradictions, dilemmas and internal incoherence (Apple, 1990, p. 15, cited in Levin & Young, 1997, pp. 10–11). Individuals and groups can be influenced by competing ideologies, and do not always hold a clear and consistent position (Fairclough 1992b, cited in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 76). This is evident in the political and social debate about school meals in New Zealand.

Ideologies can reproduce and reinforce power relationships between groups of people in society. For example, a classist perspective equates superiority with socio-economic status. In combination with the individualist view that we make our own decisions and paths independent of structural factors, individuals and groups of people with fewer resources can be painted as "…naturally shiftless, lazy and irresponsible", and somehow to blame for their position (Tyson, 2006, pp. 59, 60). This belief that shames families and ultimately punishes children for the deprivation in their home lives is an insidious element of the social and political debate in New Zealand, and is a barrier to cooperation on problem of inequalities and potential of school meals. This othering and minoritisation of certain groups in society through discourse is a key strategy

to maintain dominance (Shields, Bishow & Mazawi, 2005, cited in Bishop et al., 2010, pp. 9–10; Cannella & Lincoln, 2015, p. 259 cited in Lawless & Chen, 2019, p. 97).

These views and underlying ideologies can drive national strategies and policy development and their implemention, and can shift depending on the government of the day. This is the key difference between New Zealand and Finland; the approach to school meals and some fundamental education issues second can change significantly with new governments in New Zealand, but are viewed and acted upon fairly consistently in Finland by consecutive governments. Critics of a policy may deride it as being ideologically motivated but may not acknowledge their own ideological position (Levin & Young, 1997, p. 11). A successful ideology is one that becomes so dominant that it remains unexamined and taken for granted, and not always articulated in policy-making (Manzer, 1994, p 50, cited in Levin & Young, 1997, pp. 13–14).

When embraced by people as natural or 'common sense' ways of seeing the world, ideologies can mask their own failures and prop up powerful interests, and the oppressed can participate in their own domination (Gramsci, 1991, cited in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 76; Lawless & Chen, 2019, p. 103; Tyson, 2006, pp. 53, 58). For example, some of those who could benefit from school meals in New Zealand argue against them, citing welfare-dependency and other strategies used to resist collective action and ultimately reinforce the inequalities they are challenged by themselves (Latif, 2021). However, hegemony is not unwavering or without resistance as it is a process of negotiation as well as dominance, and so "consensus is always a matter of degree only" (Fairclough 1992b, p. 93, cited in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 76).

### 2.1.3 Language and discourse reproduce ideologies and power relationships

Language is the primary domain of ideologies that are created and disseminated through discourses. The terms 'discourse' and 'ideology' may be used interchangeably, as both frame a way of seeing and understanding ourselves and the world. Discourse as a social language is "both constitutive and constituted" (Fairclough 1995a, p. 135 cited in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 66–67) and can reinforce and reproduce - or challenge and transform - dominant narratives about these issues and more broadly human nature, society and power (Biesta, 2004,

p. 54; Fairclough 1992b, cited in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 76; Schank & Abelson, 1995, cited in Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 716; Tyson, 2006, p. 258; Wodak, 2015, p. 4). Language can legitimize certain ideological perspectives and power structures as 'natural' and 'common sense' to assimilate them into the social and political psyche (Grace, 1990, p. 32; van Dijk, 1993, pp. 263–264). This can be done in everyday language and from platforms where potential for controlling social and media discourse to maintain dominance is greater (Fairclough, 1985, cited in van Dijk, 1993, p. 254; van Dijk, 1993, pp. 254–258; Wodak, 2015, p. 4). For example, official discourses from government politicians and documents aim to establish a 'legitimate' point of view that all must recognize (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 136, cited in Simola, 1998, p. 750). Politicians have access to a unique platform that grants them more influence on the public mind, so their speeches are an obvious target for critical analysis (van Dijk, 1993, p. 280). Decision makers' discourse also tangibly influences policy and action; language is not powerful by itself, but "through the use that powerful people make of it" (Wodak, 2015, p. 4). The way New Zealand politicians talk about social and education issues such as responsibility for school meals both influences and is influenced by the debate among the public they serve.

Critical theories support agency and transformation for social justice, so often investigate language and its role reinforcing ideologies and power relations that inform the way we think and act (Fairclough, 1995, 2003, cited in O'Connor & Holland, 2013, p. 141; Tyson, 2006, p. 249). Through this we can understand how inequalities and oppression have been constructed as historical 'givens' and prepare ourselves to challenge them (Cannella & Lincoln, 2015, p. 244, cited in Lawless & Chen, 2019, p. 96). It is possible to shift discourse "when discursive elements are articulated in new ways (Fairclough 1992b, p. 23, cited in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 76), and a challenge of this research is to consider how we in New Zealand can develop "new ways of communicating that are mindful of positions of power, status-based hierarchies, and marginalisation" (Lawless & Chen, 2019, p. 103). The comparative view to Finland shows it is possible that different groups can form agreement on issues that divide similar groups in New Zealand.

A critical view believes it is desirable and possible to find agreement and understanding about important issues in society. Horkheimer proposed that in a rational society, "all conditions of social life that are controllable by human beings depend on real consensus" (1972, pp. 249-250, cited in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005). Habermas (1981) was also interested in

the way language and discourse shapes our social realities, and obstacles that impede clear communication and the ultimate goal of shared understanding (see Ray, 1992a, p. 99, cited in Duffy & Scott, 1998, p. 185). He proposed it is not just desirable but possible to reach rational consensus through truthful dialogue in 'ideal speech' situations characterised by the conditions of truth, rightness and sincerity (Corradetti, n.d.), but that this can be challenged by people's different backgrounds and experiences. Habermas' framework aimed to illuminate obstacles to problem-solving and help empower and transform (Wilson-Thomas, 1995, Thomas, 1995, cited in Duffy & Scott, 1998, p. 185). This is fundamental to the purpose of this research, which is to contribute to developing understanding and consensus on the imperative to collectively tackle child hunger and its impact on education.

#### 2.1.4 The importance of historical context and material conditions

Discourse, ideologies, power relationships and policies are strongly influenced by the socio-historical context in which they develop and operate. A critical lens views language as dynamic and saturated with its cultures' ideologies that generate and bind our experiences and understandings of the world and ourselves (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 19; Tyson, 2006, p. 255). This thesis explores the socio-historical contexts of school meals programmes and attitudes in Finland and New Zealand to understand better how discourses and ideologies have developed and influence power relationships and policy differently in the two places over time (see Corradetti, n.d.; Habermas, 1971, Kendall, 1989, cited in Duffy & Scott, 1998, pp. 184, 186; Tyson, 2006, pp. 53–54, 453). It is not possible to make generalizations about education or social policies and apply them from Finland to New Zealand because challenges and responses to them are influenced by the countries' unique contexts, including levels of inequalities, and the perception in society and politics about the role of school (Dupriez & Dumay, 2006, p. 244,249; Fairbrother, 2014, pp. 75–76; S. Ray, 2009, p. 16).

While a thorough historical analysis is not possible within the scope of this thesis, principles from critical histories research have influenced my approach, particularly my desire to understand context and gain useful insights into the problem and possible solution (S. Ray, 2009, p. 17; Villaverde et al., 2006, p. 19). A critical approach does not see history as linear progress, but "a story of change, and not all changes are improvements" (S. Ray, 2009, p. 16; Tyson, 2006, pp. 284, 290). Objective analysis is impossible because primary sources are

produced or reported by people with a particular view and position, and present researchers inhabit their own and are limited by the historical hindsight available in 2021 (Villaverde et al., 2006, pp. 18, 24). Therefore, histories will always be partial and can never be truly known (Tyson, 2006, p. 290; Villaverde et al., 2006, pp. 14, 25). They are interpretations and narratives, so critical historians must be aware and transparent about their positioning (Tyson, 2006, p. 284) as they "interpret a series of known events and recorded processes, to try to make sense of them from a distance, and to understand their effects on us today" (S. Ray, 2009, p. 16). Chapters 6 and 8 present a diachronic historical analysis of the development of the different approaches and attitudes towards school meals in Finland and New Zealand, setting context for the critical analysis of the empirical data of parliamentary debate speeches on the government provision of food in schools in Chapter 9. The diachronic structure provides a overall narrative of Finnish and New Zealand histories, and organized into periods marked by significant points of change caused by events, unintentional happenings and intentional acts (Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, pp. 719-720; Sweeting, 2014, pp. 181–182).

## 2.2 A Critical Thematic Analysis of empirical data: New Zealand Parliamentary debates on government provision of food in schools

To establish common ground and jointly act on the problem of children's hunger in New Zealand it is essential to understand the arguments contested in the political debate that impede consensus. Chapter 9 critically analyzes key themes and ideologies in two parliamentary debates about proposals to expand government responsibility for food in schools, and aims to answer Question 1 about shared understandings held by New Zealand politicians on which consensus could be built, and points of difference that need addressing. Political debate in New Zealand reflects and is reflected in broader public discussions, and similar themes are expressed in discourse on social and traditional media. The relationship between the public and political is significant, as public opinion directly influences the makeup of parliament and the formation of government, and parliamentary discourse can sway public opinion, influence other politicians, and directly impact policy and action. Speeches in House debates are written before they are presented, and politicians' perspectives are considered and agreed to before they are presented as they will go on official record (van Dijk, 1993, p. 266). I critically examined the video recordings and transcripts of participating politicians' speeches to identify and analyse thematic patterns and underlying ideologies their arguments for or against collective/government responsibility for feeding children at school.

### 2.2.1 Thematic Analysis as a research method

Thematic Analysis (TA) explores and organises texts like the selected videos and transcripts of parliamentary debates, to reveal key themes or "repeated patterns of meaning" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 10, 15). Although used widely, thematic analysis has been labelled as "poorly demarcated" (ibid., p. 1) and "loosely applied" in research (Lawless & Chen, 2019, p. 95). Thematic Analysis is not fused with a particular theoretical framework or data type so it can be used in different ways for different purposes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). I follow Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke's seminal work on *Using thematic analysis in psychology* (2006) and more recent *Reflexive Thematic Analysis* (Braun & Clarke, 2019) that offer a method that is flexible enough to be used with a critical approach (ibid., pp. 6, 15). Their guidelines are detailed in the data coding and analysis process described in Chapter 9, but in summary entail: 1) Becoming familiar with the data; 2) Generating initial codes; 3) Searching for themes; 4) Reviewing themes; 5) Defining and naming themes; and 6) Producing the report (ibid., pp. 15-24). Through the process I apply William F. Owen's *repetition, recurrence* and *forcefulness* indicators to reveal latent themes echoed and stressed in the political parliamentary speeches debating proposed legislation for government responsibility for school meals (1984, p. 274, cited in Lawless & Chen, 2019, pp. 95, 98).

Theorising the socio-cultural contexts and conditions underpinning data help to analyse it beyond a mere description of what is said and how (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 13). Understanding how the arguments may have developed over time in New Zealand can help to meet the challenge of our divided discourse, attitudes and actions. I do this through a recursive process, moving back and forth between the extracts, coded data and the literature and theoretical framework (ibid., p. 15). I do not impose a pre-existing coding frame on the data, but my critical approach, prior knowledge and experiences lend preconceptions that may influence what I identify as themes and how I interpret them, as "data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum" (ibid., p. 12).

### 2.2.2 A critical approach to Thematic Analysis

A critical approach to thematic analysis because it is relevant/functional for purpose and questions (van Dijk, 1993, p. 252). Looking for latent themes within the data requires exploring beyond the surface-level content to reveal assumptions and ideologies beneath that inform the semantics. Many critical studies that employ thematic analysis also follow Braun and Clarke's six-step guide because it is flexible and can be applied to qualitative research that seeks transformation and social justice. Although many of these studies have made important contributions, Brandi Lawless and Yea-Wen Chen contend they lack a truly critical framework as Critical Thematic Analysis (CTA) is an approach that still "has not been theorised in depth" (2019, p. 93). They consider Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide as helpful but "limited in… connecting everyday discourses [or in this case political discourses reflecting the everyday] with larger social and cultural practices nested in unequal power relations" and it "do[es] not demonstrate how a critical approach is to be folded into thematic analysis" (ibid., p. 93). Lawless and Chen propose a CTA method that builds on Owen's indicators and Braun and Clarke's six steps, "guide[d] by a critical analysis of recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness within … discourses as they relate to larger social ideologies", to "tease out how intersecting macro-forces enable and constrain … discourses" (ibid., pp. 98, 94). CTA is interested in how different groups are represented, what knowledge and values are prioritised, how oppressive or exclusionary ideas are promoted and challenged, how discourses compete for domination, and how these influence the dynamic of power relations (Cannella & Lincoln, 2015, p. 259, cited in Lawless & Chen, 2019, p. 97). A critical view also emphasises the importance of understanding socio historical contexts behind the power relations and ideologies interrogated in the analysis of the debates (ibid., pp. 93, 95-96; van Dijk, 1993, p. 259).

### 2.2.3 The influence of Critical Discourse Analysis

I lean on assumptions and strategies from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and look for ideologies underpinning "the language of those in power, who are responsible for the existence of inequalities" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 9, cited in Sengul, 2019, p. 4). There are various ways researchers of different disciplines employ CDA, but all systematically examine data to understand how ideologies, inequalities and power dynamics are "enacted, reproduced, legitimated and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (van Dijk, 2015, p.

466, cited in Sengul, 2019, p. 2) and how in a dialectical relationship these in turn shape discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 60–66; Lawless & Chen, 2019, p. 94; Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 5, cited in Sengul, 2019, p. 2; van Dijk, 1993, p. 249). Researchers using this critical lens must be transparent about their commitment to social change and emancipation. I especially draw on CDA when considering the unique position and power of parliamentary politicians, and how language can represent and shape attitudes about 'the other'.

The social power of individuals depends on their access to resources of value such as status, income, education and membership of certain groups. Critiquing the discourse of politicians implies a critique of the politicians themselves, but this is focused on their grouping as Members of Parliament, their positions on different sides of the debate, and membership of political parties (van Dijk, 1993, p. 252). MPs' language is useful to analyse critically as they hold a significant and unique position enacting policies and "managing public consensus" to reproduce dominance (van Dijk, 1993, p. 272). As elites they are defined in terms of their symbolic power and the possible scope of their resources and communication (Bourdieu, 1982, cited in van Dijk, 1993, p. 255). Their status grants them privileged access to Parliament, the platform they speak from allows them to influence the minds of others in the room, media and society, and what they believe and say can be brought into effect (ibid., pp. 254-268, 275). Elected politicians are granted a certain authority and credibility, even when they use discursive strategies such as extreme framing, derailing the topic, re-defining the issue or misrepresenting ideas to legitimize their attitudes and actions (van Dijk, 1993, pp. 267-268, 273-274). Access to a powerful platform for an elite few inherently means exclusion of the many, and with the loss of their voice and influence there is a limit to the potential for action. Politicians' position and salary can keep them removed from scarcity and poverty, and this can contribute to their perspectives about 'the other' (van Dijk, 1993, pp. 254, 260).

Discourse strategies reproduce dominance by justifying and denying inequalities through arguments, narratives and stereotypes, including the positive representation of their own group and negative representation of 'the other' whether explicitly or subtly. Examples they present are consistent with their descriptions to create and sustain negative attitudes about a group of people, such as parents whose children go to school without food (van Dijk, 1993, pp. 263-264). Parents in this position may also be painted as a potential threat to the dominant group, who

may see themselves as victims having to pay tax that helps to feed another family's child (van Dijk, 1993, pp. 264-265). This is an unfortunately common strategy in New Zealand but less so in Finland. Critical Discourse Analysis is interested in how different groups' characteristics and qualities are referred to, the discursive strategies used to strengthen that framing, and the arguments and ideologies underpinning the purpose (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 104, cited in Sengul, 2019, p. 9; Wodak & Meyer, 2009 and van Dijk, 1997, cited in Sengul, 2019, p. 9).

Fairclough offers two different approaches to CDA; one focuses on linguistic features of a text, and one that cares less about linguistic features and is interested in social issues (Fairclough, 2003, cited in O'Connor & Holland, 2013, p. 141). He argued for a combination of both to demonstrate the significance of meaning in language and its relationship with power. I draw on interests and questions about rhetorical features from the CDA approach, but a systematic microanalysis of syntax or discourse structures are beyond the scope of this thesis (see Fairclough, 1992 cited in Lawless & Chen, 2019, p. 94; van Dijk, 1993, pp. 251, 278). Additionally, because intentionality is difficult to determine in the political speeches, I focus more generally on the descriptions and themes of the debate rather than a close examination of structure and intonation (see van Dijk, 2006, p. 128 cited in Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 718). With its critical lens focused on transforming the current situation in New Zealand, this thesis also looks to Finland for lessons on building consensus to address child hunger through school meals.

## 2.3 A comparative perspective to seek lessons from Finland

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*"The practical value of studying, in a right spirit and with scholarly accuracy, the working of foreign systems of education is that it will result in our being better fitted to study and understand our own"*

(Sadler, 1900, cited in Bray, 2014a, p. 39)

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Making comparisons is a natural and universal human activity that "lies at the very origin of concepts and ideas" (Olivera, 1998, p. 179, cited in Bray, 2014a, p. 52). A long-recognised aim

of comparative education research is the illumination of one's own system through the study of others (Cook et al., 2004, Kandel, 1933, p. xix, Sadler, 1900, 1964, p. 310, cited in Bray, 2014a, pp. 39–40; Gorard & Smith, 2004, p. 16; Hansen & Kauko, 2018, p. 118; Noah, 1984, p. 154). Comparative education research (CER) is a broad field used by a variety of disciplines and for a range of purposes, but like critical research is often undertaken with a problem in mind and a purpose to improve it (Noah, 1984, p. 154). Comparative research does this by engaging with different cultures, systems and people to think flexibly and gain new insights (Hansen & Kauko, 2018, p. 118; Kubow & Fossum, 2007, p. 26). This can also help to bridge intercultural understandings and appreciation of other societies (Noah, 1984, pp. 164-165). Comparing different countries education systems is challenging, causal relationships are difficult to confidently identify, and there is a risk of simplistic and trivial comparisons where they are not connected to theory or context (Gorard, 2001, cited in Gorard & Smith, 2004, p. 15; Simola et al., 2013, p. 164). Despite its limitations and challenges, comparative education research can be a valuable exercise (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 164).

Since the 19th century Finland has looked to other countries' education systems for ideas and education's role and provision, namely Germany and Sweden but also New Zealand (Chung, 2019, p. 182; Kettunen, 2013, p. 34). Now the world looks to Finland and the visits from edutourists help Finns themselves reflect on and appreciate features of their own system they agree support improved teaching and learning, like the Kouluruokailu free and healthy school lunches (Chung, 2019, p. 184). Much of the interest in Finland is due to the current global focus comparing international performance in assessments like PISA. International rankings can influence political decisions about education inspired by top performing countries, and there is a risk of uncritical policy transfer and unintended consequences if there is no consideration of context (Chung, 2019, p. 194; Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 715; Simola et al., 2013, p. 612). For thie reason, Chapters 6 and 8 explore the respective countries' contexts to improve my understanding and rigour of analysis.

### 2.3.1 The risks of uncritical policy borrowing and the importance of context in Comparative Education Research

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*"In studying foreign systems of education, we should not forget that the things outside the school matter even more than the things inside the school, and govern and interpret the things inside"*

(Sadler, 1979, cited in Reinikainen, 2012, p. 16)

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Learning from other countries' policy approaches to social problems and transplanting these to a different system and culture is difficult (Noah, 1984, pp. 158-159), despite global policy reforms being embraced and implemented in societies that have different political and social histories (Simola et al., 2013, p. 612; Chung, 2019, p. 185). Comparative education researchers have always debated policy borrowing. They advise caution about oversimplifying complex questions and causes, and to recognize the limits of our own perspectives and ability to learn from different contexts (Noah, 1984, pp. 163, 553-554). When discussing the transferability of features of Finnish education to other countries, Finnish professors, teachers and former Minister of Education warned against simple lifting and shifting because education systems are bound to their cultural and social circumstances (Chung, 2019, p. 177-187). It is possible to learn from other countries and borrow elements of their policies if there is careful consideration of different contexts and the necessary amendments to suit, and a sustained trial period long enough to allow for review and improvement over time (Phillips & Ochs, 2003, Ochs, 2006, p. 616, cited in Chung, 2019, pp. 195-196).

An understanding of context is essential for any comparative education study because education is socially and historically bound and cannot be separated from it (Bray, 2014a, p. 20; Chung, 2019, p. 1; Fairbrother, 2014, pp. 75–76; Manzon, 2014, p. 97; Sweeting, 2014, p. 167). It is especially important if motivation for the research is to apply lessons from elsewhere for improvement back home, as cultural and historical influences on education systems and policy developments over time can be profound (Manzon, 2014, p. 100). Comparing histories of education "can help us better understand our own past, locate ourselves more exactly in the present, and discern a little more clearly what our educational future might be" (Noah, 1984, p. 154).

Finnish professors of education stress that it is not sufficient to look only at the surface phenomenon of the school lunches model without an exploration of its context (Chung, 2019, p. 185), and that CER should be an "historical journey" (Simola, 2005, p. 457) with a "strong and ambitious theory-based framework with the potential to incorporate the socio-historical complexity, and relationality and contingency of the research" (Simola, 2014). To be politically important, comparative education research must go beyond just listing similarities and differences (Simola, 2005, 2014; Simola et al., 2013).

### 2.3.2 Finland and New Zealand are worthy of comparison

It is common for researchers and policy makers in English-speaking countries like New Zealand to look to others like United Kingdom, Australia, Canada or the United States for the shared language and cultural similarities, and 'liberal market' economic approaches. However, attention is increasingly turning to the Nordic countries like Finland that have successfully organised their economic and social policies quite differently to bring about greater equity (Scott, 2014, pp. 2–3). For example, both Finnish and New Zealand secondary students perform comparatively well in international assessments like PISA, but Finland repeatedly ranks towards the top of the academic tables and the family backgrounds of Finnish learners have a considerably weaker impact on their achievements at school (Schleicher, 2009, p. 254). Despite important similarities that allow New Zealand to be compared meaningfully with Finland, both countries have very different socio-historical contexts that are inextricably connected with the different approaches of each country to feeding children in school and wider attitudes, discourses and practices. This thesis does not seek to methodically compare all that is similar and what is different, but by examining the contexts of the two places in Chapters 6 and 8 it aims to understand how Kouluruokailu has developed in Finland differently from the mixed approach and debate about food in school that characterises New Zealand (see Manzon, 2014, p. 100).

When living and studying in Finland I naturally reflected back to NZ, comparing my knowledge and understanding of the two countries. Although they are on opposite sides of the world, New Zealand and Finland share enough similarities for an investigation of their differences to be

interesting and worthy, which is important in CER (Bray, 2004, p. 248, cited in Manzon, 2014, p. 100). Perhaps most significantly, the size of New Zealand and Finland's population and land mass are similar, and their economies are relatively small and open though Finland's has been stronger in recent decades (Frame, 2000, pp. 4, 13, 15–16; OECD, 2021a, 2021b). Government expenditure in Finland was 6.4 percent of GDP in 2017, only slightly higher than New Zealand's 6.3 percent, compared to the OECD average of 5 percent (World Bank, 2020). Both countries also have decentralized education systems and are often looked to as being progressive leaders on the world stage despite their size. These similarities improve the value of this investigation with the applicability of system-wide policy lessons (but not uncritical transfer) about Finland's political and social consensus about government responsibility food in schools to the unique New Zealand context.

Although there are some important and interesting similarities between the two countries, key differences attract interest and complicate the applicability of lessons from one place to the other. Where education priorities and policies in New Zealand can change significantly with elections of a new government, there is comparatively little change in the focus on equity in Finnish education over different governments. It was this difference, and in particular Finland's consistent support for its universal free school meals programme, that drew me to study there. A country's education system does not exist in a vacuum; it simultaneously shapes and is shaped by its society, economy, political culture, and history. Significant differences between the Finnish and New Zealand contexts must be understood and considered when evaluating the transferability of lessons from Kouluruokailu. These include differences of geography and relationships with other nations, extent of ethnic and cultural diversity, influence of neoliberalism, approaches to education and welfare, political cultures, and significant events and actions in history.

Finland and New Zealand are respectively unique, but it is still valid to look to Finland as a model for New Zealand on this issue provided these are understood and mitigated. Finnish educationalists Pasi Sahlberg and Hannu Simola acknowledge but challenge those who decry the relevance of Finland's 'exceptional' characteristics and education system to other places

(Sahlberg, 2015). Both plead for researchers to understand the importance of context on education policy to consider how differences such as ethnic diversity and political culture can impact the potential for transferability of ideas and practices, but believe Finland is worth studying for its educational and social successes (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 161). Simola suggests it is an interesting case due to its size; its cultural mix; going against the flow; its membership of the Nordic welfare states; and "as an accelerated, compressed example of the global process of mass schooling" (Simola, 2014). Sahlberg identifies three elements of Finnish education that can transcend differences across places. The first is to build consensus as Finland has done over a common and inspiring vision of what good and equitable public education should be. He also suggests countries form their own path like 'the Finnish Way' by adapting lessons from overseas while preserving the unique local contexts and traditions, and affirms the importance of supporting teachers and school leaders (2015, pp. 27-28).

### 2.3.3 Limitations in the comparison of Finland with New Zealand

This research is necessarily limited by the geographical distance and Finnish language barrier thats restrict my access to many sources, particularly valuable primary texts, and the understanding of cultural nuances and experiences. Fortunately, the widespread use of English in Finland allowed me to communicate with many people and access sufficient information about Finland and articles by Finnish academics. These limitations dictate where and how the comparative lens is used in this research as they restrict a truly comparative empirical analysis of texts from both countries as my empirical data is solely from New Zealand. However, while a close comparison of both parliamentary debates from both New Zealand and Finnish would be interesting, this second-level comparison through a review of literature is not out of step with the field and appropriate for my purpose (Bray, 2014b, p. 55). In the comparison of sociohistorical contexts it is important to remember history is complex and uncertain, interpreted and presented with bias, ideas change over time, and comparisons across times should not rely on a causal analysis nor present conclusive findings (Sweeting, 2014, pp. 168, 171, 177, 179, 182-183). I am also limited in my own position and perspective as a researcher, and scope and size of the thesis does not allow inclusion or deep exploration of every topic so I must be selective about what to include. It has long been a challenge for comparative researchers who "wish to know about the world and to act on it" is to decide if we want to

know one big thing very well or many things less well (Isiaha Berlin, 1953, cited in Noah, 1984, p. 159). For this reason I aim to provide a broad view of the issue, with some important aspects such as the parliamentary debate speeches investigated more thoroughly. To improve the rigour of the research I draw from a range of primary and secondary sources and ground it in the strong but flexible theoretical framework described in this chapter.

# 3 Chapter 3: School meal policies to address the impact of inequalities, food insecurity and hunger on education globally

## 3.1 The relationship between socioeconomic inequalities, education and life outcomes

*"From an equity perspective, children's life chances should depend less on the lottery of birth than on their own latent abilities. From an efficiency point of view, high parent-child income correlations imply that society is under-investing in a sizable share of its children"*

(Esping-Andersen, 2008, p. 24)

This chapter establishes the premise for this research by outlining the complex relationship between family background, food insecurity, hunger and education outcomes, and the potential for governments to address this through sustained school meal initiatives. It also contextualises the use of school meals by different countries responding to the global challenge of food insecurity, and reviews evidence about the potential of such programmes to address the impact of poverty and hunger on children's engagement, learning and lives.

This thesis often refers to the term 'family background' but also interchangeably with 'socioeconomic background'. Karl Marx's idea of 'socioeconomic class' was developed in the mid-1800s and referred to unequal division of wealth between groups in society. Max Weber later coined the term 'socioeconomic status'. Both concepts see that the structures of our economy and society have created disparities of resources and power (E. Rata, 2009, p. 103). 'Socioeconomic background' is often described with the concepts of economic, social and cultural capital. Cultural capital conceptualises a family's ability to understand, navigate and succeed in the social and education system (Bourdieu, 1983, cited in Esping-Andersen, 2006, pp. 400–401; Gibson, 1986, cited in Rata, 2009, pp. 112–113). This can be influenced by factors including parents' language skills and educational experiences and attainment, how much time they invest in their children's learning, the number of books they have in the home (Esping-Andersen, 2008, p. 28). Esping-Andersen's analysis of PISA data concluded that cultural

capital is more influential than socio-economic status on learners' achievement, but that these are also often related (ibid.).

A common misconception or misrepresentation of equity in education is that every student is the same, should be treated the same, and/or will achieve the same outcomes. But equity asks the questions 'what is fair?' and 'what is just?' (Fraser & Honnet, 2003, cited in Grudnoff et al., 2016, p. 454), so can be understood as equality of opportunities of educational achievement, or "the lack of any statistical association between indicators of students' achievement and indicators of their social origin" (Dupriez & Dumay, 2006, pp. 244–245). An education system with high equity is characterized by all students having access to high quality education regardless of their location or family background (Sahlberg, 2012, p. 28). A critical lens sees the structural inequalities that have been built into the economy, society and education system (Rata, 2009, p. 111). If equity is held as a central driver in education policy by consecutive governments, young people who have been historically underserved and disadvantaged can be lifted and the systems that reproduce inequalities can be challenged for the benefit of all (Grudnoff et al., 2016, p. 454).

Material circumstances such as socioeconomic class or access to resources shape the distribution and dynamics of power, policy and action; people's family and social backgrounds can enable or limit their ability to participate in education, the economy, and society, and the extent of power they are able to exercise over their own and others' lives (Esping-Andersen, 2006, pp. 398–408, 2008, pp. 19, 22; E. Rata, 2009, p. 117; Sweeting, 2014, p. 175; UNICEF, 2000, p. 5). Although it is not the only factor, the relationship between a child's family background, such as access to healthy food or their parent's income, is widely acknowledged as a significant predictor for a child's achievements at school (Breen & Jonsson, 2005, pp. 227–228; Jensen & Turmo, 2003, p. 83; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009, p. 105, cited in Kennedy, 2015, p. 170; Bishop, 2002, cited in McLean, 2009, p. 89). An individual's health lifestyle is formed both by life's chances and choices, but these are "principally collective not individual phenomena" (Abel et al., 2000, cited in Prättälä, 2003, p. 1). Eating patterns and habits are more than individual preferences and decisions, and are determined by contextual or structural factors such as living situation, income and availability of food (Badri, 2014, p. 53; Prättälä, 2003, p. 1). Disadvantage and scarcity in a child's early years is consistently found to be especially

impactful (Breen & Jonsson, 2005, p. 228; Duncan et al., 1998, Machin, 1998, McCulloch & Joshi, 2002, cited in Esping-Andersen, 2006, p. 401, 2008, pp. 19, 22). Cause and effect is difficult to confidently identify when there are many contributing factors, but there are broader social justice reasons for research on education achievement to explore context. Doing so illuminates injustice and the reproduction of inequalities in education, and informs policy that can more effectively lower barriers (Bishop et al., 2010, pp. 49–50; Esping-Andersen, 2008, p. 24; Scheerens et al., 2011, pp. 37–38; Martin Thrupp & Lupton, 2006, pp. 310, 312)

Inequalities do not only negatively impact the lives of individuals but the whole of society. Economic and social disparities are often inherited through generations, and families can only improve their position by using the resources available to them. Access is variable and out of reach for many, so some are more socially mobile than others (Nash, 2004, p. 296, cited in Rata, 2009, p. 113; Kennedy, 2015, p. 171). Whole sections of society with fewer resources are excluded from access and representation and there are significant implications for long term accumulative costs of poverty on public health and social issues (Harris, 2017, p. 64; United Nations, 2005, p. 21, cited in Kennedy, 2015, p. 170; Popkewitz, 1998, p. 22). Unequal life experiences also make it harder for people of different backgrounds to share similar views, or understand and empathize with each other. This social distance can affect our ability to engage rationally and truthfully to build consensus in the 'ideal speech' situations described by Habermas (Corradetti, n.d.; Wilson-Thomas, 1995, Thomas, 1995, cited in Duffy & Scott, 1998, p. 185; Harris, 2017, p. 64). Inequalities weaken social bonds and strain the system, so investing in children can bring benefits across society (Giroux, 2016, p. 69).

This issue is complicated by the array of interacting factors and the challenge of measuring poverty and its impact. Researchers face the "difficulty of inferring inequality of opportunity from data on inequality of outcomes" (Breen & Jonsson, 2005, pp. 229, 236), so measuring the relationship between socioeconomic background and education outcomes requires a variety of indicators beyond the more easily identifiable family income or parents' occupation to understand a fuller picture. Although there is a link (Rata, 2009, p. 112), conclusions about these indicators alone are not settled as other features of a child's family environment are also influential, for example the number of books in the home or the time parents have to actively engage with learning (Dupriez & Dumay, 2006, p. 254; Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992, cited in Esping-

Andersen, 2006, p. 399, 2008, pp. 23, 25, 39; Gorard & Smith, 2004, p. 27). The funding for New Zealand's schools is transitioning from the decile system to an Equity Index for more nuanced and sophisticated measurement, and is being trialed in the targeting of schools and communities for Ka Ora, Ka Ako (Ministry of Education, 2021e). Gorard and Smith (2004) constructed a framework of equity indicators and reviewed international assessment data and surveys of schools and teachers across European countries: parents' occupation; family wealth; pupil's country of origin; performance in reading examination from PISA 2000 and gender. They employed the Segregation Index, as well as the Disimmilarity Index and the Gini Coefficient and considered the levels of differentiation in school systems. Applying these indicators to Finland, they found little segregation in its schooling system and outcomes (pp. 19, 22, 24-28).

Education systems can reinforce and reproduce inequalities, or reduce them. The strength of relationship between a child's family background and school achievement varies across jurisdictions, influenced by features of the schooling system and its socioeconomic context. The challenge for policy makers and educators is to reduce the potential for education to reinforce and reproduce inequalities in society (Rata, 2009, p. 103; Schleicher, 2009, p. 259; Thrupp & Lupton, 2006, pp. 312, 315). A review of previous studies and international education achievement databases PISA and PIRLS showed the impact of school system structures on inequalities. Aligning with other research, Dupriez and Dumay found more equitable outcomes from integrated or comprehensive systems with limited streaming or tracking based on assessment or perceived ability (see Zachary et al., 2002, Duru-Bella et al, 2004, and Crahay, 2003, cited in Dupriez & Dumay, 2006, p. 245). The OECD Directorate for Education also found that countries with "strategies for teaching heterogeneous groups of learners within integrated education systems" performed better, especially with "a high degree of individualised learning processes and strong student-teacher relations" (Schleicher, 2009, p. 259).

Processes and practices within schools can support and improve student achievement, but the extent to which schools are able to shift the influence of family background is debated (Bernstein, 1968/1970, Coleman et al., 1966, Jencks et al., 1972 cited in Thrupp et al., 2003, pp. 470–471; Thrupp & Lupton, 2006, p. 320). School effectiveness research has consistently shown that the influence of school may influence student outcomes by about 15% compared to

the impact of family background of about 85% (Teddlie et al., 2001, cited in Thrupp et al., 2003, p. 472). Government intervention is needed to support schools, and levers like universally available school meals could reduce teachers' time and energy on managing the effects of hunger on their students' engagement and learning, allowing them to focus on their primary role (Thrupp & Lupton, 2006, p. 310).

### 3.1.1 The potential for government interventions to reduce this relationship

The impact of inequalities on schooling is a persistent challenge for governments and educators around the world (Breen & Jonsson, 2005, p. 228; Esping-Andersen, 2006, pp. 398–408; Hills et al., 2010, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2012, cited in Grudnoff et al., 2016, p. 451). System reform has the potential to address persistent historical inequalities in places where the perceived and executed role of education is to support social mobility, and is resourced appropriately (see Breen & Jonsson, 2005, p. 223; Esping-Andersen, 2006, p. 399; Imsen et al., 2017, p. 400; Kennedy, 2015, p. 170; Rata, 2009, p. 114). Governments that combine quality with equity in their education systems and invest in mitigating families' disadvantage from an early age can more successfully meet this aim (Sahlberg, 2012, pp. 29-30). An OECD investigation of equity-enhancing conditions for education systems identified critical success factors as: fair and inclusive design, practices and resources (2007b, cited in Schleicher, 2009, pp. 259-262). Importantly, "learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate in learning" has also been identified by UNICEF as a key feature of a quality education system (2000, p. 4). The public and political discourse about education's role as a social equalizer and in support of 'critical agency, social justice and operational democracy reflects the quality of the reform (Giroux, 2016, p. 67). A school meals programme will be most successful if the debate is raised up and we work across politics in society to find common ground and commitment to effectively tackle child poverty through such a reform.

New Zealand governments over time have explicitly used education reform to deal with social disparities (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 32, cited in Rata, 2009, p. 114), but have struggled with the "ongoing contradiction between the ideal of education as the means to improve one's life chances and the reality of education as the means for the reproduction of inequality" (Rata, 2009, p. 103). Education reforms in New Zealand are often short term, do not receive adequate funding, and vulnerable to change with a new government. Researchers advise that reforms will

be more effective reducing education and social inequities if they have a long-term view from the beginning, are based on shared principles, have a multi-strategy approach that also involved community and those on the ground, and can be sustained over time through different governments (Bishop, O'Sullivan, & Berryman, 2010). The example of Finland's welfare and education policies successfully improving academic outcomes while minimizing the influence of family background contradicts the assumption that inequality in and from education is inevitable or necessary (Erikson and Jonsson, 1996, cited in Esping-Andersen, 2008, pp. 25, 37; Sahlberg, September 2012, p. 28; Schleicher, 2009, p. 262).

## 3.2 The relationship between nutrition, hunger and learning

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*"All children should have access to enough appropriate and healthy food to eat, no matter their ethnicity or living circumstances; to help ensure they have the best possible start in life"*

(Ministry of Health, 2019a, p. 3)

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Substantial evidence demonstrates that nutrition and good health are essential for children's physical and psychosocial development, and that this affects their experiences and outcomes throughout their lives (Badri, 2014, p. 54; Grantham-McGregor, 2005, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3944; Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 3; Wachs, 2000, & Ivanovic, 2002 & 2004, cited in Quigley & Watts, 2005, pp. 24–25; UNICEF, 2000, p. 5). Iron deficiency, for example, has been widely researched and connected "with learning and behaviour problems, including hyperactivity" (Grantham-McGregor, 2001, cited in Quigley & Watts, 2005, p. 26). Severe malnutrition, especially combined with unmet emotional and educational needs, unquestionably impacts children's global development (US Nutrition-Cognition Advisory 1998, cited in Quigley & Watts, 2005, p. 24-25). Much of the research focuses on the early years, and many studies use the increasingly questioned IQ as a measure of intelligence (Wachs, 2000, Ivanovic, 2002, 2004, cited in Quigley & Watts, 2005, pp. 24-25). Studies of children and adolescents in the Global North reveal some groups benefit considerably with a nutrition supplement but most do not, likely because most children's nutrition is sufficient wealthier countries so extra intake

is not enough to enhance brain function. It also shows many children in countries like New Zealand and Finland have low quality diets that impede brain function, and that initiatives to improve nutrition and social environments of mildly to moderately undernourished children could "largely reverse the negative effects of a poor diet" (Bryan et al, 2004, Schoenthaler, 2000b, Benton, 2001, cited in Quigley & Watts, 2005, pp. 24-25).

Although not yet widely researched, growing evidence demonstrates hunger negatively affects development, notwithstanding baseline nutritional intake or family background. Ten qualitative and quantitative studies connected children's hunger and experiences of food insecurity with their learning and social behaviour, and physical and emotional wellbeing (Quigley & Watts, 2005, pp. 26, 28). It is important to examine causes of disruptive behaviour or poor motivation as these take away from children's own learning as well as their classmates' (ibid., p. 26). Examples of behaviour studies showed to be negatively impacted by hunger and food insecurity were school attendance, participation in activities, peer interactions, disciplinary and suspensions, and grade repetition (see Kleinman 1998, Alaimo, 2001 and Dunifon, 2003, Kleinman et al. 2002; Schoenthaler, 2000a and 2000b; Benton, 2001, cited in Quigley & Watts, 2005, pp. 26-28).

It is difficult to conclusively answer whether what and when children eat influences their short-term intellectual performance as available research is inconsistent. A number of studies suggest skipping breakfast impairs attention and/or memory (see Wesnes, 2003; Busch, 2002; Benton, 2001, cited in Quigley & Watts, 2005, p. 31). Those who are already under-nourished seem more negatively impacted by missing a meal, probably because "they're less able to compensate for a missed meal as they don't have the reserves to draw on" (Dye, 2002: S187, cited in Quigley & Watts, 2005, p. 32). Studies from the United States reveal that schools anxious about not meeting required achievement standards in competitive student assessments provide more food on test days, and the increased calories and glucose intake seems to help improve student grades, particularly mathematics (Figlio & Winicki, 2005, cited in Badri, 2014, pp. 55-56).

Although the research about short-term intellectual performance is not strongly conclusive, there is consistent evidence of the overall influence of children's diets on academic performance in cross-sectional longitudinal studies across countries, particularly where children suffered deficiencies in their early years (see Ivanovic, 2002, 2004, 2005; Kim, 2002, 2005, Genwe, 1999, Grantham-McGregor, 2001, Haojie, 2003, cited in Quigley & Watts, 2005, p. 34). Some interventions associated improvement in literacy and numeracy measures with nutritional supplements (Grantham-McGregor, 2001, cited in Quigley & Watts, 2005, p. 34) and others saw an increase in attendance and positive social and learning behaviours (Kleinman, 2002, Murphy 1998, cited in Quigley & Watts, 2005, p. 34). School food initiatives in Finland and New Zealand are reported to improve student engagement, social relationships and attendance.

## 3.3 The global challenge of food insecurity and the use of school meals programmes to address it

### 3.3.1 The global challenge of food insecurity and production

The world faces the daunting challenge of adequately and sustainably feeding a growing population that suffers from widespread malnutrition in some areas and increasing obesity in others (Godfray et al., 2010, Carlsson-Kanyama and Gonzalez, 2009, Garnett, 2011, and Reisch et al., 2013, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, pp. 3942-3943). Food insecurity is "a limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited ability to acquire personally acceptable foods that meet cultural needs in a socially acceptable way" (Anderson 1990; Holben 2010; Parnell et al 2001, cited by Ministry of Health, 2019, p. 1). Children who do not have access to varied and healthy foods have poorer nutrition and general health, which impacts their experiences and achievements at school (Ministry of Health, 2019, cited in Morton et al., 2020, p. 77).

Goal 2 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aims to "end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutritition and promote sustainable agriculture" by 2030 (United Nations, n.d.). Two billion people, nearly 26 percent of the world's population, experienced hunger and food deprivation and insecurity in 2019. Of these, nearly 750 million

– almost one in ten people globally – faced severe food insecurity. The impact on children is especially concerning, with "21.3 percent (144.0 million) of children under 5 years of age were estimated to be stunted [in 2019], 6.9 percent (47.0 million) wasted and 5.6 percent (38.3 million) overweight, while at least 340 million children suffered from micronutrient deficiencies" (FAO et al., 2020, pp. viii–ix). Most of these children live in the Global South. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, UNESCO estimated *369 million children, across almost every country, missed school meals,* and urged governments to ensure children and their families were still supported with school meals, and to encourage them back to school when they reopened (UNESCO, 2020). The WHO's World Food Programme won the Nobel Peace Prize in October 2020 for its efforts in this time. Schools were not shut down for such a length of time in NZ then Finland, but organisers were often able to get lunches to the children in those weeks, and Ka Ora Ka Ako expanded as part of the pandemic response. In Finland, lunches are served in large open spaces such as parks, and are also available to the wider community for little cost. Researchers Pollard and Booth (2019, pp. 6–8) have identified conditions necessary for effective and coordinated action to alleviate food insecurity; decision makers, government agencies, sectors and organisations must commit and work together with people on the ground. This requires understanding the problem and building consensus and on both its existence and importance of tackling it. Governments have a leading role to play, coordinating these different actors towards a shared national vision of Zero Hunger and mechanisms for monitoring and review.

Food insecurity, malnutrition and related childhood diseases are more prevalent in low income countries, but are still present in wealthy countries where food is generally more available and secure, particularly among certain groups of the population (Kugelman & Hathaway, 2010, Senbajo et al., 2003, WHO, 2004, cited in Badri, 2014, pp. 52-53). The extent in societies like Finland and New Zealand can be harder to discern as there is a general lack of systematic measurement and reporting. Smaller studies use a range of indicators and methods of analysis for different purposes, making them difficult to compare and triangulate (Pollard & Booth, 2019, pp. 1, 4). These countries also face the challenge and costs that overconsumption and high energy and fat diets bring with increased obesity and related diseases (see Løes & Nölting, 2011, p. 91; Hays et al., 2002, Velsista et al., 2009, Storey et al., 2009, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3942).

Global North countries have social welfare protection for those who are underserved in society, but the features and capacity of systems vary and are usually inadequate to meet the full need. Charities such as food banks try to cover the inadequacies of government protection, but they are for emergencies, and have limited range on offer, and can be unsustainable and vulnerable to withdrawal of support and unexpected increases of demand (Pollard & Booth, 2019, pp. 1, 5-6). Additionally, projection and feelings of stigma and shame cast shade on the experiences and willingness of individuals seeking food assistance in comparatively wealthy countries, especially in the West where independence is upheld as an aspiration. This can compound feelings of inferiority, trauma and stress (ibid. pp. 5-6). Despite these barriers, 60 million people in Global North countries still accessed emergency food assistance like food banks in 2013, highlighting the entrenched structural conditions that charity or community based. This presents "a strong case for government leadership, for action within and across government, and effective engagement with other sectors to deliver a coordinated, collaborative, and cooperative response to finding pathways out of food insecurity" (ibid., p. 1).

### 3.3.2 School meals as a response to food insecurity

The "hidden costs" of food insecurity on individual and public health, social development and education pose a significant challenge for governments and organisations worldwide (FAO et al., 2020, p. ix). Most countries have developed some form of school meals, "the world's most widely provided form of social protection" (UNESCO, 2018), simultaneously improving attendance rates and children's capacity and capability for learning (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 3). Intergovernmental organizations like the World Bank, the World Health Organisation and the United Nations promote school feeding strategies and support their implementation, especially in the Global South. UNESCO estimates that one in five children across the world receive a meal at school every day (2018). School food programmes have varied purposes: some aim to increase school attendance, others to raise nutritional intake or reduce food costs for low-income families. They do this by providing lunch, sometimes breakfasts, and/or commodities like fruit or milk (Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3943). Ultimately, "school meals represent a transfer of the value of the food distributed to households" (FAO et al., 2020, p. xvi). The 'complex constellation' of school food policies, guidelines, supply chains, public attitudes, facilities etc. also vary, driven by its purpose and wider context (Nölting et al. 2009a, cited in

Løes & Nölting, 2011, p. 92; Prättälä, 2003, p. 1). The degree of governments' responsibility for funding and organisation also differs, and many collaborate with businesses and charities. Private, for-profit involvements could include provision of food or related educational resources, so "given their influence in education, [private companies] must be held to account effectively", and "effective school feeding programmes require government oversight" (UNESCO, 2018).

Much of the research focusses on Global South countries, where interventions to improve severe food deficiencies and malnutrition have brought significant benefits in attendance, engagement, achievement and other outcomes (Makudi, 2003; Whaley, 2003, cited in Quigley & Watts, 2005, pp. 5-6). The primary purpose of school meal programmes in these countries is to alleviate the experiences and effects of malnutrition and scarcity, and encourage families to send their children to school, knowing they will get a full meal (World Food Program, 2013, 2015 cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3943). International organizations and relief agencies often support the provision of food through schools in these countries in place or in addition to central and local government funding. In 2011, More than 368 million children received food at school across 70 low and medium-low to middle income countries (Jomaa et al., 2011, World Food Program, 2013, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3943)

This thesis is interested in New Zealand and Finland, comparatively wealthy countries with plentiful food. A focus on countries in the Global North is still interesting and worthwhile, as the concentrated presence of food deprivation and malnutrition in certain groups of society has significant implications for social equity and a public health challenge in the form of obesity and diabetes (Quigley & Watts, 2005, p. 7). Similar to the Global South, the primary aim of government and community supported school meals in Global North countries was originally to soothe the experiences and effects of food scarcity and encourage attendance. This has changed over time (Pollitt et al., 1978, and Ng et al., 2014, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3943) and its evolution can be described in three phases:

1. Phase One: Food insecurity was the greatest challenge in the mid 19$^{th}$ century, and the accessibility but not necessarily the quality of all food provided was most important (Passmore and Harris, 2004, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3944). This phase developed alongside

the revolution of industrial food production in the late 1800s and intensified in the aftermath of World War Two (Oddy, 2013, Levine, 2008, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3943). The effects of food scarcity were alleviated for many, so the aims of school meal programmes changed (Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3943).

2. Phase Two: From the 1970s the focus has turned to improving nutrition, quality and variety of food, in part as a response to obesity and related diseases. Governments developed nutrition policies over these decades, including guidelines for food in schools (see Pietinen et al., 2010, Caraher et al., 2009; Morgan and Sonnino, 2008, US Dept of Agriculture and US Dept of Health and Human Services, 2010; Department of Education, 2014 cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3943)
3. Phase Three: We are entering this phase as global and local concerns about food production, intensive farming, carbon emissions and food waste come to the forefront of government and public discourse. With inequalities shifting burden onto low income groups, school meals can supplement the insufficient or poor-quality food consumed by these children (Alaimo, 2011, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3947). It is a challenge to balance these different concerns (Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3945).

### 3.4 The potential of school meals to alleviate child hunger and support learning

The Finnish government promotes the benefits of protecting children by ensuring they have a warm and nutritious meal each day. Kouluruokailu is considered important for students to fully access education, increase attendance, and contributes to the local and national economies. For Finland, “school feeding goes far beyond the plate of food, producing high returns in education, gender equality, health and nutrition, social protection, and economic and agricultural development.” (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 3). This is described in more detail in Chapter 5.

To test the assumption that school meals can help to reduce the impact of family background on education and address the complex challenges of malnutrition and obesity, this section draws from syntheses of systematic and non-systematic reviews covering over 100 school meal evaluations and related studies (Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3950; Quigley & Watts, 2005, pp. 9-12). References include qualititative and naturalistic studies as well as more tightly controlled lab-based research to benefit from the different insights they provide and “gain the fullest understanding of how nutrition impacts on learning outcomes” (Quigley & Watts., p. 9). It is

difficult to make strong conclusions about the impact of school meals on certain indicators like long-term health effects or financial benefits. There are multiple contributing factors and contextual influences on food intake and educational achievement, and a lack of systematic and longitudinal evaluations needed to illuminate correlations. Smaller reviews and studies use a variety of research methods and frameworks, and these can be difficult to replicate or compare meaningfully. Most research available focussed on only one factor or part of the relationship rather than the whole picture, and evaluations tended to focus on more easily measurable but less valuable indicators: the availability of healthy food and its intake. Additionally, some studies are funded or otherwise supported by corporations like food producers, and their interpretation and presentation of results could be biased (Quigley & Watts, 2005, pp. 8-9, 31; Oostindjer et al., 2017, pp. 3944-3945, 3951). Despite limitations, overall research shows school meals improve children's nutritional intake and alleviate hunger, which supports improved social and learning behaviours and achievement. (Quigley & Watts, 2005, p. 31; Oostindjer et al., 2017, pp. 3945-3951).

### 3.4.1 The unique opportunity for food provision in schools

Schools are uniquely placed for exposing and providing healthy food to society’s children en masse and forming positive food behaviours in critical years. Regular time is set aside for eating in the school day, integrated learning opportunities are possible, and the social environment can help form healthy habits while children are young (Birch, 1999; Nicklaus et al., 2005; Niklaus & Remy, 2013, Rozin, 2007, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, pp. 3943, 3947; Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 3). What and when a child eats is influenced by their family situation and other external factors, but school policies, environments and initiatives can improve their healthy food intake and improvements in attendance, engagement and learning (Quigley & Watts, 2005, pp. 14, 22-23). A number of these are outside the school’s control such as a child’s individual tastes, access to food at home and parents’ knowledge about health. Other factors, such as school environment, nutrition education, and availability of desirable food can be influenced through school policies, food and nutrition curriculum and eating environments (ibid., pp. 14, 22-23). Initiatives are most successful when multiple complementary strategies are used in a whole school approach, and when they are given time to review, refine and improve (Manios, 2002, cited in Quigley & Watts, 2005, p. 22).

Food in schools provides valuable learning opportunities in a culturally relevant setting about healthy and sustainable eating habits, different foods and how to prepare them, nutrition and science, agriculture and horticulture. Evaluations show improvements such as healthier eating habits are more significant where there are complementary initiatives such as integration of food and nutrition education in the curriculum, and practical involvement of students in the programme as part of their learning. Not seizing the opportunity for learning and integrating a school food initiative with the curriculum underutilises and undermines its potential benefits (see Nicklaus et al., 2005, Niklaus & Remy, 2013, Stone, 2007, Weaver-Hightower, 2011, Harper & Wells, 2007, Harper et al., 2008, Atkins and Atkins, 2010, Hoijer et al., 2013, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, pp. 3947-3948).

The school social environment is an important factor for success. Countries like Finland, Italy, and Japan have emphasized cultural and social lessons in the context of school meals. Interpersonal dynamics, social structures and positive encouragement from others support the formation of shared norms and values about eating habits, social interactions and manners over mealtime, and sustainability issues such as waste. Abundant research shows habits learned in childhood and to a lesser extent in adolescence persist over time, and evidence suggests friends, peers, educators, and other staff have an important role to encourage acceptance of new foods and positively influence choices (see Birch, 1980, Kubik et al., 2003, Neumark-Sztainer et al., 1999, Shannon et al., 2002, Halfon et al., 2014, French et al., 2004, Perry et al., 2003, Sallis et al., 2003, Higgs & Thomas, 2016, Houlcroft et al., 2014, Robinson et al., 2013, Salvy et al., 2012, Dishion & Tipsord, 2011, Lowe et al., 2004. Story et al., 2002, Harper et al., 2008, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, pp. 3948-3949).

Schools can also influence the potential success of a school meal initiative by optimizing the food and eating environment in line with recommendations from research. Nutrition and eating behaviors are influenced by the environment, whether in the presentation of the food or in the physical surroundings such as overcrowding or limited time. Many schools use nudging interventions to create an environment that facilitates healthy and sustainable food habits. Based on

insights from psychology and behavioral economics that individuals react against being forced to eat healthy food, nudging interventions make healthy foods more attractive, convenient and accessible, and normalized. School policies to enhance the eating environment include nutrition guidelines, restricting marketing and provision of unhealthy food in schools, providing information about food provided and managing waste. More forceful measures may be needed, including banning certain foods (see Wansink and Chandon, 2014, Hanks et al., 2012, Hansen et al., 2016, Skov et al., 2013, Lie et al., 2014, Roberto et al., 2014, Rozin et al., 2011, Adams et al., 2015. cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, pp. 3949-3950; French, 2004, Dwyer, 2002, Carter, 1999, Hannan, 2002, cited in Quigley & Watts, 2005, pp. 5, 17-18).

### 3.4.2 The benefits of school meals for children's diet, learning, behaviour and families

Most of the research evaluating the impact of school meals is focused on increased consumption of healthier foods, and most show school food interventions are successful where they have clear policies, providing a range of food combined with other interventions (van Cauwenberghe et al., 2009, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3945). Most of the 18 studies methodically reviewed by Jaime and Locke (2009, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3945) found positive uptake of fresh and healthier foods through school meals programmes with dietary guidelines and increased access. Another review of 30 studies estimated about 70 percent of fruit and vegetable initiatives in schools were successful and improved consumption was largely maintained overtime (De Sa & Lock, 2008 cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3945), but more fruit is consumed than vegetables, though other studies found short term interventions did not have longer term behavior changes (Evans et al., 2012 cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3945; Wells, 2005, cited in Quigley & Watts, 2005, p. 18). Evaluations of English school meal programmes found that nutrient and micronutrient intake improved (Spence et al. 2013, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3945), they were of superior quality to packed lunches from home (Evans t al., 2010, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3945), and reduced disparities of food consumed by children from different backgrounds (Michele, 2006, Michele & Jonathan, 2009, cited in Badri, 2014, pp. 55-56). Having the routine of a regular school meal every day also positively influenced children's eating habits outside of school (Tilles-Tirkkonen et al., 2011, pp. 2093–2094). Multi-strategy schemes involving curriculum programmes, parent and community involvement, as well as food supply initiatives were most successful, particularly where

provision was universal and long-term (Esping-Andersen, 2008, pp. 39, 41; FAO et al., 2020, p. xvi; Greenhalgh et al., 2007, Cohen et al., 2014, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3945; Auld, 1999, Manios, 2002, Wells, 2005 Quigley & Watts, 2005, pp. 15, 18–20)

A resounding and consistent finding across multiple studies reviewed was the concerning rate of absenteeism and truancy among school aged children who were undernourished, and the impact of school meals programmes to turn this around. For example, the English "Feed Me Right" campaign decreased absenteeism by 80 percent (Badri, 2014, p. 55), and improved student attendance is reported as a benefit of food provision at school in Finland and New Zealand. Programmes to feed students at school are proven to improve attendance across Global North and South countries, and this relationship is clear even when studies adjusted for confounding variables (see Cueto, 2001 & Nutrition-Cognition National Advisory Committee, 1998, Rampersaud, 2004, Shemilt, 2004, Dunifon, 2003, Kleinman, 2002, Wahlstrom 1999, Dept of Children, Families and Learning, 1998, Alaimo, 2001, Powney, 2000, Murphy, 1998, in Quigley & Watts, 2005, pp. 32-33).

There is growing evidence of improved behavior with school meals, and this reflects feedback from school leaders and teachers trialling Ka Ora, Ka Ako. Three out of five studies reviewed by Quigley and Watts showed school food interventions had a positive impact on students participation and behavior (Murphy, 1998, Wahlstrom, 1999, Kleinman, 2002, cited in Quigley & Watts, 2005, p. 28-29), and the other two concluded initiatives "neither helped nor hindered", noting the strong relationship of family background and other factors (Dunifon, 2003, Shemilt, 2004, in Quigley & Watts, 2005, p. 29). Evaluations of American breakfast and lunch programmes showed students' learning and social behaviors improved, ultimately supporting their educational achievement (Harvard & Tufts Universities, 2000, Appendix 3, cited in Badri, 2014, p. 54). If children are well fed and nourished in their school day their engagement with learning and regulating their behavior can improve, teachers can focus on the core of their job, and disruption for others in the classroom can be minimized (Esping-Andersen, 2006, p. 399; Thrupp & Lupton 2006, p. 315; Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3942).

School meals can positively influence the lives and wellbeing of children's parents and families. For example, not having to provide one meal a day can free up finances and time, and may support parents back into the workforce (Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3951). When and what families eat could also change, for example Norway's 'Oslo Breakfast' was a school meal initiative that influenced a whole nation's eating habits (Lyngø, 1998 and 2003, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3951). Qualitative surveys of Finnish children found those who ate a balanced school lunch also ate well at home (Tilles-Tirkkonen et al., 2011, p. 2095). It is helpful for parents and families to be involved in school food programmes to align healthy habits at home in school (Schwartz and Brownell, 2007, cited in Oostindjer, et al., 2017, p. 3951; Caballero, 2003, Himes, 2003, Manios, 2002, Dwyer, 2002, cited in Quigley & Watts, 2005, pp. 22-23).

### 3.4.3 Challenges and limitations of school meals in the Global North

School food programmes are more clearly successful in places where children live with extreme poverty and deprivation such as initiatives in Bangladesh and China (Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3944). In 2007 an analysis of school meal programmes across the world found substantial improvement in children's health and learning in low and middle income countries, but evaluations of programmes in wealthier countries were less conclusive and challenged by the complicated addition of obesity and other diseases (Kristjansson et al., 2007, Greenhalgh et al., 2007, Cappaci et al., 012; Chriqui et al., 2014, Jamie and Lock, 2009, Harper and Wells, 2007, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, pp. 3944-3945). Some studies, like the unique longitudinal review of the US national lunch programme between 1946 and 2013, suggest a worrying relationship between school meals and obesity (Peterson, 2013, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3945). However, the food provided in American school lunches compared to Finnish meals tends to be of lesser quality.

The question of school meals must be considered in the global context challenged by intensive farming, overconsumption, environmental pollution, climate change and food scandals (see Knudson et al., 2006; McIntyre et al., 2009; Morgan et al., 2006, cited in Løes & Nölting, 2011, pp. 91-92). Debates and research about school meals in this 'Phase Three' are increasingly interested in potential harms and benefits for health, waste, and sustainability (Oostindjer et al.,

2017, p. 3944). The potential for food waste with school food programmes has become a key focus this millennium and is a contentious topic in the debate in New Zealand currently (Guthrie and Buzby, 2002; Smith and Cunningham-Sabo, 2014, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, pp. 3945-3946). Sustainability-focused initiatives like garden to table models are attractive and can enhance student learning and willingness to try new foods if they participate in its production, but these can be expensive and require land and labour (Blair, 2009, Ozer, 2007 cited in Oostindjer, et al., 2017). Strategies to promote more consumption of organic and local or seasonable foods are more successful when connected with other interventions in a whole school approach, and with concepts like 'sustainable nutrition' (Eberle et al., 2006, p. 54, cited in Løes & Nölting, 2011, p. 91; Morgan and Sonnino 2007, Mikkelsen et al., 2006, cited in Løes & Nölting, 2011, p. 92). An additional challenge is that sustainability goals may not always align with health goals. For example, a campaign for reduced food wastage may undermine health goals if children are encouraged to eat food on their plate, or healthier food may not be available locally so must be transported from a distance (Guthrie and Buzby, 2002, Levine, 2008, cited in Oostindjer, et al., 2017, p. 3946). Decision makers have to weigh up different goals and the limitations of their capacity to triage and prioritise issues like this.

The question of universal or targeted approach is debated across the world. Many initiatives, like those in New Zealand, are targeted towards underprivileged children whose families are charged little or nothing. In some places, they allow children outside the target group to pay for the food. Others, such as the model in Finland, are "offered universally to any child who wishes to participate at no cost" (Quigley & Watts, 2005, p. 21). Breakfast programmes in schools increase the odds that students will have a morning meal, especially if universally provided (Hyndman, 2000 & Schoenthaler, 2000, cited in Quigley & Watts, 2005, p. 22). Studies of British and American initiatives that adopted a universal provision after limited success with a targeted approach found student participation went up, and authors proposed the stigma of being singled out for charity constrain the reach and efficacy of targeted programmes (Murphy, 1998 & Kleinman, 2002, in Quigley & Watts, 2005, p. 21). The barrier of stigma and shame which children and their families experience for accessing free food while their peers do not is significant (Raine et al., 2003; Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk, 2009, cited in Oostindjer et al., 2017, p. 3947). When shared mealtimes were universal, inclusive and seen as an "opportunity for positive social interaction and learning" they were more likely to be beneficial, whereas the stigma of targeted programmes and/or a socially unsafe eating environment may undermine the

potential benefits of added nutrition on behaviour (Quigley & Watts, 2005, p. 29). The better approach, if consensus can be built to support it, is a universally provided intervention with targeted additions for equity (Esping-Andersen, 2008, pp. 39, 41).

### 3.5 Critical success factors for a school meals programme

The following success factors for a school meals initiative were consistently highlighted in the literature reviewed in this and following chapters:

1. Broad support across society and political parties to sustain the investment over changing political contexts.
2. Legislation enshrines the policy and regulates cooperation between decision makers, government agencies, business, organisations and other actors, with clear roles and responsibilities.
3. Evidence-based nutritional guidelines, aligned to national guidelines and strategies.
4. Sufficient resourcing for quality and quantity of food, and staff etc. This may come from different sources but is more sustainable with committed government investment.
5. Movement towards universal provision with additional support targeted to under-resourced groups to increase access and reduce stigma.
6. A human and child rights lens to highlight and address the structural causes of food insecurity, as well as its effects.
7. Use of multiple, integrated strategies are more likely to cover the need and meet objectives.
8. Flexibility to align with the national context, cultures, system structure, and unique challenges and opportunities.
9. Part of a schoolwide approach with involvement from teachers and staff, students, parents, and communities.
10. Use as pedagogical tool and integrated with food and nutrition education in curricula.
11. Student voice and participation, including experiential learning.
12. Varied and attractive food with opportunity for student selection and choice, with new foods introduced gradually.
13. Attractive and spacious, comfortable eating environments.

14. A holistic sustainability strategy - environmental, social, cultural and economic. For example, providing surplus food to communities to reduce waste and support children's families.
15. Monitoring and evaluation is carefully planned and used to inform improvements in line with research, using a range of indicators beyond the economic, and noting complexities of multiple factors and drawing causal relationships.
16. Trials must be given sufficient time for results to be seen, particularly in longer-term achievement and health benefits.

# 4 Chapter 4: Tension in the ideological debate about individual/parent or collective/government responsibility for food in schools

The previous chapter provided a broad evidence base on the relationship between poverty, hunger and learning, and on the potential of school meals to address the problem. However, despite international evidence, what to do about it and who should be responsible remains contested. The following section maps key perspectives and arguments of compenting ideologies in global economic, social and education policies over the last three decades. It is organised in two parts, and reflects the division of views about government and individual responsibility in the New Zealand parliamentary debates critically analysed in Chapter 9. It is not possible to provide the depth or nuance desired in this thesis due to necessarily limited size and scope, but this chapter aims to provide a foundation of understanding and support engagement with the analysis of the debate speeches.

The challenge of limiting the potential for education to be influenced by inequalities and reproduce them itself confronts us with two different views about who should be responsible: individuals and their families, or collective society through the government. With so many potential factors it is difficult to determine cause and effect, and this question of how much control we have over our destiny plagues the debate and is perhaps unanswerable. Individuals' capacity, resources, agency and freedom to make and act on choices to fulfill their aspirations is hindered or supported by their backgrounds and events beyond their control. Understanding structural influences on the opportunities and barriers in our lives can help us to understand better our own position in society and inform our action towards change. Individuals need resources to free their capacity to act and improve their lives, and governments have a role to play and the distribution of resources for greater social equity and inclusion (Rata, 2009, pp. 103, 114-115).

Any investigation about quality and equity in an education system must consider the values and purposes that drive it (Biesta, 2009, Mathison, 2009, Day & Johansson, 2008, Carr and Hartnett, 1996, cited in Hannele Niemi & Isopahkala-Bouret, 2015, p. 131). These are intimately linked with the tension between State and individual responsibility for education, and food in schools

within that. This tension goes back to the Enlightenment, modernisation and industrialization, the emergence of representative democracies, and the establishment of the welfare state. These developments influenced perspectives and assumptions about human nature and society; individuals grew to be seen as agents in their own lives, making decisions with reason and rationality to improve their situations and contribute voluntarily to civil and political society (Kettunen, 2013, p. 3; Popkewitz, 1998, p. 19). Liberal and Marxist traditions share this view of individuals as actors in their own lives, and have "an emancipatory interest in the power of human consciousness in social world to break through all exogenous constraints" (Soja, 1989, p. 30, in Popkewitz, 1998, p. 22; Biesta, 2004, p. 55).

However, they are differently positioned on many other issues, as outlined in this chapter. For example, the concept of development is understood as linear in the liberal tradition, whereas the Marxist sees it as dialectical (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 22). These traditions have also led to distinctive sets of ideals and values underpinning a vision for society: "competition and preparedness for the labour market for the competitive state" that prizes and incentivizes individual responsibility, or "equality and participatory democracy for the welfare state" that values and accepts collective responsibility (Imsen et al., 2017, p. 4). We have created the 'market' and the government, and we need to determine the role and purposes of both to harness the potential benefits for all (Robert Reich, 2015, p. 218, cited in Rizvi, 2016, p. 9). A critical lens aligns with values, assumptions and arguments for collective responsibility, and the purpose to build consensus towards this way of thinking and acting, as has been done in Finland.

## 4.1 Individual, corporate and charity responsibility for feeding children at school: ideological perspectives and arguments

This ideological perspective descends from the 17th century ideas of Thomas Hobbes' individualist view of human nature and politics, "overlaid with 19th century social Darwinism". These doctrines see humans as "possessive individuals" who are "essentially the proprietor of their own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them", and inform the view of human nature as primarily self-interested and "directed toward the acquisition of wealth, status and power." While it is recognised that not every individual is driven by this personal ambition,

liberal theory commonly understands social interactions and organisation as governed by the self-interest of individuals (Lauder, 1990, pp. 4, 5)

### 4.1.1 Neoliberalism: centering the individual with an economic lens

The movement towards personal responsibility and individualism has spread to dominance across the world over the last 30 years, particularly in Global North and Anglo-Saxon countries (Grek et al, 2009, cited in Ball, 2010, p. 125). Failures of the Keyenesian welfare states to protect against global economic crises and the persistence of inequalities, geopolitical shifts and growing dissatisfaction with centrally managed economies and education systems saw many countries adopt reforms that embraced individualism, competition and decentralisation (Biesta, 2004; Björklund et al., 2005, p. 7; S. Ray, 2009, p. 25). Neoliberalism was posed as a solution to compounding crises, based on the belief that a free economic market would be more competent than the State to provide services and distribute resources (Desjardins, 2015, pp. 141–142; Ray, 2009, p. 25; Wiborg, 2013, pp. 408). More than a concept, 'neoliberalism' is a loose collection of ideas, values, assumptions, discourse and policies that can be flexibly applied (Harris, 2017, p. 56). Clearly defining this is difficult as it is interpreted and enacted in policy in a variety of ways. Essentially, a neoliberal perspective understands social interactions through an economic lens (Rizvi, 2016, p. 4). Proponents promote deregulation, privatisation, and State withdrawal from providing social services "...to bring all human action into the domain of the market" (Harvey, 2005, p. 3). Fiscal responsibility and economic benefit as central concerns are prioritized over, or reframe, social or environmental concerns (Harvey, 2005, p. 3; Harris, 2017, pp. 55-56). To measure this benefit, accountability mechanisms ensure 'economy, efficiency, and effectiveness' (Power, 1994, p. 34, cited in Ball, 2010, p. 126). Other branches of thought and movements influencing economic and social policy emerged in the same era, including the New Right, neoconservatism, and neo managerialism. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably, though they are distinct concepts. Their important differences are beyond the scope of this thesis, but they share relevant key principles and assumptions outlined in this section and interacting through the debate (Levin & Young, 1997, p. 9). For simplicity I use the term neoliberalism but note this nuance.

Neoliberalism centres the agency of the individual and their own responsibility for bettering their life chances through their own decisions and actions (Harris, 2017, p. 55; Harvey, 2005, p. 3; Lauder, 1990, p. 5). Individuals' freedoms and liberties are key values, particularly freedom to own private property, to work for prosperity, and for these to be free from interference of government (Harris, 2017, p. 56; Middleton et al., 1990, p. ix). In this way, the ideal individual is a productive and self-managing member of society, "largely motivated by the economic interests, [and] always seeking to strengthen their competitive positioning within markets" (Rizvi, 2016, p. 4). They are held accountable through assessment and measurement through tools like tests and performance-based pay (Shore & Wright, 1999, p. 559, Falk, 1999, p. 19, Power, 1994, p. 34, cited in Ball, 2010, p. 126). These ideals are consistent with capitalism which also promotes individual self-interest and economic growth, and breaks down worker and broader social solidarity through discourse and policies. A focus on individualism means collective organisations like unions are not well regarded (Harris, 2017, p. 56). This is to encourage individuals' hard work, self-reliance and independence to improve their situations, and an extreme articulation of this is the view that "in order to succeed, the poor most of all need the spur of their own poverty" (Gilder, 1981, cited in Lauder, 1990, p. 5).

*The free market, competition, privatization, and role of corporations*

This ideological perspective contends that only a truly free market can stimulate competition, and, through that, innovation and efficiency (Harris, 2017, p. 55; Harvey, 2005, p. 3; Lauder, 1990, p. 5). For this reason, public services should be privatized at least partially, to reduce responsibility and red tape of government, and to encourage efficiency (Harris, 2017, p. 56; Rizvi, 2016, p. 3). It is thought competition along with accountability measures and the requirement of individuals and public services to perform against them will encourage the desired traits. Cynically, the pressure can be considered as a strategy to destabilize the public sector and allow takeover of private interests (Shore & Wright, 1999, cited in Ball, 2010, p. 125).

*Smaller government and withdrawn role of the State*

With the raising up of individual freedoms and market efficiency as core values, a strong State is considered slow and bureaucratic, an intrusive force in individuals lives, "stifling initiative, inhibiting choice, and fostering drab uniformity" (Middleton, Codd & Jones, 1990, p. ix; Harris, 2017, p. 55; Lauder, 1990, p. 5). A key tenet of neoliberalism is the limited role of the State or government (Harvey, 2005, p. 3). This way of thinking has become widely held by advocates

promoting a set of ideals and values as ideal, presenting the State as a barrier to these ideas, and the free market as a vehicle to achieve them (Harris, 2017, p. 61). Some support a limited state because they believe responsibility for funding and organizing social services should not fall too much on its shoulders (Rizvi, 2016, p. 3). Others view State control of the economy as a threat to personal freedoms (Friedman, 2002, cited in Desjardins, 2015, p. 139). Savas outlines five explanations for pursuit of smaller government (2000, cited in Rizvi, 2016, p. 3):

1. Pragmatic reason - public spending has grown too much and cannot be sustained, but privatization can alleviate financial stress and support productivity and efficiency.
2. Economic theory - The State is less relevant and needs are changing in an increasingly globalized and trading world. Individuals and societies in wealthier, freer economies can take more and better responsibility for their own lives and affairs.
3. Ideological view - Government is becoming too powerful and stepping on individual liberty and has its own interest in maintaining power.
4. Philosophical belief - Government restrictions dampen possibilities and incentives for creative innovation, and curb possibility for growth.
5. Populist argument – The people should have freedom to identify and act on their own needs and interests, independently from a big and disconnected government.

Most Global North countries' governments maintain the core responsibility for such services despite varying extents of privatization, but the relationship has become a transactional one with taxpayers as consumers of the services provided and as such, 'value for money' has become a central concern (Biesta, 2004, p. 57; Ray, 2009, p. 17). The new role of the State is to create the conditions for the market to thrive (Harvey, 2005, p. 3).

Those who called for a smaller role of Government additionally advocate for lower taxes, especially on the earnings of individuals and companies (Harris, 2017, p. 56). Cuts to social services come from concerns about individuals and families relying too much on them, becoming dependent, and bloating the system. To save costs, responsibility for social services is shared with private, corporate and community sectors to different extents (Harris, 2017, p. 55). This perspective prefers a targeted approach to the provision of social services such as school meals, as they seem to be cost-effective by limiting spending on smaller numbers. In lifting the conditions of under-resourced people, it argues targeted provision can reduce disparities in education

outcomes for that group and bring a clearer return on investment (Esping-Andersen, 2008, p. 39).

*Decentralisation, deregulation and privatization of education*

Education reforms in line with these values and ideals were promoted to lift dropping student achievement, and a crisis in education (Lauder, 1990, p. 2). From this view, education and other social institutions were not reaching their potential due to unnecessary government restrictions and the power of unions. Supporters argued education should decentralized, regulated by a competitive market with less government responsibility for greater flexibility, higher outcomes, and to 'do more with less' (Levin & Young, 1997, p. 9; Singlair, 1989, p. 389, OECD, 1995, p. 8, Taylor et al., 1997, p. 84, cited in Simola et al., 2002, p. 253). Liberal economist Milton Friedman believed the competitive enterprise of for-profit providers would "revolutionise" education and force failing schools to improve to "retain their clientele" (Friedman, 1997, p. 341) (p. 341). Fear of totalitarian control over knowledge was also a complaint against state education, but whether this fear was relevant to welfare states is questionable (Desjardins, 2015, p. 141). It is important to note there is debate over how much this crisis was manufactured (Susan St John, cited in O'Connor & Holland, 2013, p. 142; Bierliner & Biddle, 1994, cited in Sleeter, 2008, p. 1947-1957). The spread of these ideas, values and managerial approaches to education is often termed the Global Education Reform Movement (Hargreaves et al, 2001, Rinne et al., 2002, Sahlberg, 2004, Aho et al., 2006, cited in Sahlberg, 2007, pp. 150-151). A lot of debate about education in this context focuses on whether it is a public or a private good, but some argue that this dichotomy has changed to which benefits of education are prioritized; economic benefits versus social and others (Hensley et al., 2013, p. 555).

The economic lens views parents as clients and children as consumers with the freedom to choose their school (Biesta, 2004, pp. 57-58). Education is principally seen as a private commodity that can be selected and consumed by individuals and their families, and as an essential way to bolster human capital to meet the needs of the economy (Lauder, 1990, p. 11; Middleton et al., 1990, p. ix). Human capital theory understands the transactional relationship of education as necessary and just, because individuals gain benefits and earning power from their education so it is right they personally invest themselves (McLean, 2009, p. 57; Rizvi, 2016, p. 4). This

perspective values economic drivers in education that see the role of school as developing individual skills for the workplace and contribution to the economy. In this way education can still be seen as a public good, but with a focus on economic benefits that assumes other benefits will follow (see Shaw, 2010, Baum & McPherson, 2011, Hirt, 2007, Marginson, 2007, McMahon, 2009, Mettler, 2005, cited in Hensley et al., 2013, pp. 553-556). The financial value and impacts of schooling are easier to measure and justify than less tangible values like 'empathy', and economic returns are clearer than social ones (Hensley et al., 2013, p. 555).

Education systems are assumed to be more flexible, effective and efficient with less government intervention and more competition and choice (Lauder, 1990, p. 11; Lauder & Hughes, 1999, pp. 4-20 cited in Simola et al., 2002, p. 252). Governments influenced by these ideas withdraw or dismantle their responsibility, investment and power over education in various ways and to varying extents (Simola et al., 2002, p. 261). For example, many cut funding and raise fees, especially in higher education (Desjardins, 2015, pp. 141-142). This decentralization and reorganizing the management of education systems decreases distinction between the public and private, and can be seen as a change "from government to governance" (Ball, 2010, p. 124).

The competition brought by privatisation is supposed to encourage institutions to improve their students' achievement at lower cost (Lieberman, 1993, 1985, Starr, 1987, Brown & Contreras, 1991, Whitty, 1997, p. 33, cited in Haché, 1999, p. 114). The concern about value for money has led to stricter accountability and inspection through student assessments, evaluations of services, financial incentives and penalties (Biesta, 2004, p. 57). This has led to a narrower quantitative focus on assessing teaching and learning. Student education outcomes and performance are based on standardized measures both nationally and internationally assessed. Literacy and numeracy are the focus as core foundational skills that can be clearly assessed over subjects such as the arts and social sciences. Schools are held accountable to effectively and efficiently improve their students' performance (Sahlberg, 2007, pp. 150-151). In this way, the market can shape the purpose of education and content of curriculum (Biesta, 2004, pp. 57-58). This focus on measurement and assessment "validat[es] the primacy of [education's] economic value" (Brancaleone & O'Brien, 2011, p. 510).

### 4.1.2 Social liberalism and the Third Way

The neoliberal and social liberal approaches both originate from classical Liberal political thought and consider responsibility for people's lives and circumstances primarily sitting with individuals and their families. Unlike neoliberalism, however, which advocates for little government involvement and a freer market, social liberalism accepts the role of government to improve people's circumstances, and "then it is up to individuals [and families] to make use of those circumstances to improve their own lives" (Rata, 2009, p. 101). Charities, voluntary and community groups, and corporations also have a role in equalizing society, with or without government support or collaboration (ibid.).

A sort of toned down 'progressive' neoliberalism, or a 'middle ground between capitalism and socialism' emerged in the 1990s and 2000s as 'left wing' governments under Tony Blair in the UK and Bill Clinton in the US pulled back on some of the swift privatization of their predecessors in the 1980s as negative impacts surfaced. Centrist and centre-left politicians influenced by the Third Way recognized the potential dangers of dismantling the State, but were less favorable towards collective movements than their predecessors (Harris, 2017, pp. 270-271). This position is pragmatic, recognizing that governments often do not have the capacity to bear the weight of cost and responsibility to provide social services including education, and there is a role for the private sector to contribute to its aims (Rizvi, 2016, p. 9)

### 4.1.3 Strategies for hegemony and dominance of perspective and practice

This perspective is framed as rational and necessary to maintain its dominance in public discourse and policy. In many places, focusing on the economic crisis of the 1970s allowed swift reform without the necessary discussion and debate in politics and society, and subsume them in a dominant discourse (Davies & Bansel, 2007, cited in Desjardins, 2015, p. 140). The failures of government were denounced, and neoliberal policies and strategies were presented as the only viable solution (Lauder, 1990, p. 2). This justified rapid privatisation, decentralisation and withdrawal of government responsibility for social services (Jessop, 2002, cited in O'Connor & Holland, 2013, p. 142) This narrative has normalized neoliberal ways of understanding the world and operating; they are painted as 'common' sense, logical and rational, and necessary for the economy with no feasible alternative (Harris, 2017, p. 55; Lauder, 1990, pp. 1-3; Rizvi,

2016, p. 4; Mundy, 2007, Rizvi & Lindgard, 2010, Soguel & Jaccard, 2008, cited in Simola et al., 2013, p. 615). Rizvi and Lindgard (2010) have termed this the 'neoliberal imaginary' that shapes the way we understand the world and imagine an ideal of how it ought to be (cited in Rizvi, 2016, p. 4).

## 4.2 Collective and government responsibility for feeding children at school: ideological perspectives and arguments

This strategy is challenged by advocates for more collective and government responsibility on issues such as ensuring all children are fed at school. Like the Liberal tradition focused on individual responsibility described above, they are influenced by ideas from the Enlightenment and understand humans as rational actors in their individual and social lives (Biesta, 2004, p. 55). There is great diversity in the beliefs and visions of those who support a collective approach, and different schools of thought vary in their perception of the State's role and ideal extent of involvement. Their vision of society is influenced by socialist thinkers like Marx, who emphasised the effect of material conditions on a person's opportunities and successes in life: individuals "make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past" (Marx in McLellan, 1977, p. 300, cited in Rata, 2009, p 102). In Western democracies, most may be considered as being a Social Democrat. A Social Democratic position supports redistributive government policies because the difference something like free and universal school meals can make to a child's circumstances will enable that child to make their own history as they please (Rata, 2009, p. 102). This perspective is more aligned with a critical lens than that outlined above; inequality as bad for everybody and individuals can only be liberated when all of society is free, so social policies should be built on compassion and focused on equity. This view is stronger and more widespread in Finland than it is in New Zealand.

### 4.2.1 Challenging neoliberal individualism and the dominance of the economic lens

Although presented as 'common sense', there are many critiques of the dominance of an economic lens on social and education policy. Contemporary critics against neoliberal reform in New Zealand questioned the narrative about the economic crisis requiring smaller government

and freer market and argued proponents of using this strategy to "create a legitimation crisis", camouflaging their own flawed theories by presenting the State and other culprits to blame (Lauder, 1990, p. 3). The flaws of neoliberalism and promotion of the individual over the collective has been shown all too clearly since the 1980s. They are presented as logical and the only way, but neoliberal assumptions and assertions are challenged with empirical evidence of structural inequities and the reality of people's lives (Lauder, 1990, pp. 2-3; Verger et al., 2016, cited in Rizvi, 2016, p. 3). Economists with a neoliberal lens are therefore criticized for explaining inequalities too theoretically and focusing too narrowly on financial over other matters (Banerjee & Newman, 1991, Becker & Tomes, 1979, Galor & Zeira, 1993, Grawe & Mulligan, 2002, Solon, 2004, cited in Breen & Jonsson, 2005, p. 237). The following paragraphs challenge the focus on individual responsibility and present the case for a collective response to social issues like child poverty and hunger through initiatives like universal school meals programmes.

The reforms centered on individual freedom and competition are argued to have "created a more self-interested society and chipped away at the idea of society with a shared destiny", with individuals more likely to act and vote on what benefits them personally (Harris, 2017, p. 13). Neoliberal values such as efficiency and competition undermine and displace "genuinely public values" for a 'Mercantile' society characterized by commercial and transactional relationships; (Foucault, 1970, p. 194, Yeatman, 1996, cited in Ball, 2010, p. 126). Labour is commodified, and individuals who are unemployed and seeking social assistance are sidelined in the public view and punished in the process (Lauder, 1990, p. 5).

The focus on individual responsibility can lead to damaging views of people who are already among the most vulnerable in society. In New Zealand, people who receive government benefits or food assistance are looked down upon by many as lazy for their own part in creating their circumstances. Individualist views about beneficiaries focus on the importance of paid employment to lift oneself out of poverty and assume many are out to cheat and exploit the system. These are propagated through discourse: in the speeches of politicians, opinion pieces from talk show hosts, explicit and subtle media framing, and on social media platforms. 'Beneficiary bashing' others 'us' from a homogenized 'them', dampening empathy and informing policies

that can create further harm. It also ignores the fact that most people receive government assistance in their lifetime like free public education and health care, various subsidies, and pensions (St John, 2015, cited in Harris, 2017, pp. 173-174). Branding all people who receive benefits with deficit descriptions like 'lazy' and 'irresponsible' is not an accurate reflection of the large majority of people who are struggling to make ends meet while being stigmatized by society and politicians (Caritas, 2010, Harris, 2017, p. 175). These views also inform their poor treatment through the bureaucratic welfare system, and countless stories tell of the barriers and stigma beneficiaries face in accessing support (Harris, pp. 174-175). The relative deprivation and wealthier countries like New Zealand, coupled with a dominant ideology that values individual responsibility, leads to shame and feelings of inferiority and those who are food insecure because dependency is seen as humiliating (Pollard & Booth, 2019, pp. 5-6). An individualist view dismisses the structural inequalities, racism, and effects of colonization that influence a person's material conditions.

Supporters of collective responsibility, however, argue for a focus on equity through policies like school meals programmes to benefit all children, though it is easier to identify the returns of government investment for individuals then it is for society. Such policies, particularly if they are universal in their application require commitment from governments and citizens to invest sufficient resources overtime. Nordic countries like Finland see these costs as worth the public investment (Esping-Andersen, 2008 pp. 22, 30).

### 4.2.2 The role of the State as representative of the collective

Challenging the neoliberal preference for smaller government and a diminished role of the State, a collective or Social Democrat view understands there are some functions only the State can effectively facilitate, namely redistribution, regulation, and steering. Neoliberalism and Third Way thinking in New Zealand has seen increased responsibilities placed on communities and charities to provide what the State otherwise could, such as food in schools. However, these initiatives are unable to operate at scale and meet the need in the way State provision can (Kelsey, 2015, cited in Harris, 2017, pp. 61-62). The State is uniquely placed to gather information and data about inequalities and address them by redistributing resources through society on a

national level, for example through levying taxes, creating jobs, and investing in social services. Governments are not motivated by profit in the way private companies must be, and operating at scale can mean better value for money in providing social services (Harris, 2017, pp. 62-64, 117). The State must regulate the economy through legislation to mitigate the creep of the market, irresponsible and unethical trading, and the pursuit of profit over other outcomes to the detriment of individuals in wider society. It also has an essential strategic role steering the economy and society through policies, targeting budgets, and coordinating agencies and other actors (ibid., pp. 68-69, 72-73). Some criticisms of the State in the 1980s were valid, so it is important that reconsideration of its role in this era involves representatives from across society: "[it] matters that we see it not as some aloof institution, but as reflective of the community instead" (ibid., p. 76). A representative democracy like Finland and New Zealand reflects the attitudes of voting society, and consensus is needed about the role of the State more generally in this challenging era, as well as on specific issues like ensuring children are fed at school through the State's redistribution, regulation, and steering functions.

Social consensus about the State's role and responsibilities providing social services like welfare, public education and health care has been pivotal in history. We take access to such services for granted in New Zealand and Finland, but in both places the State's responsibility for the welfare of its people has been determined through debate, commitment and concerted action as outlined in the following chapters (Harris, 2017, pp. 116-118). Welfarism is concerned with distribution of resources across society, and for social services to be universally available regardless of income (Biesta, 2004, p. 57). The welfare state in NZ and other Anglo-Saxon countries has been more threatened by neoliberalism then the Nordic countries like Finland. The Nordic States show redistribution can reduce poverty and mitigate the challenge of social inheritance by improving the circumstances of families and children through comprehensive provision and a whole-of-government approach (Erikson and Jonsson 1996, cited in Esping-Andersen, 2008, p. 25; Harris, 2017, pp. 116-118). They are also evidence that it is possible to create a welfare state that more effectively cares for the needs of its people while still being economically competitive (Desjardins, 2015, p. 140). Pollard and Booth (2019, pp. 6-8) have identified the conditions necessary for effective and coordinated action to alleviate food insecurity, and stress that government agencies, sectors and organisations must commit to a shared goal and work together with people on the ground. This requires understanding the problem and building consensus on both its existence and importance of tackling it. Governments have

a leading role to play, steering and coordinating these different actors towards a shared national vision of Zero Hunger.

The targeted approach to social services provision favoured by neoliberal ideologies can be criticized for the complexity of measuring who deserves support, and limited ability to reach those who may need support the most. Instead, supporters of a universal approach to providing services like school meals argue it is more successful because it reaches all children no matter their background. This approach favours equality, and win it includes extra supports for under-resourced children it upholds equity (Esping-Andersen, 2008, p. 39). A universal policy like Kouluruokailu can only be sustained with and breadth of support across society, particularly because of the shared financial investment and the difficulty of identifying success and measurement indicators. whether a government takes concerted action to address problems like child poverty and hunger on our vision and commitment (ibid., p. 41). This is the challenge for New Zealand as we continue to debate over the extent of provision and where the responsibility for it sits.

#### 4.2.3 Education as a public good favours equity and quality over choice and competition

From this position, education is understood to be a 'public good' that also benefits all of society, and not only economically. This contrasts with the individualist and neoliberal view of education as a private good, which has a narrow focus on what is valued and sidelines the social and moral purpose and benefits of education, asking 'is it useful, saleable, efficient'? The concept of education as a public good goes back to Plato, who saw its potential for promoting truth, beauty, virtue, and justice, and asks the questions 'is it true?' and 'is it just?' (Lyotard, 1984, cited in Ball, 2010, p. 126). The State has traditionally been responsible for educating its citizens, and education has a political and moral role because of its relationships with power and values, and its potential to reproduce or reduce inequalities (Giroux, 2016, p. 58; Gorard & Smith, 2004, p. 16). Competition, individualism and economic profit favoured over the democratic public good threatens the role of education as a promoter of democratic values and practices and a vehicle for equity (Giroux, 1998, p. 12; Karaba, 2016, p. 4).

In the last thirty years, the increased choice and competition in education has created and perpetuated inequalities; when education becomes a competition, only a few win (Lauder & Hughes, 1999, pp. 24-25, cited in Simola et a., 2002, p. 262). Critics of neoliberalism's economic lens argue growing inequalities show economic policy extends too far into education and other elements of society (Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011, p. 516). The individualist view is problematic for "totally neglect[ing] the social determination of educational choice", privileging those with money and the cultural capital who can best navigate the education system (Giroux, 1998, p. 13; Simola et al., 2002, p. 252). In systems characterized by privatization and parental choice, schools can also often select students for admission on achievement and/or financial measures, and such policies entrench social stratification despite stated aims (Haché, 1999, p. 114; Gordon, 2006, p. 155, Ellison, 2012, p. 129, Goodman & Burton, 2012, p. 503, cited in Kennedy, 2015, pp. 171–172; OECD, 2011, p. 1). Additionally, budget cuts to encourage efficiency reduce access to resources and place pressure on teachers and places of learning, and costs are shifted to students and families in higher education especially (Desjardins, 2015, pp. 141-142). Privatisation is often promoted to improve quality of education, but this is not reflected in international assessments. Indeed, the proudly public Finnish system is often top of the tables and boasts comparatively smaller achievement gaps between students from wealthy and poor backgrounds (Gorard & Smith, 2004, p. 23; OECD, 2011, p. 1). Finland has not been so influenced by neoliberalism as other countries like New Zealand and shows there is another way to achieve excellence and support social equity through education (Sahlberg, 2007, pp. 150-151).

The State has been influential in forming shared identities and values through public education systems in the modern nation state (Desjardins, 2015, p. 138). Indeed, universally provided education in the 19th century grew from a belief in education's role shaping a nations morals, attitudes, and identities (McLean, 2009, p. 57). When learners are "relegated to the role of economic calculating machines" and seen as commodities themselves (Giroux, 1998, p. 15), their "human development is arrested by the immediate need for exchangeability" (Brancaleone & O'Brien, 2011, p. 510). The focus on standardized high stakes testing to measure perceived ability and quality of education stifles teachers' autonomy to create engaging programmes and "shape the conditions under which future generations learn about themselves and their relations to others and the world" (Giroux, 1998, p. 16). Classroom dynamics and teachers' professionalism are also impacted by constant testing and focus on economic benefits, which

“dehumanises education” and devalues children by forcing them to conform, memorise selected content and compete. This limits their capacity for imagination and critical analysis, neglecting their development as citizens (H Giroux, 2016, pp. 12, 28; Hedges, 2011, cited in Hartlep & Porfilio, 2015, p. 307). Rather than serving as a production line into the workforce, education should be, according to John Dewey, “a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (1987, cited in Giroux, 1998, p. 12).

#### 4.2.4 A human rights and children's rights lens

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*“Without a recognition of, and emphasis upon, human rights, the philosophical basis for reducing inequalities in childhood is less secure. As a result, there is a risk that inequalities will not be properly addressed and poor children will not be able to participate fully in society”*

(The Children’s Commissioner’s Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty, 2012, p. 3)

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Centring children and viewing this issue with a human rights lens supports collective and goverment responsibility. Finland and New Zealand have signed and ratified all three accords that constitute the International Bill of Rights: The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is generally considered the foundation of international human rights law. The 1976 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of the same year build on the fundamental rights of the UDHR in more detail. Both countries are signatories to other treaties which provide more elaborate explanation and specific protection where needed, such as the 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRoC). As States Parties to these treaties, they are effectively bound “to respect, protect and fulfil” the human rights enshrined within them (United Nations, 1948; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1976; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1976; Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990).

Education, health, and adequate food are economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR), enshrined in Articles 16 and 22-27 of the UDHR. These include "the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of [themselves] and of [their] family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services" and right for support when individuals face a "lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond [their] control" (Article 25). The ICESCR emphasises in its preamble that "the ideal of free human beings enjoying freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his economic, social and cultural rights, as well as his civil and political rights". Article 10 emphasises the vulnerability of children and the special protections that should therefore be afforded to them, and the article following reinforces everyone's right to an "adequate standard of living for [themselves] and [their] family, including adequate food", and that all States party to the Covenant must act to make this right a reality. States should uphold the right for everyone in their society to be free from hunger, by implementing legislation and programmes to "improve methods of production, conservation and distribution of food… by disseminating knowledge of the principles of nutrition… to ensure an equitable distribution of world food supplies in relation to need".

Regarding children specifically, the Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines the right for all children to be able to attain the highest standard of health and living in Articles 24 and 27 respectively. Article 24 explicitly includes "the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water" to protect against ill-health and malnutrition, and that education about child health and nutrition should be available to all (Article 24). Article 27 of UNCROC recognizes the right of every child to an adequate standard of living, and that primarily parents or others who are responsible for the child should secure necessary living conditions for development, but says that "States parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shell in case of need provide material assistance and support programs, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing" (Article 27). Children are entitled special protection, and this extends to their family which "should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community" and secure the well-being of its members, especially children. Signalling the importance of parents, legal guardians and families in the lives of children, the Convention expects States to

“respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents...legal guardians” in Article 5. This centrality of family and the parents’ or guardians’ role is repeated throughout the document, including the primacy of parental responsibility to provide the conditions “within their abilities and financial capacities” for their children to enjoy a decent quality of life. However, the same Article also emphasises the responsibility of the State to assist parents and guardians in achieving this if needed, “particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing” (*Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1990).

The particular vulnerability of children and the special rights they are subsequently granted in these treaties must be at the front of political decisions. If a child does not have access to adequate food to sustain their health and well-being, and if problems related to hunger and malnutrition impact their ability to access education, then it can be argued that protection of these most basic rights has been neglected for this child. If we accept that a child’s circumstances are beyond their control and often that of their parents/guardians, who hold primary responsibility for the well-being of the child, then it falls to the State to secure their right to enough food. Removing the obstacle of hunger will also enable the child to better access education and enhance their access and participation in society.

The levels of protection afforded to any individual right in a given jurisdiction is determined by different factors, such as whether it is included in the constitution or if they have signed a binding human rights treaty making it directly applicable to that domestic context. Legal research on rights-based consistutionalism by Finnish academics discuss the influence of particular features of the political and legal culture of that context, which can hold “distinct ideologies or mentalities about the concept and purpose of law” that influence the extent of support for human rights norms and legislation protecting them (Lavapuro et al., 2011, pp. 505–506). For example, in a context wherein the public and governing officials “are committed to” the legal protection of human rights, arguments in support of such rights “typically received considerable weight, compared with societies and governments which hold up issues of national security and other ‘state-centred’ concerns about ‘the common good’”. The level of pluralism in a society can also determine the consensus or competing interpretations of human rights in

political and social discourse (ibid., p. 506). Chapters 6 and 8 discuss the domestic human rights situation in Finland and New Zealand.

#### 4.2.5 Strategies to promote more collective and government responsibility as the 'just' and 'right' thing to do

Advocates for more collective and government responsibility present research and evidence of social inequalities to support their arguments and frame their perspective as compassionate and just in comparison with individualist views. This strategy is used by social justice and human rights organisations, school leaders and teachers, political commentators and politicians who support a government-funded school meals programme. As an example and opportunity, Prime Minister Ardern's catchphrase 'Be Kind' has come into popular usage during New Zealand's COVID-19 response period (Howie, 2020).

# 5 Chapter 5: Finland's universal free school meals programme Kouluruokailu and the consensus that sustains it

## 5.1 Universal free school meals in Finland since 1948

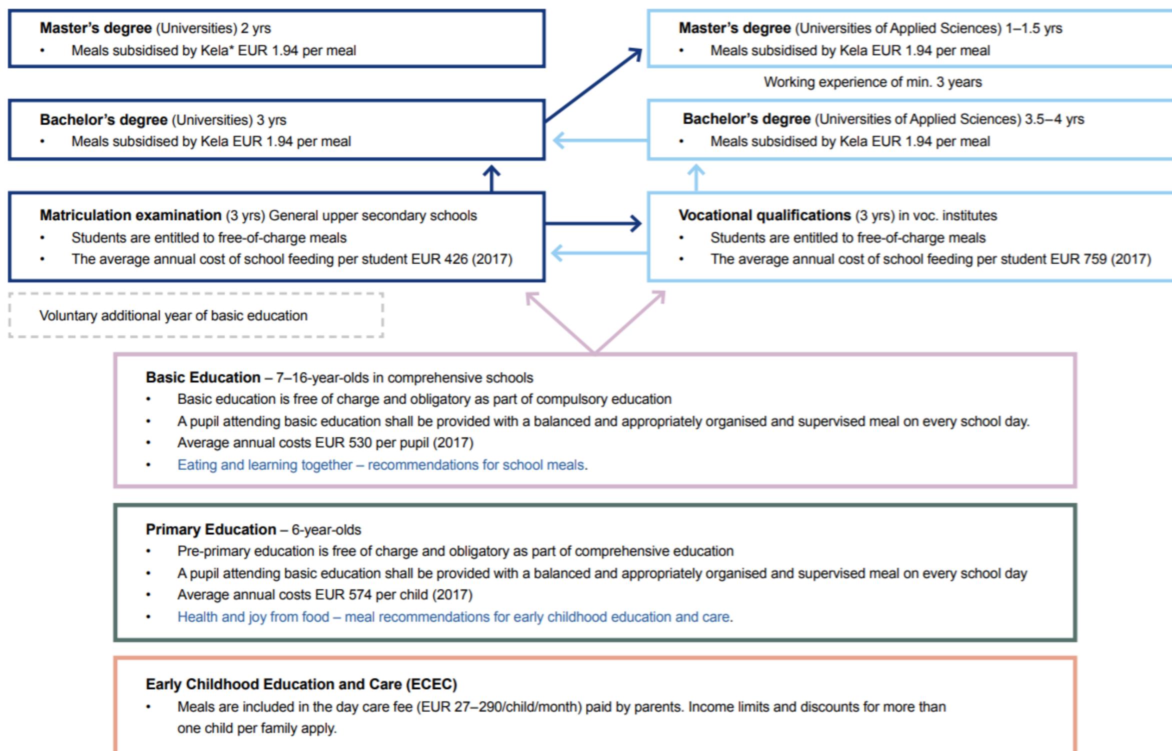
Finnish people are proud of their long-enduring universal free school meals programme Kouluruokailu, seeing it as essential and unique in the world (Løes & Nölting, 2011, p. 100; Pellikka et al., 2019, pp. 8, 30; Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Manninen, 2010, p. 173). The benefits of food in schools are widely acknowledged across the country, and successive governments have supported Kouluruokailu, acknowledging their joint responsibility in this shared investment to improve individual outcomes and equity in education and society. The Finnish State has supported food in schools for over a century. In 1913, subsidized school meals were targeted to underprivileged children, and in 1943 legislation was passed that entitled every elementary school child a free meal from 1948. This was gradually extended to secondary students, and since 1979 tertiary students have had their food subsidized (Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Manninen, 2010, p.172). The Basic Education Act enshrines government responsibility for balanced and supervised school meals that are free and universally available (13.6.2003/477).

Kouluruokailu aims to encourage students' attendance and learning at school, and to increase their consumption of healthy food like fruit and vegetables (JAMK University of Applied Sciences, n.d.; Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 3; Finnish National Board of Education, 2005, cited in Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Manninen, 2010, p. 172). The programme provides social protection for children from homes facing food insecurity, and although the Finnish government reports no undernutrition in the country, there are concerns about increasing rates of obesity (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 30). Young people are a vital group to target with such a programme, and schools are considered uniquely placed to support nutrition and learning healthy eating habits through daily balanced meals (Ministry of Social Affairs and Public Health, 2006, p. 55). More than the provision of food to fill hungry stomachs, Kouluruokailu is also a pedagogical tool and viewed as important for children's knowledge and social development, and their participation is encouraged to develop skills and values for citizenship and community engagement (Korkalo et al., 2019; Pellikka et al., 2019, pp. 3, 6, 12, 17, 26–27). A focus on holistic sustainability has developed in recent decades, and the Finnish government sees universal and free healthy school

meals as a contribution towards the Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger. Kouluruokailu promotes cultural sustainability through Finnish food culture, social sustainability by supporting communities with surplus food, and financial sustainability by operating at scale and mitigating long-term costs related to poverty and food insecurity (Roos and Mikkola, 2010 cited in Løes & Nölting, 2011, p. 100; Pellikka, 2019, pp. 3, 17). It is often offered as a key reason for success in PISA, and Finland has responded to international interest in this by publishing case studies and offering lessons about the universal model to other countries (Pellikka, 2019, pp. 3, 12, 30; Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Manninen, 2010, p. 173).

Finnish children receive meals at every level of the comprehensive school system, from pre-primary at 6 years old through to the end of senior secondary schooling at about 19 years old. In early learning centers, the cost of meals is included in the fairly nominal fee, and Kela social services subsidises meals in tertiary institutions (Korkalo et al., 2019; Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 13; Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Manninen, 2010, p. 172). In a nation of 5.5 million inhabitants, approximately 830,000 school meals are served daily across the system illustrated in the image below (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 6).

**Image 1. The Finnish educational system and implementation of school feeding** (Pellikka, 2019, p. 14)




## 5.2 Implementation of Kouluruokailu

The Finnish government recognizes a successful school meals programme that meets the necessary criteria for all children every day is a challenge that must be supported by clear roles and responsibilities, evidence-based guidelines and sufficient financial and staffing resources (Ministry of Social Affairs and Public Health, 2006, p. 55; Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 31). Legislation sets out roles and responsibilities: The Basic Education Act 628/1998; The General Upper Secondary Act 629/1998; and The Vocational Education and Training Act 630/1998, (cited in Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Manninen, 2010, p. 172). Central government is primarily responsible for steering through national policies and legislation, and multiple agencies work collaboratively. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry coordinates food policy, the National Nutrition Council provides education and guidance, and education agencies support food and nutrition education in the core curriculum (Pellikka et al., 2019, pp. 3, 13, 16). The provision of food in schools is decentralized and responsibility sits with municipal authorities who make decisions about local budget, practicalities of provision in the area, nutrition education in local curricula, and monitoring and evaluation (Pellikka et al., 2019, pp. 3, 7, 15; Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Manninen, 2010, p. 172; Waling et al., 2016, p. 2) 'Multilateral cooperation' across the school community is essential for effective school meal provision. Many

schools have health committees made up of teachers, students, health and food service providers. Food providers plan school lunch menus guided by national nutrition recommendations, and the cost and availability of food. School leaders guide the school's food culture as well as nutrition, food and health education in the curriculum. Teachers provide this education and supervise school meals, often eating with the children to model good habits. Food service staff in schools are responsible for provision, but local organisations and businesses are also often involved, and student and parent involvement is also encouraged (Pellikka et al., 2019, pp. 8, 15, 22, 24, 29; Waling et al., 2016, p. 2).

School meal preparation and provision models vary across municipalities according to local needs, resources and facilities. While some schools have industrial kitchens, the use of catering companies that also provide meals to elderly homes or hospitals in the community is increasingly popular and public catering is part of Finland's broader welfare system. Municipalities often centralise provision, either as a local public service or by contracting commercial providers. Procurement often involves companies applying through a tender process, and minimum requirements for quality are written into this paperwork. Providers must also hold hygiene passports and be subject to inspection (Løes & Nölting, 2011, p. 100; Pellikka et al., 2019, pp. 13, 15, 18).

**Image 2. Kitchen and food preparation types (**Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 18)

| Kitchen type | Food preparation and transport |
|---|---|
| **Central kitchen** | • Recipe planning and pre-preparation for multiple locations<br>• The food is transported hot, cold or chilled to service, distribution and heating kitchens and service points<br>• Pre-prepared food is transported to local kitchens daily |
| **Regional/ production kitchen** | • Food preparation (e.g. Cook & Chill or Hot Fill method)<br>• Food is transported to local kitchens daily |
| **Preparation kitchen** | • Traditional school kitchen<br>• Food is prepared and served close by<br>• Food can also be transported to other service points |
| **Service/Distribution kitchen** | • Fully cooked food is provided by a preparation kitchen and is transported daily to the service kitchen<br>• Food transportation containers are sent back to the preparation kitchen for washing<br>• Energy-providing carbohydrates (potatoes, rice or pasta) are usually cooked in the kitchen of the service premises |
| **Heating kitchen** | • Fully-prepared food is transported to the kitchen and heated for serving |
| **Serving point** | • No food preparation at the serving premises<br>• All food is transported to the premises and served immediately<br>• Food transportation containers are sent back to the preparation kitchen for washing |

Finland's National Nutrition Council provides nutritional guidelines, aligned with Nordic guidelines, for municipalities' provision of healthy food in schools (Pellikka et al., 2019, pp. 13, 16; Waling et al., 2016, p. 10). Guidelines are also concerned with appearance and taste of meals, and integration with other parts of the school (National Nutrition Council 2008, cited in Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Manninen, 2010, p. 172). "Highly professional" and "scientifically based" school meals aim to contribute one third of a child's daily recommended nutritional intake (Løes & Nölting, 2011, pp. 99-100; Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 13). Students normally have some choice in the food they select in self-service buffets, guided by a 'plate model' that suggests portion sizes for a balanced meal of 'typical' Finnish food: children are encouraged to fill half their plate with fresh vegetables and salads, a quarter with protein (meat or fish and a vegetarian option), and another quarter with carbohydrates such as potatoes, rice or pasta. Low-fat milk, bread and oil-based spread is also provided (Korkalo et al., 2019; Tikkanen & Urho, 2009, cited in Løes & Nölting, 2011, p. 100; Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 15; Tikkanen, 2011, pp. 223–225; Tilles-Tirkkonen et al., 2011, p. 2092). It is also possible to arrange meals for special diets for health or religious reasons and many schools also limit snack foods with high sugar and fat in salt content (Pellikka et al., 2019, pp. 16, 18).

A whole school approach is considered essential for the success of Kouluruokailu. Since 2008 schools have been required to teach nutrition and promote healthy lifestyles as part of a whole of government strategy (Finnish National Board of Education 2008, cited in Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Manninen, 2010, p. 172). School meals are a pedagogical tool and an opportunity for learning, integrated in national and local curricula. The National Curriculum guides local curricula and school plans for providing school meals, and also for food and nutrition education through subjects like home economics to develop practical skills, knowledge of nutrition, and the social and cultural aspects of shared meals (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 3; Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Manninen, 2010, pp. 172-173; Waling et al., 2016, p. 2). As eating environments can influence children's consumption of food, schools have designated areas for dining and are encouraged to make these comfortable and attractive, and to allow sufficient time for eating before play (Pellikka et al., 2019, p.15).

Monitoring and evaluation of school meals happens at municipal and national levels to inform policy and practice. The local focus is usually on issues like nutritional quality, food waste, and student participation and feedback. The Finnish Food Authority and National Institute for Health and Welfare use national surveys and evaluations to gather information about participation, timing of school meals, curriculum integration, community involvement, challenges and successes, and the consumption of food like fruit and vegetables (Pellikka et al., 2019, pp. 26-27).

### 5.3 Benefits and evidence of impact, lessons and best practice

These and other evaluations provide evidence of Kouluruokailu's benefits and lessons for best practice. Quantitative and qualitative data examined in the ProMeal Study on school meals, health and learning in Finland and other Nordic countries show healthy and attractive school meals improve health equality and public health, and that consumption of healthy food and improvement of conditions to support learning can be achieved through balanced school meals. (Waling et al., 2016, p. 1). Another Nordic study found children's conceptualizations of healthy food and good eating habits are influenced by sociocultural norms (Berggren et al., 2017, p. 130). The Finnish government recently reviewed its school meals model and identified its factors for success as including the universal reach to all school students, the length of time it has been in place, and the horizontal cooperation across the system with national steering and local implementation (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 7; Tiilikainen & Mokkila, 2009, pp. 5-6).

Surveys reveal school meals are popular in Finland, and most students eat the provided meals each day. However, parts of the meal may not be selected by students or discarded as waste, which can reduce nutritional intake. Even with this accounted for, school meals are often the healthiest meals the child will eat in their day (Hoppu et al., 2010, Raulio et al., 2007, cited in Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Manninen, 2010, pp.  173-174). A study of Finnish toddlers' dietary intake showed the three legislated meals provided at early learning centers contributed significant nutrition to the children's diets, and that despite some room for improvement, children enrolled in early learning generally had better diets then those cared for at home (Korkalo et al, 2019). A comparative study of the relationship between children's consumption of fresh fruit

and vegetables and their access to school meals in Finland, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands found the impact of family background and healthy eating is stronger where no school meals are provided. The authors consider lessons from Finland and advise policy makers wishing to reduce this relationship to create universal school meals programmes that consider family environmental factors and involve parents (Ray et al., 2013, pp. 1109–1117). Other studies highlight a relationship between school food habits and eating habits at home; households that encourage balanced and healthy eating also influence children to select and consume a balanced meal at school, and food habits learned at school influence children's food consumption outside of school (Korkalo et al., 2019; Raulio et al, 2010, cited in Tilles-Tirkkonen et al., 2011, p. 2092; Tilles-Tirkkonen et al., 2011, pp. 2092, 2095). Kouluruokailu aims to not only support under-resourced families or parents who may be unemployed or beneficiaries. In Finland, as in New Zealand, it is usual for both parents to work full time, which has implications for childcare and hectic weekday mornings. It removes one meal to consider and budget for each school day, and relieves the pressure to create a healthy balanced lunch for their children every school day morning. All families in Finland benefit from the provision of free lunches at school (Andersen, 2010, pp. 170–171).

### 5.4 Challenges of cost, waste and sustainability

Although broad support for *Kouluruokailu* has persisted over seven decades, this consensus still must be defended and faces challenge, particularly the pressure to reduce costs in times of economic strife (Løes & Nölting, 2011, pp. 99–100; Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Manninen, 2010, pp. 173–174; Tiilikainen & Mokkila, 2009, p. 6; Yle Uutiset, 2017). The programme accounts for around 6% of munucipalities' spending on education (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 26). The average cost of a meal was €2.45 in 2008, covering the food, workforce, cleaning, electricity and facilities (Mikkola, 2010 cited in Løes & Nölting, 2011, p. 100). In 2017 the national average cost of a school meal was €2.80, including similar secondary costs (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 25). There is no set national budget for school feeding as it is included in the broader education budget, and municipalities are responsible for funding schools with central support through the government transfer system. Local authorities levy taxes to pay for school meals and other public services, and larger municipalities can keep costs lower by operating at scale. Some additional funding from the European Union helps supply fresh fruit, vegetables, and milk

(ibid., 2019, pp. 25, 26). The Finnish government must balance the tradeoff between health and nutrition with cost efficiency, and although the latter can be prioritized it is possible for school meals to be attractive, healthy, tasty and affordable. Some municipalities address this with regularly updated menus informed by student feedback (ibid., p. 31)

The universal provision of Kouluruokailu aims to reach 100% of children at school in Finland. While most children consistently eat the meals, not all eat it every day, nor eat all of the food offered, and this leads to food waste (Tiilikainen & Mokkila, 2009, p. 6). Primary-aged children are more likely to eat school meals than adolescents, and there is a relationship between skipping school lunches and other unhealthy practices in students' lives (Pellikka et al., 2009, pp. 30-31). The Finnish government promotes participation and reduced food waste, so seeks students' feedback on why they skip meals. This feedback supports other qualitative studies on the question. In these surveys and focus groups, students consistently discuss the impact of variety, choice and presentation of food, the environment of the school dining area, sufficient time to eat and socialize, and the influence of friends on whether they select and consume school meals (FAO, WFP, 2009, cited in Badri, 2014, p. 55; Pellikka et al., 2019, pp. 30–31; Tilles-Tirkkonen et al., 2011, p. 2095). Additionally, student consumption of unhealthy snacks is a persistent challenge (Hoppu et al., 2010, cited in Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Manninen, 2010, pp. 173-174).

Most school food provision uses a buffet style self-selection guided by the plate model. This choice with guidance from teachers and kitchen staff helps to promote consumption and minimize waste, along with other features such as comfortable eating environments (FAO, WFP, 2009, cited in Badri, 2014, p. 55; Løes & Nölting, 2011, pp. 99-100). Food waste is also offset by the provision of surplus food at minimal or no cost to families and communities. The issue is connected to a growing interest in sustainable practices like vegetarian meals and procurement of organic vegetables and locally-sourced food, and the guidelines emphasise that school meal plans should consider environmental, cultural, economic, and social sustainability issues (Roos and Mikkola, 2010 cited in Løes & Nölting, 2011, p. 100; Pellikka et al., 2019, pp. 17, 31). Finnish leaders and educators work to improve and sustain Kouluruokailu through time and challenges: "A good school meal should therefore be seen as an investment in our children's

future and continued to be an important part of the Finnish education system." (Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Manninen, 2010, pp. 173-174).

## *5.5* Consensus across Finnish politics and society about education and school meals

> *"Confidence in the education system is simply not politically controversial among Finnish citizens. Even supporters of the populist party cannot be distinguished from the Social Democrats when controlling for other factors"*
> (Fladmoe, 2012, p. 466)

When I moved to Finland I was struck by the general agreement in what I read and the people I met about the importance and common sense of providing a meal at school to all children to support individuals' outcomes and improve equity in society for all. A change of government in New Zealand brings a different ideological vision and approach to school meals and education and social policy more broadly, but in Finland society and consecutive governments have maintained Kouluruokailu and upheld principles of equality, a strongly public schooling system and collective responsibility for decades. According to the leader of a comprehensive school I visited, it would be "political suicide" for a Finnish politician to seriously question or act against universal school meals (Juuso, 2017). Finland's unique society and political culture is said to lend itself to consensus on decision-making, especially on social and education issues and the universal provision of free nutritious meals at school.

Finnish people have a long-persisting and "unusually strong belief in schooling" and a widely held concern for schools' role promoting equality in Finnish society (Herranen, 1995, p. 323, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 58; Sahlberg, 2018b; Simola, 2005, p. 465; Simola et al., 2002, p. 25). A 2008-2012 survey revealed "75 per cent of Finnish people view the formation of the free, compulsory comprehensive school as the most important event in the nation's history, even more than the Civil War 1918 or Winter War 1939-1940" (Torsti, cited in Scott, 2014, p. 117; Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 714). This support for public education is broadly shared across

Finnish society regardless of their identification with different political parties that may differ significantly in other ways (Fladmoe, 2012, p. 466).

Consensus on school meals and public education is reflected across political parties (Hannele Niemi, 2016, p. 23; Scott, 2014, p. 117). Government documents refer to the "joint responsibility", "shared investment", and "horizontal cooperation" of national and municipal authorities, government agencies, businesses and communities to ensure all children are fed each school day, for individual and collective benefit (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 3). Interviews with former Education Ministers highlight the importance of consensus in Finnish education policy: "We don't have any political party; we don't have any government; we don't have any family who could say the education is not important. If there would be a politician that would say he didn't care so much about education policy, he will be a former one" (cited in Chung, 2019, p. 119). Pasi Sahlberg identifies seven areas of consensus on education: the importance of learning; a long-term vision and goals; cooperative government responsibility for education; equity and access for all; inclusion and diversity; resourcefulness and trust in professionals; and conserving what is proven while continuing to innovate and improve (Sahlberg, 2007, pp. 166-167, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 56). The continuity and consistency about government responsibility for free school meals and education's role as a social equalizer especially have been sustained by Finland's unique political culture and coalition arrangements since World War II when three parties held a balance of power and were compelled to find consensus and work together to rebuild Finland (Hannele Niemi, 2016; Sahlberg, 2015)

### 5.5.1 Debate and challenge to consensus

Consensus was not something that happened naturally in Finland, it was fought for and has been sustained intentionally (Chung, 2019, p. 111; Administrative leader 1 cited in Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 721). It faced challenges in the debate leading up to the comprehensive school reforms from 1968, but these discussions led to a shared goal for education (Administrative leader 1 cited in Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 721). In the wake of a severe economic crisis in the 1990s, the Confederation of Finnish Industries and Employers questioned the comprehensive school model and advocated for neoliberal reform as was happening in other, particularly Western, countries (Simola et al., 2013, pp. 622–623). Elements of Finnish education such as

cost, testing, text books and compulsory age of education may be questioned and discussed, significant challenge has not gained traction and the foundation of the education system remains steady (Sahlberg, 2018b; Simola et al., 2013, p. 625). Similarly, discussions on school meals tend to focus on questions like cost, student input, sustainability or the vegetarian meals, but no one challenges the principle of free and universal food in schools (Sahlberg, 2018b). Despite its obvious benefits, this consensus has been questioned as being not a wholly good thing, as democracy and decision-making rests on discussion and debate (Fladmoe, 2012, p. 470). The development of Kouluruokailu. Finland's approach to equity in education, and the consensus that sustains them is explored in the following chapter.

# 6 Chapter 6: The development of Kouluruokailu and the consensus that sustains it in Finland's sociohistorical context

Comparative education research should be an "historical journey"; looking only at the current model of Finland's Kouluruokailu it is not enough to gain the deeper understanding necessary to select relevant, applicable, and adjustable lessons for New Zealand (Chung, 2019, p. 185; Simola, 205, p. 457, 2014, p. 274). This chapter explores the unique sociohistorical context in which Finland's shared attitudes and collective approach to education and specifically universal free school meals have developed. This is a complex topic deserving of more depth and detail, but the following provides a summary of relevant considerations about the country's demographics, geographical position between East and West and membership in the Nordic welfare states, social and political culture, human rights landscape, education system and broader history.

## 6.1 Significant features of Finland's context

### 6.1.1 Demographics and geopolitical position

Levels of cultural diversity is a significant difference between Finland and New Zealand. Finland does not keep official statistics on ethnicity, but records of the population with a foreign background show that though these numbers are rising, there is less immigration and cultural diversity than in New Zealand (Statistics Finland, 2020a). Finland is a home of the semi-autonomous and indigenous Euoropean Sámi, about 10,000 of whom live in Finland out of 75,000 across Norway, Sweden and Russia (Sámediggi | Saamelaiskäräjät, n.d.). Due to scope and limited available information about Sámi, this thesis does not compare their situation with the indigenous Māori population and issues of New Zealand in depth. Indigenous Sami people in Finland are constitutionally entitled to attend schools in Sami languages, as are Swedish-speaking minorities (Chung, 2019, p. 65; Scott, 2014, p. 127)

Finland's relative ethnic and cultural homogeneity is often referred to as a partial explanation for students' educational success in schools and the possibility for consensus and cooperation in the system (Frame, 2000, p. 8; Kuisma, 2007, p. 20; Reinikainen, 2012, pp. 12–13; Sahlberg, 2007, p. 149; Simola, 2005, p. 465). Some argue countries as diverse as New Zealand cannot

learn from Finland, and consider it is easier for Finland to reach agreement in a comparatively homogenous society and provide universal food programmes to a less diverse student population. However, Finland and its education system are increasingly multi-cultural since the 1990s (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 149; Scott, 2014, p. 17). Although the Nordic welfare states face challenges with increased children with migrant backgrounds and other ethnicities in schooling, there is little evidence their provision of social welfare has been undermined significantly (Scott, 2014, pp. 18-19). Additionally, Sahlberg reminds that "Finland successfully increased excellence and equity at the same time as it increased ethnic and cultural diversity" (Sahlberg, 2017, p. 69, cited in Scott, 2014, p. 127), and argues that while the level of diversity is an interesting difference with New Zealand, other differences are more significant such as geopolitical position, ideologies and traditions (Sahlberg, 2018b, 2018a).

Finland's identity, values and practices have been heavily influenced by its geographical position between Russia in the East and Scandinavia and Europe in the West (Bacon , 1970, p. 16, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 24; Chung, 2019, p. 48; Sahlberg, 2018b). Simola argues this position supported the development of social consensus in Finland (Simola, 2005, p. 457). More on the history and influence of Swedish and Russian rule is detailed later in this chapter. Finland's unique consensus and approach to education, social policy and welfare cannot be separated from its membership of the Nordic welfare states (Sahlberg, 2018b). More than geographical proximity, they share histories and cultural elements (Fagerholm, 1960, p. 69, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 39). Gosta Esping-Andersen's welfare regime theory and other scholars characterize the Nordic model(s) of the universal welfare state with values like inclusion, collective responsibility, universalism and equality, and a high standard government provision of services usually financed by higher taxes, leading to greater social equity and mobility (Chung, 2019, p. 45; Jørgensen, 2001, cited in Esping-Andersen, 2006, p. 399; Esping-Andersen, 1990, cited in Hansen & Kauko, 2018, p. 117; Markussen, 2003, cited in Imsen et al., 2017, pp. 1–2; Esping-Andersen & Korpi, 1987, cited in Kuisma, 2007, pp. 9–10; Sahlberg, 2018b; Timonen, 2003, p. 113). Nordic states aim to address causes of social inequalities and intervene early to avoid greater and more complex problems (Chung, 2019, p. 40-41; Greve, 1996, Cox, 2004, cited in Kuisma, 2007, p. 12), supported by citizens' high trust in their political and public institutions (Listhaug & Ringdal, 2008, Listhaug & Wiberg, 1995, cited in Fladmoe, 2012, p. 460). Social Democratic ideology has traditionally dominated Nordic countries, and is reflected in the purpose and key features of Nordic public education model(s) (Esping-Andersen, 1990, Korpi,

1983, Korpi & Palme, 2003, Nygard, 2006, Arnesen & Lundahl, 2006, cited in Fladmoe, 2012, p. 460; Scott, 2014, p. 19). Education is generally seen as a public good to shape the nation in Nordic countries, and is less politicized in Finland than in others (Telhaug et al., 2006 cited in Fladmoe, 2012, p. 460; Sahlberg, 2018a). The Nordic welfare state has been sustained over time and withstood challenges (Aasen, 1999, Ahonen, 2002, Sejersted, 2005, Telhaug et al., 2006, cited in Fladmoe, 2012, p. 457).

### 6.1.2 Inequalities and food insecurity in Finnish society

Finland's comparatively weak relationship between family background and education outcomes show equity and excellence in education are not mutually exclusive (Gorard & Smith, 2006, p. 25; Esping-Andersen, 2008, p. 21). Wrap-around services of the welfare state support children and their families, and the country is famous for progressive welfare policies including the baby box for expecting parents, the universal basic income experiment, grandparental leave trial and for successfully tackling homelessness in its capital city. Finland's international reputation is focused on its high quality of education and life, livable cities, quality education, and children's rights (e.g. Newsweek, 2010, Institute's Prosperity Index 2010, Readers Digest, 2008, cited in Reinikainen, 2014, p. 17; OECD, 2009; UNICEF, 2007). In 2018, 22.6% of households with children had difficulty making ends meet in the European Union, but only 6.7% of households with children in Finland faced that same challenge (Statistics Finland, 2020b). Finland reports very low levels of child malnutrition (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 4), but increasing obesity in the last 50 years, coinciding with less physical activity, is a significant challenge (Finnish National Nutrition Surveillance System, 1999, cited in Prättälä, 2003, p. 2).

### 6.1.3 Finnish social and political culture

Literature on Finnish culture describes it as traditionally egalitarian and cooperative, with comparatively few social class distinctions (Chislett, 1996, and Singleton, 1989, cited in Chung, 2019, pp. 40-41; Sarjala, 2013, pp. 32-36, cited in Scott, 2014, p. 116). Commonly held values include the importance of equity and caring for children, an agrarian ethos of hard work, obe-

dience and trust in public institutions, collective responsibilities, and cooperation among society (Chung, 2019, p. 48; Frame, 2000, p. 8; Lewis, 2005, cited in Sahlberg, 2007, p. 148; Sahlberg, 2018b). A uniquely Finnish attribute is *Sisu*, a "dogged determination, strength of character or just plain guts" (Chung, 2019, p. 185). The interesting combination of authoritarian but collective attitudes have persisted through the country's rapid development from an agrarian and poor country to a high-tech knowledge economy in the international spotlight (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 147). They are influenced by unintentional happenings such as Finland's historical position among its neighbours and the harsh climate that requires cooperation. Intentional acts like the movement to protect the national language, legislating for universal free school meals, and the comprehensive school reforms reflect and reinforce these values (Chung, 2019, pp. 36-37, 42-43, 48, 185; Simola, 2005, pp. 457, 465).

Finland's unique political culture and coalition arrangements since World War II are essential to understand in an investigation of political consensus on social and education issues like *Kouluruokailu*. Nordic countries have high levels of social trust in political leaders and institutions, and despite being multi-party democracies they are generally characterized by political consensus rather than polarization (Fridberg & Kangas, 2008, Listhaug & Ringdal, 2008, Listhaug & Wiberg, 1995, Milner, 2002, Putnam & Goss, 2002, Rothstein & Stolle, 2003, Sartori, 1976, Torpe, 200, cited in Fladmoe, 2012, pp. 457, 460; Sahlberg, 2007, p. 157). This is especially strong in Finland, which is "even more statist" than other Nordic countries (Simola, 1998, p. 732). An extensive review of large surveys from 1981 to 2009 analyzed public and political opinion on education in Norway, Sweden and Finland. It showed that while other Nordic states' widespread support for public education was connected by support for Social Democratic parties, in Finland "political polarization [about education] was almost non-existent" (Fladmoe, 2012, p. 457).

Finnish political culture provides consistency and continuity through consecutive coalitions (Chislett, 1996, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 39). Finland's multi-party proportional representation system has a Parliament of 200 members, and the two strongest political parties are traditionally the Centre (formerly Agrarian) Party and the Social Democrats. Since World War II parties have enjoyed fairly balanced popularity in Finnish society, compelling them to work together in coalitions and find agreement on key issues (Chung, 2019, pp. 39-40; Heidar, 2004, cited in

Fladmoe, 2012, p. 460; Sahlberg, 2018b; Scott, 2014, p. 218). The large majorities which governing parties form can represent around 70% of public support, allowing for deeper and more sophisticated policy discussions (Frame, 2000, p. 8). From the establishment of the comprehensive school in the 1970s until 2015, Finland had 20 different governments with 27 different Ministers of Education, but all upheld 'the Finnish Dream' of the public school (Sahlberg, 2015, p 27). This continuity is supported by the interesting fact that at least one of the parties from the previous coalition government has been present in the succeeding coalition (Sahlberg, 2018b), and a social democratic system, with trust in public officials and professionals including teachers, maintains a respect for public education and government responsibility for social services like Kouluruokailu (Telhaug et al., 2006, cited in Fladmoe, 2012, p. 460).

### 6.1.4 Finland's human rights and child rights setting

Finland's constitutional framework and domestic human rights also underpins social and education policy, and should be viewed within its Nordic and European setting. Nordic countries have an excellent reputation for ratifying international human rights treaties (Lavapuro et al., 2011, p. 507). The Finnish written constitution and legal framework unambiguously lays the basis for protection of human rights, and the Finnish and Nordic understanding and approach to human rights have traditionally been considered "fairly homogeneous and state-centred in their self-understanding about community values" (ibid.) The last thirty years have seen a trend towards a more rights-based approach, spurred on by its incorporation of the European Convention of Human Rights into its domestic law in 1990 and entry into the European Union (EU) five years later, immediately launching a review of Finnish law to align with European (ibid., pp. 507, 512, 513, 515). This has been coupled with constitutional and normative changes towards the principle of human-rights-friendly interpretation in the 1990s spurred by liberal critique and legal activism for reform in the previous decade with inspiration from New Zealand's Bill of Rights Act 1990 (ibid., pp. 509, 530).

Finland's domestic legislation goes further than New Zealand enshrining individuals' political and civil rights; it also addresses a broad range of their economic, social and cultural rights in a comprehensive rights-focussed chapter in the Constitution (Lavapuro et al., 2011., pp. 516,

521). Kela, the Finnish Government's social security service, states on its website that "The Constitution guarantees economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights, such as the right to work, education, indispensable subsistence and care, social security and adequate social, health and medical services, which the authorities are required to guarantee and promote. The protection of political and civil rights, including equal treatment under the law, also extends to ESC rights (Kela, 2018). The examinations and criticisms of Finland's human rights record in its Universal Periodic Reviews have so far focused mainly on discrimination against ethnic minorities and immigrants, and while some recommendations have been focused on the rights of children, these have been largely of a civil rather than economic and cultural nature (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2020). Finland's human rights settings are significant because economic social and cultural rights that deal with issues such as education and access to food, are enshrined in its constitution in a way that differs from New Zealand.

#### 6.1.5 Equity and excellence in the Finnish education system

The success of Finnish education can be attributed to variety of interrelated sociohistorical factors, particularly a commonly held agreement about its importance (Välijärvi et al., 2002, p. 46, cited in Simola, 2005, p. 456). Finnish politicians and society share a national vision for education to be accessible for all and to act as a social equalizer to benefit individuals and promote cohesion and prosperity in the Finnish nation (Chung, 2019, p. 111; Ahonen, 2003, Antikainen, 2010, Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999, Kivinen, 1988, Telhaug et al., 2006 cited in Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 715; Kumpulainen & Lankinen, 2012; Niemi & Isopahkala-Bouret, 2015, p. 132; Sahlberg, 2012, p. 27, 2018b). Education issues are less politicized in Finland than they are elsewhere, even other Nordic countries (Telhaug et al., 2006 cited in Fladmoe, 2012, p. 460). Even as governments change over time, education is understood holistically (Niemi & Isopahkala-Bouret, 2015, p. 133). The government's role in education is significant. With very little privatisation, collective responsibility for education is offered through taxes that fully fund comprehensive schooling and tertiary, and significantly subsidise early learning (Scott, 2014, p. 202). To achieve its vision, the government reduces other barriers to accessing education by providing free warm meals, health and counseling, and resources (Ahonen, 2014, pp. 78–79; Sahlberg, 2007, pp. 154–161). High trust, clear roles and responsibilities in the decentralised system enable effective cooperation between government agencies, national and municipal

authorities, schools, and communities to provide quality education and school meals (Chung, 2019, pp. 58, 123; Sahlberg, 2007, p. 156; Scott, 2014, p. 115; Timonen, 2003, pp. 113-114). School practices also reinforce inclusive and collective values; streaming or grouping by perceived ability was abolished decades ago in favour of mixing students; and inclusive education and learning support is normalized, based on the principle that all students, as much as possible, should be able to attend their local school with their peers (Chung, 2019, pp. 59, 124-125; Laukkanen, 2006, cited in Niemi, 2016, p. 22; Simola, 2005, p. 465). Supporting evidence of these practices is demonstrated, but while this is important in Finnish policy making, so is a strong value-base (Sahlberg, 2018b). Government and collective investment in education and connected social services is done at a reasonable cost, not much more than the percentage of GDP spent in New Zealand, and this is considered worthwhile for the excellent outcomes (Niemi et al., 2016, p. 274; Reinikainen, 2012, p. 14; Sahlberg, 2007, pp. 158, 161; Scott, 2014, pp. 101–102). A former Minister of Education explained the investment as ultimately cost-saving; wrap-around support with policies like free school meals in an equitable education system assumes fewer pupils will drop out and be excluded from active society, and the financial burden is significantly more expensive than supporting them through childhood (Chung, 2019, p. 113). Pasi Sahlberg notes that social and political consensus about education is a relatively recent phenomenon over the last 50 years, and believes other countries like New Zealand can also develop and commit to a shared and sustainable vision for public education (Sahlberg, 2015, p 27, 2018b).

The broadly supported 'one school for all' comprehensive model from the 1970s is often given as a reason for Finnish success in international assessments. The results have invited international attention to Finland, especially because the proportion of between-school differences is approximately one tenth of the OECD average (Kupari & Välijärvi, 2005, cited in Sahlberg, 2007, p. 159). An analysis of 18 national education systems rated Finland at the top for its combination of excellence and equity, and the free and universal provision of Kouluruokailu and other services were considered a prominent reason (Andere, 2014, pp. 7, 43). Finland has "succeeded in promoting equality by reducing the extent to which a student's socioeconomic background affects his/her performance in school" (Reinikainen, 2012, p. 12), showing that it is possible to achieve excellence in results without undermining equity (Chung, 2019, p. 114; Reinikainen, 2012, pp. 4, 12; Sahlberg, 2007, pp. 147, 158-161; Simola, 2005, p. 456). Other factors contribute to Finland's success in PISA. For example, the Finnish curriculum aligns

comfortably with PISA framework, the phonetic nature of the written language supports literacy, and the highly qualified teaching profession is trusted to provide quality learning (Chung, 2019, p. 126). Finnish politicians and government officials are quick to state that success in PISA is not the purpose of their education system, but that it has been a "side product" of its development (Niemi, 2016, p. 20). When asked for comment on PISA, Education Minister Sanni Grahn-Laasonen replied,

> "We know that we have an excellent education system in Finland, but we're not doing it to be good in PISA. We're doing it because we want all our children to learn and we want our small country—only 5.5 million people—to be a good society to all our children. We don't have standardised testing in Finland, we don't do school rankings or anything. We just want to give all our children a very high-quality education and we want to build our education system based on values like equality and equity" (Grahn-Laasonen, cited in Will, 2016).

A frequently presented explanation for Finnish education success is high-quality teaching and social trust in teachers as autonomous professionals (Simola, 2005, p. 456; Laukkanen, 2006, cited in Niemi, 2016, p. 22l Chung, 2019, p. 184). A high value and respect for teachers is ingrained across Finnish society (Chung, 2019, p. 114-115; Scott, 2014, pp. 98-100; Räty et al., 1995, cited in Simola, 2005, p. 458). Teaching is a sought-after career; teachers are highly qualified with master's degrees, and initial teacher education courses are competitive in their admission of students (Chung, 2019, pp. 106-111, 127l Välijärvi et al, 2002, Westbury et al, 2005, cited in Sahlberg, 2007, pp. 153-154; Scott, 2014, pp. 98-100; Simola, 2005, p. 459). This view of teachers is related to the broader Finnish view of education's role and connected issues such as school meals.

It is also relevant that Finland's education system was not as captured by neoliberal ideologies and practices sweeping the world in the 1980s and 1990s. Discursive dynamics "spiraled between the Social Democratic agrarian tradition of equality and the market liberal of equity that emerged in the late 1980s in Finland", but the entrenched egalitarianism in the Finnish psyche and system helped it withstand the spread of neoliberalism (Simola et al., 2002, p. 255; Simola, 2014, p. 276). Although some neoliberal concepts appeared in political discourse, they largely did not follow through into Finnish policy (Hargreaves et al, 2001, Rinne et al., 2002, Sahlberg, 2004, Aho et al., 2006, cited in Sahlberg, 2007, pp. 150, 157-158). Finnish education policy

does not follow the neoliberal assumption that competition brings quality, and instead takes a collaborative approach, or a 'mutual striving' (Sahlberg, 2017, p. 36, cited in Scott, 2014, p. 121). While other high performing countries such as Japan and Korea spend a lot of time in tutoring after school, Finnish children spend less time in school overall, and at the primary level there is very little homework and an emphasis on learning through play (Chung, 2019, p. 53; Reinikainen, 2012, pp. 14-15). There is no national standardized testing in Finland except for the matriculation examination at the end of upper secondary school, and education politicians and officials analyse samples to avoid ranking and league tables. Instead of standardization, competition and accountability, Finland focuses on equity, trust and teacher professionalism (Chung, 2019, pp. 63, 108, 124; Niemi, 2016, pp. 27-28; Sahlberg, 2007, p. 147; Simola, 2005, pp. 113, 464; Simola et al., 2013, pp. 622-623, 625). Some elements are congruent with neoliberal ideas, for example a human capital lens is often applied as Finland relies on an educated populace for a strong economy (Sahlberg, 2018b). Finland's education system faces challenges including declining results in PISA, disparities in gender and in education for immigrants, disparities in education for immigrants, budget cuts and less support for 'gifted' education (Chung, 2019 pp. 131-134, 142; Niemi et al., 2016, p. 274; Reinikainen, 2012, pp. 11-13; Sahlberg, 2007, p. 161; Scott, 2014, p. 110). However, Finland has become a case study internationally for its educational success and promotion of equity through schooling without following neoliberal strategies policies and attitudes (Sahlberg, 2011, cited in Simola et al., 2013, p. 614). The evolution of Finns' shared attitudes about education as a vehicle for social equity is outlined in the following section.

## 6.2 The development of consensus about collective/government responsibility for universal school meals in Finnish history

This section provides a brief diachronic overview of the history of public education and universal school meals in Finland, and the broad support from Finnish politicians and society. It is loosely guided by the periodical structure identified by Kosunen and Hansen in narrative interviews with Finnish politicians, policy makers and education academics, who told the story of Finland's comprehensive schooling system in very similar ways from the Enlightenment to comprehensive school reforms to the present day, highlighting "historical events, unintentional

happenings and intentional acts" as significant points of change (Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, pp. 719-720):

1. *First period: Pre-comprehensive school period to 1970*
2. *Second period: From steady development to the first crisis of comprehensive schooling*
3. *PISA as an international performance game*

These periods have been amended for the purposes of this thesis to focus on school meals and the development of consensus about collective and government responsibility for them, but in the context of attitudes and policies in public education:

1. *First period: pre 1917 independence*
2. *Second period: Building a nation – Independence, Civil War and World War II.*
3. *Third period: Modernisation and re-building, integral role of education and school food*
4. *Fourth period: Comprehensive schooling from the late 1960s*
5. *Fifth period: Challenge to consensus and the comprehensive school*
6. *Sixth period: The age of PISA and international attention*

### 6.2.2 First period: Pre-Independence

Finland has traditionally been isolated from the rest of the world, partly due to its geographical position, and size of country and population (Juva, 1968, p. 17 cited in Chung, 2019, p. 24). Positioned between Sweden and Russia, the country was fought over consistently from 1300 to 1800. Sweden largely held the reins of power in this time before independence, but Russia's political influence and control strengthened from 1714 as Sweden's diminished, sealed in 1809 with Russia's victory in war. Finland became a grand duchy of Russia, though many Swedish influences remained (Chislett, 1996, Fox, 1926, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 27). Under Swedish and Russian rule, Finnish society was largely agrarian and egalitarian, not feudal or hierarchical as other European states, and Finns have respected learning, literacy, and teachers throughout history (Niemi, 2016, p. 21).

Sweden ruled Finland for six centuries but did not exercise its power harshly and was seen as a fairly benevolent overlord whose reign brought benefits (Bacon, 1970, Hall, 1967, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 26). The main strife was over the imposition of the Swedish language which was widely used by the elite and in schools and civic life, but the unique Finnish language was

treasured and protected by Finns as integral to their cultural and national identity (Chung, 2019, pp. 26, 36-37). The Swedish influence was especially promoted through the Lutheran Church.

Lutheran values of hard work, community, and literacy, “pav[ing] the way for consensus politics in a Nordic welfare model, based on an autonomous civil society, and respect for education” (Chung, 2019, pp. 32, 115). Finland’s society was highly literate compared to other European countries, largely because schooling was provided by the Church from the beginning of Swedish rule. The saying ‘oppia ikä kaikki” (all life is learning) was recorded as early as the 1600s (Antikainen, 2010, p. 532, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 32), but until the mid-19th century secondary education was restricted to Swedish-speaking boys of privileged backgrounds training as state officials or clergy (Chung, 2019, p. 53; Junila, 2013, pp. 186–187; Kotilainen, 2013, p. 115; Hannele Niemi, 2016, p. 21). At first only clergy were literate, and then literacy was fostered in the people to allow them to read bible passages. Clergy played a leading role as teachers in Finnish communities, and a Church law in 1686 insisted a person wishing to marry must first demonstrate they could read (See Louhivuori, 1968, Eskelinene, 1968, Gilmour, 1931, cited in Chung, 2019, pp. 42, 118; Junila, 2013, p. 187; Niemi, 2016, p. 21). Parish ambulatory schools, the education of which was mostly religious, educated Finns in the countryside, and continue to do so even after the 1866 decree establishing folk schools for all, as in other Nordic countries (Kotilainen, 2013, pp. 114-115). The Church imposed penalties on those who did not comply with literacy requirements (Binham, 1986, p. 156, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 51), but education was limited to a basic level for most Finns and secondary or further education was only available to children of nobles or clergy (Ahonen, 2014, p. 81).

Neighbouring Russia has imparted a strong eastern influence that Hannu Simola calls an “eastern authoritarian flavour” in Finnish culture and Social Democracy (Simola, 2005, p. 457). Russian tsars allowed relative freedom of Finnish political authority, though they differed on the extent. Towards the end of imperial rule in the 19$^{th}$ century, Tsars Alexander III and Nicholas II were more authoritative and restrictive, imposing the use of Russian language on Finns, shutting down Finnish newspapers and taking over the military to enforce it (Chislett, 1996, p. 22, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 27). In this period however, elements of the welfare state were pioneered; workers were compensated if they were injured in their job, and food they consumed

during the workday was considered responsibility of their employing industry (Chung, 2019, p. 41; Mikkola 2010 cited in Løes & Nölting, 2011, p. 99).

Schooling in Finland as a Grand Duchy of Russia remained in the hands of the Church in the early 19th century as it had under Sweden, conducted in the Swedish language and inaccessible for many beyond basic literacy (Chung, 2019, p. 53; Junila, 2013, pp. 189-191). Compared to other European countries, Finland was fairly late to establish mass elementary schooling and progress was not straightforward as the tsars did not support it (Binham, 1968, pp. 156-157, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 51; Kivirauma & Jauhiainen, 1996, cited in Simola, 2005, p. 460). Finnish nationalism grew under Russian rule, propelled by the Fennoman movement and the 1835 publication of the national epic the *Kalevala* that glorified “strong individuals whose power was based on mental abilities and wisdom, not on physical strength” (Gimour, 1931, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 27; Niemi, 2016, p. 20; Simola, 2005, p. 457). The movement promoting a Finnish identity and independent nation was entwined with that advocating education for all in the Finnish language (Chung, 2019, p. 115; Saari, 1944, cited in Chung, 2019, pp. 36-37; Sulkunen, pp. 45-46, cited in Junila, 2013, p. 202). Accessible and public education for all Finnish children in their local area was advocated for by many respected university professors in Finland, ideologically driven by “romantic nationalist efforts” and a social liberalist hope to improve social equality (Ahonen, 2014, pp. 81, 91; Kotilainen, 2013, pp. 115, 121; Niemi, 2012, p. 20).

In 1858 Uno Cygnaeus developed a plan for a Finnish elementary ‘school for all’, influenced by examples of different schools around the country. Inspired by the Enlightenment, he drew on Nordic neighbors’ nationalist and Social Democratic ideologies and models of education administration, and also from the Germany concept of *bildung* and pedagogical practices (Chung, 2019, p. 52; Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, pp. 720-721; Kotilainen, 2013, p. 122). The first non-Church affiliated teacher training course was established in Jyväskylä in 1863, and in 1866 a legal decree established folk schools providing education to all Finnish children regardless of their background (Whittaker, 1983, p. 32, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 53; Valtonen, 2013, pp. 161, 178). Poor children were supported to attend school by the municipality Relief Fund, and education sought to lift their opportunities (Kotilainen, 2013, p. 125). Folk schools initiated the secularisation of education in Finland and broke the hegemony of the church. This was not

a smooth transition however, and debate over values, views and practices in education divided rural and urban societies (Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 720; Kotilainen, 2013, p. 115-118). The spread of secular elementary education took time and traditional church schools remained in rural areas as a cheaper alternative (Ahonen, 2014, pp. 82-83; Kotilainen, 2013, p. 122; Valtonen, 2013, p. 164). The move to mass education and improved teacher training enhanced the value of teachers as morally upstanding members of society and paved the foundation for the Finnish welfare state (Junila, 2013, pp. 192, 202; Kotilainen, 2013, pp. 128-129; Valtonen, 2013, pp. 160-161, 178). However, Finnish society was highly literate but still divided through two parallel tracks in the school system until the comprehensive school reform in the 1970s (Louhivouri, 1968, p. 176, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 51; Junila, 2013, p. 187-188, 195).

At the turn of the 20th century, Finland was one of the poorer countries in Europe and mainly agrarian (Kettunen, 2013, p. 35). The 1905 Russian Revolution eased the stranglehold on Finland, and the labour movement and political party in Finland grew despite the dominance of agriculture as 'working class' membership was conceptualized more broadly than elsewhere in Europe to include agricultural workers and middle-class professionals (Chislett, 1996, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 28; Kettunen, 2013, pp. 38-39). New Zealand was the first country in the world where women won the vote, and in 1906 Finland gained universal suffrage to be the first in Europe (Kirby, 2006, cited by Chung, 2019, p. 41; Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 10). Despite progress, political and social instability were present. At the time of World War I, Finland's army was weak and society was divided between bourgeois Whites and socialist working-class Reds, similar to the division in Russia .Social Democrats enjoyed a swelling of support in the 1916 elections, and Finland elected the first socialist Prime Minister Oskari Tokoi. Responding to the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, Finland declared independence on 6 December 1917, which Vladimir Lenin granted (Chislett, 1996, Hall, 1967, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 29).

Education researchers at the time noted that Finland had comparatively high levels of literacy and Finns placed a high value on education in the early 20th century, and although attendance at school was not yet widespread, mixed gender co-educational schools provided consistency (Louhivouri, 1968, p. 176, Thornton, 1907, in Whittaker, 1983, Bacon, 1970, Fox, 1926, cited in Chung, 2019, pp. 51, 57; Junila, 2013, p. 189, Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 8). Finland's school meals programme developed at this time when the relationship between nutrition, hunger and

school attendance and engagement was acknowledged with the establishment of the School Soup Association in 1905. Female teachers and women in the community cooked the food with assistance from students. Government subsidy of food in schools began in 1913 (Mikkola, 2010 cited in Løes & Nölting, 2011, p. 99; Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 10).

### 6.2.3 Second period: Building a nation – Independence, Civil War and World War II.

Finland looked to lessons from the Nordic states in the early days of independence, and in first few decades faced internal conflict and external threats to its borders (Chung, 2019, pp. 39, 45). The Civil, Winter and Second World Wars impacted on the development of social consensus in Finland (Simola, 2005, pp. 457-458). During this time, society and financial authorities recognised the benefit of feeding children at school but provision was targeted to those most in need (Pellikka et al., 2019, pp. 8).

The initial period after independence was characterized by political turmoil and class division as the influence of socialist 'Reds' grew in the Social Democratic Party and were challenged by the 'Whites' who were ultimately victorious (Chung, 2019, p. 29; Simola, 2005, p. 457). Nearly 40,000 Finns were killed in the brutal and bloody civil war, the collective trauma of which is still evident (Chung, 2019, p. 29; Ylikangas, 1993, p. 521, cited in Simola, 2005, p. 457). After the war, Finland focused on rebuilding the country and implemented programmes to equalize society as part of this. The Finns initially sought a monarch from Germany to lead the country after the civil war, but with Germany's defeat in World War I this did not eventuate and Finland became a Republic and enjoyed relative peace for 20 years, despite some political differences and crises (Chung, 2019, p. 30; Kettunen, 2013, p. 43).

Free public education spurred by egalitarian ideals was provided universally from ages 7 to 16 after Independence, and in 1917, "the country's system of education was seen as a tool for sustaining national identity, basic literacy, and essential political freedom" (Hall, 1967, p. 65, Whittaker, 1983, p. 32, cited in Chung, 2019, pp. 51, 53). These shared values have been consistently upheld in Finland over the last century, though the experience of Civil War made some Finns question the idea of universal education for the masses (Rinne, 1988, p. 440, cited in

Simola, 205, p. 460). In 1921 education became compulsory from the ages of 7 to 12, where before it had been optional but encouraged, though this aim was not realized until after WWII (Ahonen, 2014, p. 83; Pellikka et al., 2019, pp. 8, 10; Valtonen, 2013, p. 164). Finnish children received welfare assistance to fully participate in school by the 1930s in the form of free medical care, school books, targeted free meals and transport for those in isolated areas, and 90% of the population were literate (Chung, 2019, p. 52; Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 8). Changes in teacher training qualifications and the move to university level teacher education in the 1930s and 1940s advanced professionalization of teachers (Halila, 1950, p. 296, cited in Simola, 2005, p. 460; Valtonen, 2013, pp. 161, 171). The development of formal vocational education between the wars grew partly from economic concerns, growing industrialization and related motivations (Ahvenainen & Vartiainen, 1982, p. 186, cited in Kettunen, 2013, p. 31; Kettunen, 2013, pp. 31-32, 48, 50-51). Educational planning and reform at this time was connected with the notion of society as a national community. Building connections between the now independent and increasingly powerful rural people and university educated groups in society was 'a crucial part of the political and cultural reality' as Finland sought to unify. Use of the Finnish language was central to this, and academic work was valued and promoted in the nationalist movement (ibid, pp. 46, 51).

Since the compulsory education reforms, cooking and nutrition has been taught in Finland's schools as part of home economics, though initially only to girls and some boys (Sarlio-Läht-eenkorva & Manninen, 2010, p. 173). The 1921 legislation also established the government's responsibility to provide underprivileged children with two thirds of a meal (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 10). Guidelines for food in schools emerged two years later, promoting the consumption of breakfast and insisting on dedicated time in the school day for eating. Students were able to purchase porridge in many schools (ibid). The development of Finland's school-meals model faltered a little in the 1920s, but again become a point of discussion and debate by the 1930s (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 8). The National Board of Education promoted school meals in 1936 in a pamphleting campaign, based on studies revealing 60 percent of Finnish students were not sufficiently healthy (ibid.). The following years were dedicated to careful policy development and planning hindered by the Winter War and World War II (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 8; Kokko & Räsänen, 1997 cited in Prättälä, 2003, p. 2). In 1943 the Finnish government passed legislation enshrining the free and universal provision of food in schools to be established by 1948 (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 8).

Twenty years after the divisive internal war, Finland was once again threatened from the east and formed a united front against the Soviet Union in the Winter War 1939-40 but was forced to cede ten percent of its land in the peace treaty. When Germany also invaded Soviet Union the following year, Finland joined to protect its independence and recover what had been lost but was ultimately unsuccessful. As the Germans faced defeat towards the end of World War II, those occupying Lapland destroyed much of the area as they were forced out. By this time, 37,000 Finns had lost their lives and many more were injured and displaced (see Frame, 2000, p. 15; Chislett, 1996, Bacon, 1970, and Eskelinen, 1968, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 31; Simola, 2005, p. 457).

The harsh experiences of war led to a rise in the labour union movement and collective responsibility for social protection (Antikainen, 2010, pp. 532-533. cited in Chung, 2019, p. 33). In 1943, the middle of the war, legislation enshrining universal free school meals was passed to be in place across the nation within five years. Food rationing, malnutrition and other challenges of war spurred this move, with more than 400,000 internally displaced people and 50,000 orphaned children to care for. The city of Helsinki began providing school food in 1943, and children contributed by growing vegetables or gathering berries. By 1948 the war was over, and Finland focused on resettlement and rebuilding; a freely accessible meal of porridge, soup or similar in schools for all children was essential for this (Pellikka et al., 2019, pp 6-10).

#### 6.2.4 Third period: Post-war, modernisation and re-building, integral role of education and school food

At the end of the war Finland was still predominantly agrarian, and the resettlement of people displaced by changing borders led many to farming, particularly dairy, while the country also underwent swift industrialization (Ahonen, 2014, p. 83; Chung, 2019, p. 31; Prättälä, 2003, p. 4; Sahlberg, 2007, p. 148; Simola, 2005, p. 458). Rebuilding the nation after the war required modernization, and Finnish leaders looked outside the country for examples of opportunities and risks to consider lessons for themselves (Kettunen, 2013, pp. 34-35). The country formed international connections, joining the World Bank in 1948 for loans to support the rebuild of

infrastructure and the economy, hosting the Helsinki Olympics in 1952, and joining the Nordic Council and United Nations 1955. After completing payment of war debts in 1952 and Stalin's death the following year, Finland's diplomatic relationship with the Soviet Union improved but kept Finland from membership of the European Communities formed in the late '50s (Chung, 2019, p. 31; Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 8).

Traditional values, social trust and collective spirit remained strong in post-war Finland, and the ideals of democracy and equality in Finnish education in society were widely held and discussed (Kettunen, 2013, p. 51; Lewis, 2005, cited in Sahlberg, 2007, p. 148). As in other Nordic countries, these formed the value base for the welfare state in the 1950s and 1960s and the broad consensus in Finland's political culture that supported it (Sahlberg, 2018b). In 1948, Parliament was fairly evenly divided among three major parties; the Social Democratic Party, the Agrarian Party (now called the Centre Party) and the Communist Party were forced to find agreement and work collaboratively to rebuild the nation. Consecutive governments shifted between the Social Democrats and Agrarian Party from 1950 to 1964, but the Social Democrats were dominant through the 1960s and worked with the Communist Party on income policy considered fundamental to the early welfare state (Chung, 2019, pp. 31-33; Sahlberg, 2015, p. 38; 2018b).

This period was characterized by peace and the Finnish and Nordic welfare state, built on Lutheran values of equality and solidarity for the public good, democracy, and a reverence for education (Chung, 2019, pp. 32-33). Esping-Anderson's description of welfare state regimes highlights the influence of Social Democratic values on the Nordic universalist approach (1990, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 32; see also Antikainen, 2010; Hiilamo, 2012, Kuisma, 2007, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 32). Finland's welfare system was built on agrarian and collectivist as well as industrial and individualist values and features. Modernization, industrialization and rapid speed significantly impacted Finnish society, and different groups had to coexist in a unique way (Simola, 2005, p. 458). Over the 1960s, the welfare state expanded as governance across municipalities standardized (Chung, 2019, pp. 40-41; Niemi-Iilahti 1995, Kröger 1995, cited in Timonen, 2003, p. 112, 114).

Having been through the trials of the war fighting alongside each other, Finnish people discussed and increasingly perceived universal access to good quality public education as a basic right and fundamental for social equity and cohesion (Lindert 2004, cited in Ahonen, 2014, p. 83; Kettunen, 2013, p. 51; Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 720; Niemi, 2016, p. 21). The swift modernisation and industrialisation also influenced the consensus on role of school in the nation (Simola, 2005, p. 457). The post-war political situation demanded broad agreement on a vision and values base for education and social policies, paving the way for resounding support in Parliament for free school meals, comprehensive school reforms in 1968 and other features of the welfare state (Ahonen, 2014, pp. 84-85; Niemi, 2016, p. 21). It was in this period the 1921 reforms for compulsory schooling were finally realized across the country, and the government invested significantly in schooling and teacher training (Simola, 2005, p. 460; Valtonen, 2013, pp. 164, 175). The conceptualisation and balance of the individual and collective shifted in this period. There was little reference to individuals in pre-war education policy and curriculum documents that talked about the education of wider society, but after the war, the role and interests of the individual became more present in society. However, the individual's needs were still less than the needs of collective society; the main purpose of schooling was to train "individuals for society" (Curriculum, 1952, pp. 13-14, 28, cited in Simola, 1998, pp. 734-735).

The 1943 legislation enshrining universal free school meals came into force in 1948, by which time the war was over and school meals bolstered the processes of resettling displaced people and rebuilding the modern Finnish nation (Pellikka et al., 2019, pp 6-10). These were conditions "where messages of nutrition and public health experts could be accepted" and consensus could be built (Prättälä, 2003, p. 4). Wartime food rationing ended in the 1954, and Finns began consuming more dairy, meat products, and sugar (Kokko & Räsänen, 1997, cited in Prättälä, 2003, p. 1). The National Nutrition Council was established in 1954, representing interests of different agencies and groups including education, agriculture, health, and the food industry (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 11; Finnish National Nutrition Surveillance System, 1999, cited in Prättälä, 2003, p. 2). This collaborative council exemplifies Finnish consensus-based policy development but has been criticised over time for avoiding controversial issues (Roos, Lean & Anderson, 2002, cited in Prättälä, 2003, p. 2). After ten years of *Kouluruokailu*, the Finnish National Agency for Education established the position of a school meals inspector (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 11).

### 6.2.5 Fourth period: Comprehensive schooling from the late 1960s

The context of the comprehensive school reforms in the late 1960s was social upheaval globally and further expansion of welfare service provision domestically (Desjardins, 2015, p. 140; Niemi-Iilahti, 1995, p. 282, cited in Timonen, 2003, p. 114). The rapidly evolving changes drew focus to inequalities and education's purpose in society, and the diversification of the economy and workforce required a broader curriculum (Ahonen, 2014, p. 83; Chung, 2019, pp. 65, 122; Desjardins, 2015, p. 140). Throughout the 1960s there was consideration and discussion about a comprehensive school model, first proposed in a 1959 State Committee report and debated in Parliament with resistance from non-socialist parties in 1963 (Ahonen, 2014, p. 83). Arguments against comprehensive school reform were focused on the financial cost and a preference for separating education of the elite from the common people. Those in favour supported equal access to quality education as a function of the welfare state (Kuusi 1961, Ahonen 2003, pp. 116–21, 123, cited in Ahonen, 2014, p. 84). Finland was the last of the Nordic countries to implement comprehensive school reform, and was unique in that this was not done by a Social Democratic government but through a shared vision and commitment of Social Democrats and the Agrarian Party (Ahonen, 2014, p. 83).

It was a significant collective decision to promote the role of education as a vehicle for social equity so a child's learning outcomes and life possibilities do not rely on their family background (Researcher 1, Administrative leader 1, cited in Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 721; Scott, 2014, p. 103; Valtonen, 2013, p. 180). However, consensus was not an easy thing to build; there was "a counter narrative to the hegemonic discourse of unanimous decision-making regarding construction of the comprehensive school, and emphasized the political struggles in negotiations of power: what was evident was that it was impossible to resist the aim of promoting equality of education in that political climate" (Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 721). A key dispute was over who should be responsible for education: a strong centralized State or parents and local communities (Researcher 2, cited in Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 721), and resistance to government responsibility primarily came from private business and ideologically right-leaning advocates for privatization (Sahlberg, 2007 cited in Scott, 2014, p. 103). Left-centre political parties were popular with many, and criticism of the role of education as a social equalizer was frowned upon (Ahonen, 2014, pp. 84-85; Administrative Leader 1, Researcher 2, cited in Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 721). Academics and education professors influenced education

policy and reforms, promoting a base of evidence for success (Administrative Leader 1 cited in Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, pp. 721-722). The Agrarian Party had resisted comprehensive school reform until this point. In 1965 it changed its name to the Centre Party and its internal attitudes towards education shifted towards support for comprehensive schooling to support the collective benefit for children in the countryside (Ahonen, 2014, pp. 83-84; Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 728). Finally, despite disagreement in the process, Parliament eventually came to an agreement, voting almost unanimously on the legislation in 1968 with Left parties in the majority with Centre Party support (Ahonen, 2014, pp. 83-85; Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 721; Niemi, 2016, pp. 21-22).

Simola talks of Finland's education history and the comprehensive school reform as "an accelerated, compressed version of the global process of mass schooling… implemented very rapidly and systematically, even in a rather totalitarian way… the Finnish success story in education is historically very recent" (Simola, 2005, p. 458). Central planning was popular in this context, and strong steering and investment from the State in welfare services such as education, school food and healthcare were considered necessary to advance equality (Antikainen, 1990, Torstendahl, 1991, cited in Simola, 1998, p. 750; Sahlberg, 2012, p. 28). The comprehensive school system was directed by a highly centralised administration with local boards to support implementation, which began in poorer and isolated northern areas (Ahonen, 2014, pp. 84-85; Niemi, 2016, p. 22).

The comprehensive school system is publicly funded and managed, and grounded on principles of equity and universal access. Private grammar schools were mostly absorbed into the comprehensive public school system, and those that remained independent were expected to use the national curriculum and were unable to charge fees (Ahonen, 2014, p. 84). The new system abolished the former tracking of students into restrictive 'academic' and vocational pathways at a young age for reasons of educational and social equality. That decision point was raised to 16 years old, though students could not move between pathways after basic school for another couple of decades (Ahonen, 2014, pp. 83, 85; Chung, 2019, p. 53; Kettunen, 2013, p. 51-52; Niemi, 2016, pp. 21-22; Scott, 2014, p. 106). Education policies were made more inclusive, but in reality, most disabled children were separately educated from their mainstream peers (Ahonen, 2014, p. 85). These reforms were followed by well-aligned teacher education reforms

to professionalise teaching, moving Initial Teacher Education to universities and raising the qualification to a research-based master's degree, which saw growing popularity of new academic disciplines such as developmental and educational psychology (Begrem et al., 1997, p. 434, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 69; Sahlberg, 2007, p. 153; Simola, 1998, p. 733, 2005, p. 461; Valtonen, 2013, pp. 161-163, 180).

Only after a generation of students moving through was the impact of the reforms on equality and education in society clear (Ahonen, 2014, p. 85; Chung, 2019, p. 122; Sahlberg, 2007, p. 160). The comprehensive school reform brought increased equality in education and wider society, particularly for those less privileged, and has been identified with the teacher education reforms as a significant factor in Finland's success in international assessments (Chung, 2019, pp. 70-72, 187; Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 728; Ahonen, 2000, pp. 175-177, cited in Valtonen, 2013, p. 165). In 1960 only 12% of students attained a high school diploma, by the 1990s nearly 80% did. This made post-school education more accessible in theory, but participation in tertiary education but still strongly influenced on family background (Kivinen & Rinne, 1995, Rinne & Vuorio-Lehti, 1996, cited in Ahonen, 2014, p. 85). The system has successfully minimized the difference in student achievement between schools, to about one tenth of the OECD average (OECD, 2001, Malin, 2005, Schleicher, 2006, cited in Sahlberg, 2007, pp. 158-160). The status and role of teachers has been strengthened, too; "teachers have become judges in terms of determining the directions of our children's future. This right has been handed over to them by the State from above and by parents from below" (Rinne, 1988, p. 440, cited in Simola, 2005, p. 461). These successes have helped maintain consensus in support of the public comprehensive school as a vehicle for social equality over time.

Finnish school meals developed and expanded with the comprehensive school; and the subject of home economics, which included cooking, was made compulsory for all students in the reforms (Sysiharju, 1995, cited in Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Manninen, 2010, p.  173). Changes in diets after WWI increased Finns' intake of energy and fat (Prättälä, 2003, p. 1). The cross-agency National Nutrition Council did not reach agreement on specifically Finnish guidelines for some time but contributed to the development of Nordic nutrition recommendations in 1968 (Kokko and Räsänen, 1997, and Murcott & Prättälä, 1993, cited in Prättälä, 2003, pp. 2-3). Since then, a primary aim of Nordic and Finnish nutrition recommendations has been to

increase intake of fresh foods, cereals and potatoes, and limit quantity of fats, sugar and salt in people's diets (National Nutrition Council, 1998, cited in Prättälä, 2003, p. 3). Dietary guidelines for Finland were first proposed by the Council in 1978 and have evolved since (Finnish National Nutrition Surveillance System, 1999; Kokko and Räsänen, 1997, cited in Prättälä, 2003, pp. 2-3). In 1981, guidelines specifically on the content and provision of school meals, and their connection with schools' educative purpose, were first introduced (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 11). Access to school meals also expanded in this time. While previously they were only provided free until the end of basic education, in 1983 provision extended to upper secondary students (ibid.). From 1979 meals have been subsidized on university campuses (Prättälä, 2003, p. 3).

### 6.2.6 Fifth period: Challenge to consensus and the comprehensive school late 1980s & 1990s

Challenge to consensus on the comprehensive schooling system and the public provision of services came in the late 1980s and '90s. Finland had enjoyed strong economic growth and productivity over three decades, compared with New Zealand's average to weak growth in the same time, and this continued into the 1980s with further diversification of industry (Chung, 2019, p. 34; Frame, 2000, p. 4). Until the end of that decade, Social Democrats and the Agrarian/Centre Party had essentially shared power and agreement on the purpose and provision of education and school meals (Simola et al., 2013, p. 619). A significant shift in Finnish politics moved towards the conservative right from 1987. The Social Democrats and National Coalition Party joined to form a government after that year's election, and in 1991 the Centre Party became dominant and allied with the National Coalition. (Chung, 2019, p. 34; Simola et al., 2013, p. 619). The historical relationship of the centre- left coalition of previous decades went from leading comprehensive school policy to defending it, and the 1990s became a "competitive tug of war" (Ahonen, 2014, p. 92; Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 723). The global backdrop of this shift was the weakening and dissolution of the Soviet Union, allowing Finland to grow closer to Europe (Chung, 2019, p. 34). A severe recession, considered the worst since the Great Depression, halted domestic economic growth and drove it back in the 1990s. Sparked by various influences including the collapse of the Soviet Union, a banking crisis, over-valued currency and burst asset price bubbles, the recession saw unemployment rise to 18% and public debt to

over 60% of GDP (Chung, 2019, p. 35; Frame, 2000, p. 5; Sahlberg, 2007, p. 148; Simola et al., 2002, pp. 249-250).

Despite these shifts and challenges, consensus on education, or the quest for it, remained an important feature of Finnish politics (Simola et al., 2009, p. 169). In the early 1990s, the Director of the National Board of Education joked about a parliamentary debate on education: "The parts of the addresses concerning education policy, and its importance and needs for development, could be written by one and the same person'" (Hirvi, 1996, p. 42, cited in Simola et al., 2009, p. 173). 'Active collaboration' was also encouraged across the education system; officials were prompted to listen to and involve teachers and students, and to trust schools and teachers in their roles (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 23). Since WWII, either or both Social Democratic and Centre Parties were present in consecutive governments, and the Centre Party remained so in this time. Some individual Social Democrats held similar views on education as centre-right parties, and agreement could be formed on key issues (Administrative leader 1, cited in Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 723). Politicians in the Centre Party were sometimes divided on issues, and while some supported more right-wing proposals by the National Coalition Party, others aligned with Social Democrats and Green Parties (Politician 2, cited in Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 723; Simola, Rinne & Kivirauma, 2002, pp. 249). The economic and political environment gave rise to some changes in the management of public education, but comprehensive schooling and universal free meals were sustained (Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 722).

The debate and changes in Finnish education were also influenced by the challenge to central planning and management of public services brought by neoliberal ideologies and global reforms. Globalization also increased a focus and value on international trends and provided an external audience for Finland's comprehensive school system (Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 724). International organizations like the OECD and the World Bank promoted decentralization of education systems in the 1990s, and internal industry groups did the same domestically (Chung, 2019, p. 214). Highly centralized governance of education and State management was questioned in the 1980s for being overly regulatory and bureaucratic, for not meeting the egalitarian aims of the previous system, and was ultimately discarded by this new government (Ahonen, 2003, pp. 169-171, 173-175, cited in Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 728; Kivinen et al., 1994; Rinne et al., 2000b, cited in Simola, et al., 2002, pp. 252, 261; Timonen, 2003, pp. 114).

The Nordic welfare state and consensus politics were put under pressure, and the recession saw cuts in public spending on social services with many decisions made based on budget (Rinne et al., 2002, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 141; Imsen, et al., 2017, p. 3; Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 722; Kuisma, 2007, pp. 10-11). This was accompanied by discursive change that promoted individual and parental responsibility for educational choices and social mobility, and a human-capital view of education as a vehicle to advance individual and national wealth (Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 723; Simola et al., 2002, pp. 251-252, 256, 261). Attitudes, discourse and policies about public education shifted, beginning with decentralization of central governance which transferred significant financial responsibility, pressure to reduce spending, and curriculum development to local municipalities (Chung, 2019, p. 55; Niemi, 2016, pp. 28-29; Sahlberg, 2012, p. 28; Simola, et al., 2002, pp. 251-254, 261; Simola et al., 2013, p. 619; Timonen, 2003, pp. 114-116). Decentralisation was extensive and swift, as it was also in New Zealand (Temmes, Ahonen & Ojala, 2002, pp. 129, 92, cited in Simola et al., 2013, p. 619). While there is broad support for a model with increased responsibility of municipalities, the reforms have been criticized as happening too quickly, resulting in variability and inequalities between local jurisdictions (Simola et al., 2002, pp 249-250, 254).

The role and responsibilities of teachers became more complex with decentralization as responsibility transferred from the national to local to school level and placed more demands on teachers (Simola et al., 2002, p. 258). However, these reforms also reflected greater trust in the autonomy and judgements of schools and teachers (Ahonen, 2014, p. 87; Chung, 2019, p. 56; Sahlberg, 2007, p. 156, 2015, p. 23; Simola et al., 2009, p. 169) Teachers and principals generally supported the reforms in surveys and the trust placed on them, but had concerns about increasing workload (Simola & Hakala, 2001; Simola, 2002; Santavirta et al., 2001, cited in Simola, 2005, pp. 463-465; Sahlberg, 2007, p. 157).

Other key changes included cuts to public spending on education, injecting school choice within the public system, and quality assurance for evaluation (Simola et al., 2002, pp. 249-250). Central government's role was to steer the system towards national goals and replace its inspection approach to a broader evaluative one (Hirvi, 1996, p. 93, cited in Simola, et al., 2002, p. 253). Rather than follow other countries like Sweden and privatized education, Finland made changes within the public system to increase choice and competition for individuals (Ahonen,

2014. p. 91; West & Ylönen, 2010, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 55). These changes contradicted the comprehensive school reforms of the 1970s, but the principles of the model and supports including the universal provision of free school meals largely withstood neoliberal influence (Ahonen, 2014, p. 86).

The Nordic countries, Finland especially, were less influenced by neoliberal ideologies, maintaining their identity as welfare states more than other countries (Chung, 2019, p. 32, 56; Scott, 2014, p. 7). Despite the recession, "expenditure on welfare services as a percentage of GNP in the mid-'90s was... third highest in Finland, behind only Denmark and Sweden" (Ministry of Finance, Finland, 1997, cited in Timonen, 2003, p. 112). However, the influence of 'the third way' saw adjustments to rhetoric and provisions of the Nordic welfare state to marry democratic socialism and capitalist motivations (Imsen, et al., 2017, pp. 11-12).

Despite adopting rhetoric and some policies aligned with neoliberalism and new managerialism, Finland's education system largely resisted the sweep of reform embraced by others, including New Zealand (Hargreaves et al, 2001; Rinne et al., 2002; Sahlberg, 2004; Aho et al., 2006, cited in Sahlberg, 2007, pp. 150, 152). Changes in society and the heightened importance of economic benefits from education weakened the dominance of egalitarian principles in the 1990s, and the role of education in Finland became more complex with a focus on economic growth as well as the advancement of social equity (Antikainen, 1990, p. 77, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 54). The challenges of the recession reinvigorated the value of collective care and the social good, limiting the extent of change to the welfare state (Ahonen, 2014, p. 92; Simola et al., 2013, p. 619). Other Nordic countries more readily took on neoliberal ideologies and approaches. For example, Sweden embraced privatization of the school system (and later regretted it), but despite pressure from the Right and from industry groups to increase competition, Finland ultimately decided not to follow suit and retained a strong public comprehensive school system (Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, pp. 724-725; Simola, 2005, p. 459; Simola et al., 2013, pp. 622-623). Publicly funded comprehensive schooling was "unanimously considered a civil right that could not be abandoned" by politicians (Simola et al., 2002, pp. 250). This was supported by a survey of parents in the mid-1990s (Räty et al., 1995, cited in Simola, 2005, p. 458). Additionally, while distrust of schools and teachers was the motivation of neoliberal reforms in

many countries, in Finland it was based on trust (Simola & Hakala, 2001, p. 115, cited in Simola, 2005, p. 464; Simola et al., 2009, p. 169).

Egalitarian discourse and Social Democratic values have persisted through this period in Finland, and social responsibility for reducing inequalities and segregation in education remained broadly valued and shared by Finnish politicians and other government actors (Simola et al., 2002, p. 254-255). Interestingly, politicians interviewed by Simola, Rinne and Kivirauma in the early 2000s considered policies of the 1990s as reactions to unintentional happenings rather than intentional acts, and never used the term 'neoliberal', instead preferring to refer to policies of the 1990s as 'market-based' or 'emphasising [personal] responsibility' (2002, pp 249-250, 254). Other studies involving interviews with public officials and others involved in education policy at that time noted "…in many cases [they] did not acknowledge the ideological umbrella of neoliberalism in their action" (Virtanen 2002; Meriläinen 2011, cited in Ahonen, 2014. p. 91). A researcher interviewed by Kosunen and Hansen reflected on their experience on committees at the time and submitted that politicians and officials were somewhat naïve in thinking that some of the discourse and actions aligned with neoliberal ideology: "Here we were and still in such a state of innocence that we thought we were just making nice liberties and a nice little competition" (Researcher 1, cited in in Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 723).

Universal free school meals persisted through the challenges of the 1990s, and in 1998 The Basic Education Act described the important role of government-provided daily meals and nutrition education for all children (Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 11). A study undertaken by Finland's National Nutrition Surveillance System showed the prevalence of Finns eating out in this decade, and that most of these were meals provided in schools (1999, cited in Prättälä, 2003, pp. 2-3). To support healthier meals, plant-based spreads have reduced the price to be more affordable than butter since Finland joined the European Union in 1995 (Prättälä, 2003, p. 3).

### 6.2.7 Sixth period: The age of PISA and international attention

By the turn of the Millennium, the Finnish economy was on the way to recovery with diversified exports and a growing knowledge economy (Chung, 2019, p. 35; Sahlberg, 2007, p. 148, 2015,

p. 23; Simola et al., 2002, pp. 249-250). The publication of the PISA 2000 results demonstrating the high performance of 15 year old Finns pulled the education system into a new stage, and made it a source of great interest internationally (see Rhodes, 2011, Steiner-Khamsi, 2004, Takayama et al., 2013, Waldow et al., 2014, cited in Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 728). Since then, Finland has consistently placed towards the top of international ranking tables, with some variation (Pellikka, et al., 2019, p. 11). In the 1990s, Finnish students were achieving at average or a little above average rates when compared with other countries, so these results were somewhat unexpected and can be considered an 'unintentional happening' (Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 725; Sahlberg, 2015, p. 23). It has been suggested that these results halted moves towards reform of the comprehensive school and may have saved it: "ideas of dismantling the [comprehensive school] system were knocked out with the first PISA results started appearing, after that nobody has really questioned the idea of comprehensive school" (Administrative Leader 3, Researcher 2, cited in Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 725; cited in Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 725).

In this context, public and political discussions were held on the previous decade's reforms, with growing concern that the extent of decentralization and flexibility they brought led to variability of investment and learning in education provision across municipalities, and that this increased inequalities (Ahonen, 2014, p. 88; *Suomen Kuvalehti*, 34, 2001, cited in Simola, 2005, p. 459). Research revealed that the market-influenced reforms such as school choice within the public education system during the 1990s have been shown to increase the influence of a child's family background on their education and segregation between schools on socioeconomic lines (Seppänen, 2006, Rimpelä & Bernelius 2010, Skidi Kids, 2010, OECD, 2009b, cited in Ahonen, 2014, p. 90). In response, some neoliberal policies were reversed, for example to protect a child's right to attend their local school. The National Board of Education has also provided more steering through curriculum documents since 2004 (Ahonen, 2014, pp. 88, 92).

Internationally Finland still has one of the most equal education systems, but true equality of opportunity in education may be a "vain dream" (Rinne & Vuorio-Lehti 1996, cited in Ahonen, 2014, p. 90). Education leaders in Finland face criticism for putting too much importance on the PISA assessments and recommendations of the OECD (Ahonen, 2014, p. 88), and there are concerns that Finland's international success can have unintended consequences if education

leaders rest on their laurels and do not continue to discuss, review and improve the comprehensive schooling system and its outcomes (Administrative Leader 1, Politician 1, Stakeholder 1, cited in Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 726). This is connected to issues of funding cuts and austerity in this era, because the system needs investment for its success to be maintained (Hilamo, 2012, Jensen, 2011, cited in Chung, p. 36). A discourse of competition and choice in Finland's public school system remains, despite limited privatization (Ahonen, 2014, p. 79), and there are concerns Finnish politicians and society are less clear and strong on consensus about the future of education (Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, pp. 726-727).

Universally available healthy food at school has continued into the 21st century. In 2004 school meals were integrated into the national curriculum, and more thoroughly in 2014 with a focus on health, educational, social and cultural significance, as well as guidelines for monitoring and evaluation (OPH, June 2019, p. 11). The government has also provided nutritional criteria guidelines for school meal procurement since 2010 (OPH, June 2019, p. 11). After nearly 80 years of Kouluruokailu, Finland's universal free school meals programme has improved and strengthened in its provision, impacts, and place in social and political culture.

# 7 CHAPTER 7: New Zealand's inconsistent approach to food in schools 2008-2021

The arrangement of food provision in New Zealand schools is complex and differs markedly from Finland's Kouluruokailu. Individual school boards make decisions about food in their schools, including whether to access programmes at all. Provision is mixed with no single agency's oversight, offered through a variety of local and national initiatives, and schools may participate in more than one. Most of these are led by volunteers, charities and businesses and do not receive government funding. The National-led government from 2008-2017 contributed central funding towards Fruit in Schools, KickStart Breakfast in partnership with food corporations, and through the charity KidsCan. They did not believe in expanding State responsibility for school meals, and instead promoted the role of business and charities, prioritizing immediate economic concerns. Opposition politicians, academics, teachers and social justice organisations presented evidence of inequalities persisting despite these initiatives. They advocated for more government support and systematic approach. Legislation was drafted by opposition MPs to this effect and was debated in 2013 and 2015, but these efforts were defeated before they could move into the Select Committee process wherein representatives from different political parties collaborate and undertake public consultation on the proposal. Chapter 9 critically analyses key themes of these arguments, identifying common ground to build from and differences to bridge or put aside. These arguments were reflected in multiple news stories exposing the vast difference in quantity and content of food consumed by children across the socioeconomic spectrum, and in public discussions on social media. Collectivist and individualist ideologies compete for dominance in New Zealand, and during this period the belief in personal responsibility and smaller government prevailed, even if only by a small majority. The Labour-led government from 2017 has had a very different approach to food in schools, and its MPs who spoke in favour of the aforementioned legislation to enshrine government responsibility are now the Minister of Education and the Prime Minister. This government established a pilot for a more systematic programme, Ka Ora, Ka Ako. Schools and communities are targeted for provision through the more nuanced Equity Index instead of decile measurement to better reach those in need and lessen stigma. Provision within the soul is universal and aims to reach 25 percent of school children with current funding arrangements. Widely supported by participants, it is still challenged by the political opposition and some social commentators. A future government could discontinue or significantly pare back government support for the programme.

## 7.1 Corporate-government partnership and charities 2008-2017

The National-led government's approach to food in schools was mixed and characterized by less central responsibility in favour of business and charity involvement, independence and self-reliance of parents, and volunteers from the community. Government funding of programmes varied, and large food companies Sanitarium and Fonterra led two key initiatives Kickstart Breakfast and Milk for Schools. These were not accessed by all schools and students, and the variety and amount of food offered through them was limited, so were supplemented by charities and social enterprise schemes including KidsCan and Eat My Lunch.

### 7.1.1 Fruit in Schools

The Fruit in Schools programme was established by the Labour-led government in 2005 and was continued by the National-led one from 2008. It was a targeted programme for low decile schools, developed through inter-agency cooperation, funded through the Ministry of Health, and managed by a produce organization. It aimed to increase children's intake of fruit and vegetables and their knowledge and habits about food into healthy lifestyles. Studies found it well supported by participating schools, who reported an increased sense of equality among students, better learning about nutrition and health, and a general improvement in their health and well-being. By 2018 the programme provided a variety of fruit to 104,244 students across 547 eligible schools (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), 2018, p. 6; Ministry of Health, 2017).

### 7.1.2 Kickstart Breakfast

Kickstart Breakfast is a partnership between the dairy company Fonterra and cereals company Sanitarium. Fonterra is the country's largest corporation, accounting for 25 percent of New Zealand exports and 30 percent of the world's dairy exports, and Sanitarium is another significant company in Australasia (Fonterra, 2018). The initiative was developed in early 2009 responding to evidence from the 2002 National Children's Nutrition Survey and the 2005/07 New Zealand Health Survey showing about 20 percent of children did not regularly eat breakfast to begin their school day, and many of these hardly ever did (Fonterra, 2018). The purpose is to offer breakfast of Weetbix cereal and milk to children at school, and companies promoted the nutritional value of the food they supplied for breakfast, "the most important meal of the day" (Kickstart Breakfast, 2020). When established it did not have capacity to cover all schools every

day so was targeted to decile 1-4. The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) joined the partnership after four years, providing $1.2 million a year to cover half the wholesale costs of the food provided and one third of administration. This government support enabled Kickstart Breakfast to be offered to all schools who wanted to opt in, and for five days a week instead of just two (Fonterra, 2018; DPMC, 2018, p. 5).

KickStart Breakfast operates on a community partnership model in which companies provide the food with support of government funding, and schools provide the environment, eating utensils and volunteers from the community to organise and serve. It was considered better for the companies to focus on providing food instead of operational logistics (Fonterra, 2018) and for "each school [to] run the club as best fits their students' and community needs" (Fonterra, 2019). Since 2009 it has supplied more than 40 million breakfasts; from serving 400 schools twice a week in 2013 it has grown to more than 30,000 breakfasts every day in 1,300 schools, (Fonterra, 2019).

Results have been positive. A survey of more than 1,000 participating schools in 2019 reported children are generally morehealthy, settled, engaged and positively behaved if they participated in the programme (Al-Sa'afin, 2021; Fonterra, 2019). A 2018 report commissioned by the Ministry for Social Development and Oranga Tamariki the Ministry for Children found that those who participated were one sixth less likely to require dental health interventions, though it is difficult to directly correlate this solely to the initiative. However, the report did identify causal mechanisms that could contribute to this outcome, including increased nutrition in diets through the programme. Additionally, 95% of participating schools were 'very satisfied' and noted children's improved health, attendance, engagement and social behaviours (Ministry of Social Development & Oranga Tamariki, 2018). KickStart Breakfast continues today alongside the *Ka Ora, Ka Ako* free and healthy school lunches trial, with some schools accessing both programmes.

### 7.1.3 Milk for Schools

Fonterra's Milk for Schools initiative was not the first of its kind in New Zealand, harking back to the 1937-1967 school milk programme described in the following chapter. It supplemented

the KickStart Breakfast from 2012 with a pilot to provide Anchor Lite long-life milk in Northland primary schools, and after some modifications including smaller servings sizes, was offered to all primary schools across the country from 2013. Fonterra is a multinational corporation and New Zealand's largest company. Its CEO has commented the aim of the programme is to increase the consumption of dairy products domestically, for the benefits to children's health as well as the company's gain (Spierings, cited in Stuff, 13 December 2012). Fonterra provided schools with the cartons of milk as well as cold storage and waste facilities and services. By 2018 145,000 children in 70% of New Zealand schools received the milk daily (Fonterra, 2018), and during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020 Fonterra and schools worked together with charities and health organisations to deliver milk to families most in need (Fonterra, 2020).

Principals of participating schools across deciles reported that most children drank the milk, and noted visible improvements in hunger, learning and attitudes of children: "Whether you agree with milk in schools or not they certainly learn better with a full tummy." (Beere, cited in Stuff, 13 Dec 2012). Researchers from Auckland University evaluated Milk for Schools to see changes in the consumption of milk and its impact over two years. They found a significant increase in intake, including days children were not at school to receive it free of charge. Seventy-three percent of children drank the milk, and out of those 52 percent drank it every day, 99 percent finished the carton, and 96 percent liked the taste. These findings challenge the national trend of milk consumption and intake of calcium decreases as children age, and researchers hoped the increased calcium intake will improve children's health and development (Marsh et al., 2018). A Massey University study "examine[d] linear growth, body composition and bone mineral status" in children who participated in the programme compared to a control group of children from schools who did not. They found children who consumed more milk through the programme had significantly improved bone health and strength (Kruger et al., 2017). The programme has been disestablished and Fonterra focuses its contribution through KickStart Breakfast available to all schools.

### 7.1.4 Charities and social enterprises

These partnerships between food corporations and the government did not meets the needs of all children in New Zealand with milk and cereals. Many schools provide support to children

themselves, often fund-raising to do so, and also rely on the involvement of charities and social enterprises. A number of these operate in New Zealand, including KidsCan and Eat My Lunch. KidsCan is a not-for-profit organization funded in a variety of ways including appeals for monthly donations for members of the public to support children and hardship in this country. Since 2008 the government has funded the charity at $350,000 a year to provide food as well as basic clothing and hygiene products to under-resourced children at eligible schools (DPMC, 2018, p. 5). In 2015 KidsCan offered support in the form of food, health care and clothing to 114,000 disadvantaged children in 530 low-decile schools across the country, but this only reached one third of all children in need (Child Poverty Monitor, 2015, cited in Fletcher, 2016). The founder of KidsCan acknowledged the charity could not fulfil the need in New Zealand, and made a plea that if everyone in New Zealand gave $1.30 a year, no children would have to go hungry at school (Z. Fleming, 2017b).

Social enterprises such as Eat My Lunch were also established in this environment to contribute to feeding New Zealand children at school. The catering company Eat My Lunch was established in 2015, with a business model that provides a free lunch to a child in need with every meal purchased. Taking a collaborative approach, they call for people across New Zealand to decide to work together to ensure every child has lunch at school (Eat My Lunch, 2018, p. 13). 1.6 million lunches have been provided, but schools linger on a waiting list the company does not have capacity to meet. Schools report improved attendance and children experiencing less shame for not having food, as well as impacts on learning and social behaviour, and children's health and well-being more generally (Eat My Lunch, n.d., 2018, p. 7). The company was criticised in 2017 for use of community volunteers as if it were a charity while also making a significant profit selling a portion of its shares to the conglomerate FoodStuffs. Although operating a business, founders lamented the need for their existence and mission in a country as bountiful as New Zealand (Campbell, 2017).

7.1.5 Persistent inequalities and varied consumption of food in schools

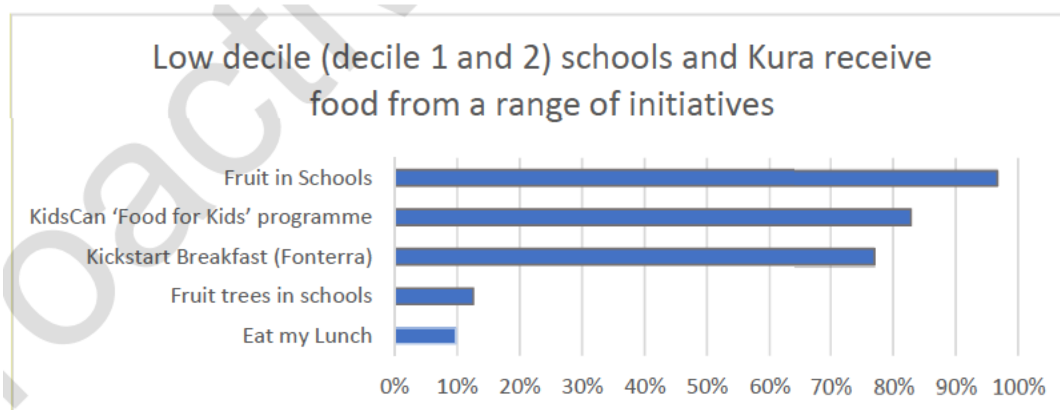



**Image 3. This graph from July 2018 shows the proportion of decile 1 and 2 schools participating in school food initiatives (DPMC, 2018, p. 8).**

This mixed approach to food in schools did not reach all children who needed it and was not sustainable with its reliance on business and charity. The nutritional value of food provided was also questioned. Although better than no food or unhealthy food, nutritionists were concerned the initiatives fell short of providing a full and balanced meal, as an ideal lunch would include fruit and vegetables, protein and carbohydrates. It is always challenging to evaluate the impact of food provision in schools, but particularly so in New Zealand where provision is mixed and schools may access multiple programmes that have different aims and funding sources (DPMC, 2018, p. 9). Understanding the policy environment of food in schools is constrained by limited data available on social issues including the experiences of food insecurity, participation in food in schools programmes, diet outside schools, access of charity food banks, or indeed the impact of these on children's education and life outcomes (ibid. p. 7). What is evident is that poverty, inequalities and hunger at school persist despite these initiatives.

The number of children hospitalized in New Zealand for malnutrition doubled between 2007 and 2017 (Johnston, 2017) and organisations providing emergency food support reported increasing numbers of families and individuals seeking their services, and many of those needing assistance are working (DPMC, 2018, p. 8). Schools also gave anecdotal evidence of families keeping their children home instead of sending them to school to avoid this stigma and hide the shame because they do not have food or sanitary products for the children to take (Fletcher,

2016). Media stories continued to highlight the differences between the amount and quality of food that children at different ends of the socioeconomic spectrum brought with them to school. Stories focused on low-decile schools in which few children brought lunch sometimes attracted sponsorship and funding from individuals and businesses who viewed them (Barback, 2012; Fleming, 2017a, 2017b).

Participant observation research in a South Auckland school investigated the food consumption, habits and experiences of the children in 2015. It found children having little to no breakfast or lunch was common, and often food brought were biscuits, chips and pies. This was supplemented by a carton of milk and a piece of fruit supplied by programmes above, but this did not meet their full daily needs. Children who did not bring lunch were also offered a defrosted peanut butter sandwich made by volunteers. The researcher presented the children's perspectives and experiences of this; there was significant social stigma about this charity offering. Although children felt shame for not bringing lunch to school, they were identified as "only being worth cold bread" and often told teachers they were not hungry even though they were to avoid being considered as such: "To kids, not having food was shameful, but not being hungry was socially acceptable, reframing not eating as a choice". The researcher was particularly concerned that this habit was embodied by the children and was influencing their psychological and physiological perceptions of hunger in their bodies, which can have significant impacts into adulthood (Kornell, 2014; Spray, 2021).

## 7.2 Ka Ora, Ka Ako – Free and Healthy School Lunches 2019-present

### 7.2.1 Ka Ora Ka Ako prototype

After nine years of National coalitions, a Labour-led government won the 2017 elections Jacinda Ardern took responsibility for child poverty reduction as the new Prime Minister. In 2018 the Government held a nationwide conversation Kōrero Mātauranga about the future of education, engaging with tens of thousands of New Zealanders. Online surveys and both broad and targeted in-person consultations provided feedback on a range of education issues to inform policy direction and development. The impact of poverty on learning and life opportunities was a consistent concern, and a number of respondents talked about the problem of children going hungry at school (Ministry of Education, 2021a).

It was in this context the Youth and Wellbeing Strategy was developed with the vision for “New Zealand [to be] the best place in the world for children and young people” (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), 2019). Part of this Strategy was the creation of a centrally-organised and supported school meals programme launched in early 2020 to help ”families with the costs of essentials” so ”children and young people have what they need” (ibid.). Its name *Ka Ora, Ka Ako*, “is about being healthy and well in order to be in a good place to learn” and aims to reduce food insecurity as a barrier to children’s learning and wellbeing, and to take financial pressure off under-resourced families (Ministry of Education, 2021a).

Ka Ora, Ka Ako was developed with reference to national and international research on the relationships of financial hardship, food insecurity, and children's health, learning and social development. Policy makers looked to international examples including the UK and Sweden but were selective of lessons to create a pilot programme better suited to the unique New Zealand school system and cultural context. New Zealand’s schooling system is highly decentralized with individual school boards holding significant autonomy, and the cultural diversity of the population is rich. As such, any initiative must consider the challenges and opportunities of this context to be effective. For this reason, eligible schools can choose if they wish to participate in *Ka Ora, Ka Ako*, and some have declined for reasons including their use of existing initiatives (Ministry of Education, 2021a). School boards, leaders and communities can decide how to implement the programme, for example whether schools make the lunches on-site or have an approved catering company to deliver meals. It is also possible for a group of schools to outsource to a single company. Different options are available because schools are considered most knowledgeable and able to make decisions affecting them and their unique community contexts, with government responsible for contracting and paying suppliers (ibid.). While provision and menus are not uniform, all suppliers must follow guidelines regarding nutrition, hygiene and food safety, and minimizing waste (Ministry of Education, 2020, 2021b; Ministry of Education et al., n.d.; Ministry of Health, 2019b).

The programme does not have financial capacity to be offered universally across every school in New Zealand, and at this early stage the model is being trialed and will undergo evaluations for refinement and improvement as it expands. Prime Minister Ardern has stated personal support for the concept of a universal free school meals programme, but also that financial realities

require prioritizing government investment, particularly in the current national and global context: “I don't have a problem with unlimited lunches. I think that would be great... But I have to prioritise, and it is quite costly to roll out and I have to ask the question 'is that the next step for us?’” She notes the target of 25 percent of schools in under-resourced communities will not capture all the children in need (Ardern, cited in Molyneux, 2021). However, the meals are offered universally to all children within a participating school, so individuals are not singled out by need. This is to avoid stigma and shame directed at children receiving the lunch, and to reduce the complexity of needs assessments for targeted provision. Ensuring all children in the school community have access to a healthy lunch every school day captures those that may be missed in a targeted approach. The schools and communities accessing Ka Ora, Ka Ako are identified by a range of intersecting family and community characteristics in an Equity Index, that is being developed to replace the somewhat blunt decile system as a measure for socioeconomic situations (Ministry of Education, 2021a, 2021c).

At its launch in February 2020, *Ka Ora, Ka Ako* offered a daily balanced meal to around 10,000 primary and intermediate students across 42 schools in communities selected for trial based on their levels of disadvantage. The impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown on children accessing the lunches challenged the fledgling programme, and the government expanded the reach of provision rapidly to counter this. As of March 2021 eight million lunches have been provided free to more than 132,600 children across 542 New Zealand schools. By the end of the year the initiative aims to reach 215,000 learners, or a quarter of school-aged children (Ministry of Education, 2021a). The initiative is also creating a number of jobs in the food service and related industries (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2021; Latif, 2021) The cost of each meal is $5 for primary aged students and $7 for secondary, and this will be reviewed along with student participation, attendance and general health and wellbeing (Ministry of Education, 2021a). In March this year, Cabinet agreed to continue funding the programme through 2022 and 2023 (Offices of the Cabinet, 2021).

### 7.2.2 Evaluation and responses

Evaluations of Ka Ora, Ka Ako gather evidence and feedback from schools and students to inform policy makers and suppliers in their future decisions about the programme. The first official report is yet to be published, but of course some results are unlikely to be seen for some

time, particularly in outcomes influenced by multiple factors such as improvements in attendance and learning outcomes, as these are significant shifts in trends and it is difficult to draw a clear causal relationship to a single intervention. More immediately visible results are likely to be an increased intake of healthy food and the reduction of hunger's influence on student attention and social behaviours.

These results are already reflected in responses from teachers, school leaders, children and families that have been generally very positive. The principal of a Rotorua primary school told media the difference in children's attention, engagement and even attendance has been "massive" since their participation in the programme (Molyneaux, 2021). Principals of South Auckland and Taranaki schools explained their initial worries about implementation and issues such as food quality, waste and undermining parents' roles and dignity, but these were not realized; surplus food is shared with families and school staff and the programme has been a success overall with high uptake, improved happiness, engagement and attendance (Latif, 2021; Stratford Press, 2021). A teacher at a decile 3 Wairarapa school described it as overall successful but highlighted some teething issues that could be improved with time and evaluations, including unequal portion sizes and new foods that some children were reluctant to eat:

> "The biggest thing for our low decile kids is the new type of food. This is new, and we need to get them inside, so feeding them simple sandwiches, muffin and fruit/yoghurt whatever to start with is the best way to start. Then they need to start doing fancy meals/new foods. Chicken wrap is super popular, chicken noodle salad, no thank you. So I think we need to keep it simple and introduce variety later on. That, and the kids just want hot food. The hot meals, wraps/sandwiches and sushi have been popular so far. Anything else has been a bit too adventurous. Bulk hot meals should be cheaper and easier to produce than sandwiches and wraps etc., so if they can save money in winter for summer then surely that's a good thing. We know they want to get it right! It'll just take a while" (Sulzberger, 2021)

Some parents have voiced their concerns about the universal within school approach, some of the food that is offered, and the withdrawal of the parents' role. However, many appreciate the reduced food bills and morning stress, and commend the universal approach for minimizing the stigma attached to receiving a free school meal (Latif, 2021).

## 7.3 Debate about individual/parent vs collective/government responsibility for school food initiatives

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*"It can be argued that there is nothing more fundamental to family behaviour than a parent feeding a child. School food is therefore often controversial, because it is at the boundary of appropriate Government interference in childrearing"*

(Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2013, p. 12)

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The inconsistent approach to food in schools described above has been wracked with debate about who is responsible for ensuring children do not go hungry in their school day. Under the National-led government, the dominant narrative elevated independent and parental responsibility while withdrawing that of the government and collective. Under Labour there is a groundswell of support for more government and collective responsibility. In both situations, this debate has hindered agreement and collaboration to effectively tackle the problem of family background and hunger impacting children's engagement and outcomes at school.

### 7.3.1 Mixed approach with calls for more government/collective responsibility

Organisations including Child Poverty Action Group, Auckland Action Against Poverty and the New Zealand Principals' Federation lobbied the National-led Government for more central support for school food provision, referring to research and international examples including Finland to demonstrate possibilities (Barback, 2012; Child Poverty Action Group, 2013; New Zealand Principals' Federation, 2011). Child Poverty Action Group called for support of legislation proposing government-funded lunches, and Auckland Action Against Poverty supported more government involvement in responsibility through taxpayer funding, to ensure greater access to fill the need while avoiding reliance on charities and businesses (Brookes, 2014; CPAG, 2013). In 2011 the NZ Principals' Federation drew on and supported research from CPAG exposing poverty faced by at least 200,000 children, and the impact of this on their access to food and learning in the school day. The extent is too significant for charity to fix and requires collective decision and action across society and Parliament. The Federation called on all principals and others who cared about equity, human rights obligations, and a well-educated

workforce to support a proposal for government responsibility to provide breakfast to all children in low-decile schools. They recognized that this would not solve child poverty but if sustained and funded sufficiently, it would be an essential action to mitigate the immediate need and contribute to addressing the bigger structural problems (NZPF, 2011).

In 2013 the Office of the Children's Commissioner presented evidence of the problem and developed a framework for a government-supported food in schools programme. The OCC referred to international studies and best practice examples, and noted the duplication of initiatives, lack of sustainable funding and absence of central oversight in this mixed landscape. Key features of good practice identified include cooperation with clear responsibilities of different actors, and for government to steer, coordinate, fund and monitor efforts. Parents also have a critical role, and any food in school programme should uphold their dignity and build their capacity (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2013).

Opposition MPs drafted Bills to amend the Education Act and legislate for government responsibility in schools but failed at the first reading, and did not pass into Select Committee stage and the opportunity for politicians across Parliament to work together and consult with the public on the proposal. Chapter 9 critically analyses MPs' speeches in these debates to identify the common ground and points of divergence and the underlying ideologies that inform them. In these debates and in media interviews, opposition MPs advocated for a bigger role of government in providing school lunches as "the right thing to do"; and although they believed parents are ultimately responsible for feeding their children, some cannot afford to do so. Fixing family and child poverty requires multiple interventions and system changes, but feeding hungry children will have an immediate effect and support their learning (Ardern, cited in Burrow, 2015). The Government resisted change to the programmes and calls for further involvement, instead giving precedence to the individual responsibility of parents and the social responsibility of businesses and charities. Minister Paula Bennett said voting down the proposed legislation "absolutely is the right thing to do. We provide breakfast into any school that wants it and this is being taken up which is great, but we believe in parental responsibility and I stand by the decision we made" (Bennett, cited in Burrow, 2015).

### 7.3.2 Ka Ora, Ka Ako debate and opposition to government responsibility

The new Labour-led government's announcement of *Ka Ora, Ka Ako* in 2019 brought the issue of centrally-funded free and healthy school lunches back into public focus. National Party spokespeople, now in opposition, labelled it a "nanny state policy" that could "take away the autonomy of parents to provide lunch for their children" (The New Zealand National Party, 2019). National MP Paul Goldsmith criticises the within-school universal approach and argues free lunches should be targeted to the most needy (cited in Neilson, 2021). A year and a half into the trial, the libertarian ACT MP David Seymour has criticised reports of food waste where children have not eaten the meals questions the quality of the food or the extent of need. Calling it a "free lunch farce", he argues the individualist talking point "This programme shows that nobody will ever spend taxpayer's money as carefully as their own" (Seymour, 2021). He also criticizes attempts to reduce stigma and improve their students' diets by encouraging students to eat the provided lunches, saying:

> "This Govt wants more people to rely on its handouts. It's stigmatising families who take personal responsibility. Schools are being told to discourage kids from eating homemade lunches, and encourage them to wait until they're hungry, to build reliance on free Govt lunches." (@dbseymour, 2021)

Similar arguments are discussed in comments below news articles and across social media, influencing politicians' stances while being influenced by them in return. Opposition to government responsibility for school lunches that diminishes the reality of the problem and does not consider structural challenges threatens the possibilities and sustainability of Ka Ora, Ka Ako*,* and therefore its potential to make a significant difference in children's lives and New Zealand society.

Broader public opinion on education and social issues and priorities shifts with a change in government in New Zealand, and this seems to be the case with school meals. Parents' and teachers' positive responses to *Ka Ora, Ka Ako* are widespread in news articles (Latif, 2021; Stratford Press, 2021). Media outlets covered the problem of hungry children and published opinions supporting a more systematic approach to address it under the previous National-led government, but this seems to have increased with the Labour-led Ka Ora, Ka Ako programme. Duncan Garner, a right-leaning broadcaster who was strongly against government-funded

school meals in the past, has recently launched a campaign for a universal programme to ensure all children and teenagers are fed at school. He acknowledges the impact of hunger and food insecurity on learning, and advocates for food to be provided in all schools to ensure benefits for all children, including those in higher decile schools (Garner, 2021):

> "So we have taken a stance and we say if we're going to feed some of them, feed them all… Now, coming to this position has been somewhat of a journey for me. You see, I never supported food in schools five years ago - I always deemed it exclusively a parent's job to feed their children. Then I visited these amazing enterprises that provide the food and I visited some of the schools and met the teachers and kids. And I have changed my mind. This is now something we must do. This is about doing all we can to give all children a fair start." (Garner, 2021)

Some news articles and opinion pieces continue to question government responsibility for food in schools, and offer alternatives including poor people growing their own fruit and vegetables, but these attract significant responses that break down and reject arguments made (Graham, 2017; Graham & Jackson, 2017)

This argument against government support for school meals has an ugly side of beneficiary bashing, with individuals who seek assistance painted as lazy and undeserving. The view of 'laziness' as the reason 'why people who live in need are poor' grew in New Zealand from 38% in 1989 - the height of neoliberal reform - to 60% in 2004 (Humpage, 2010, cited in Harris, 2017, p. 174). Political discourse has undoubtedly encouraged this. Former Prime Minister John Key described his vision of a welfare system as one that looks after people in high need situations but is focused on getting people back into the workforce, "and occasionally gives them a kick in the pants when they are not taking responsibility for themselves, their family and other taxpayers" (Key, 23 March 2010, cited in Harris, 2017, pp. 174-175). This view also intersects with racism, with Māori and Pacific Island peoples disproportionately under-resourced in society.

**Image 4. This cartoon, steeped in racial and classist stereotypes, caused controversy in 2014 for its accusation of beneficiaries receiving free school meals so they can spend their money on gambling, cigarettes and alcohol** (Dally, 2013)**.**

Branding all people who receive benefits with deficit descriptions such as 'lazy' and 'irresponsible' is not an accurate reflection of most people who struggle to make ends meet while being stigmatized by society and politicians (Caritas, 2010, cited in Harris, 2017, p. 175; NZPF, 2011). The founder of KidsCan challenges the perception of parents whose children go to school with no food, and the individualist assumption that they are to blame for buying alcohol and cigarettes over food for their family (Chapman, cited in Weaver, 2016). Blame is unjust as most parents do their best in an increasingly expensive country with accommodation costs often demanding more than 60 percent of income, and families are forced to prioritize and sacrifices essentials such as heating or food (ibid.; Presbyterian Support Otago, 2011, pp. 14–16). Principals of schools that service under-resourced communities talk about the impact of food on reducing the hunger and improving the learning of the children in their care, whether from community volunteers and fundraised money or one of the centrally organized programmes. They acknowledge the difficult lives of the families in their communities, and that most work hard to care for their children (Fleming, 2017). School leaders in wealthier communities also support free food initiatives, recognizing the privilege of their own children, nearly all of whom brought lunch to school (O'Callaghan & Ferrick, 2012). Framing beneficiaries as 'dole bludgers' out to game the system is also criticized for being disingenuous when tax evasion by wealthy individuals and companies ($7.4 billion in 2011) costs the country overwhelmingly more than benefit fraud ($22 million in 2010) (Harris, 2017, p. 176).

Blaming and shaming parents is also an unhelpful strategy that places the negative consequence of parents' decisions and challenging situations on the shoulders of their children who continue to go hungry at school while responsibility over who should feed them remains contested: *"*You can debate the rights and wrongs of who is to blame and why it is happening but, if we want children to learn, a full tummy is so important." (O'Callaghan & Ferrick, 2012). Studies show the social and psychological impacts of targeting poorer children for charity food provision and argue a core requirement of food provision in schools should be to uphold the dignity of children and their families. It is important that children do not suffer and are instead supported for their own individual benefits and the good of all society in the future (New Zealand Principals' Federation, 2011; Spray, 2021; Weaver, 2016).

There is a difference of opinion among those who support government responsibility and funding for school meals on how best to maintain the dignity of children and their parents; whether programmes should be targeted or universal. An Otago University Associate Professor warned against "blanket" provision of food even only to low-decile schools, to maintain parents' dignity and avoid removing their responsibility for feeding their families. However, the Associate Processor still advocated for government involvement at the next level up, to ensure families can afford to do this (O'Callaghan & Ferrick, 2012). The Office of the Children's Commissioner also recommended planning a school lunch model included the mitigation of family dependence on government welfare, but also "note that in some instances the educational and nutritional benefits gained by the child may outweigh any small negative impacts (such as increased dependency) on the part of the parent" (OCC, 2013). Others argue for more collective responsibility and that only a universally available programme can truly address the needs of children in New Zealand (Garner, 2021; Graham, 2017, Spray, 2021).

Proponents of collective and government responsibility also question the sustainability of corporate in charity models, as support is often targeted and could change or be withdrawn on the whim of the market, loss of grant funding, or if the business' own interests are not being met (NZPF, 2011). Fonterra and Sanitarium have been fairly open about the financial benefit as a

driver in their leadership of KickStart Breakfast and Milk in Schools, as regular consumption of their food products is likely to establish long-term habits:

> "I don't believe in charity. This is a business decision – it is really something like advertising and promotion… New Zealand is the largest exporter of dairy products in the world, but at home, we're not drinking as much milk as we used to… Long term we want to have these kids on milk and not on carbonated drinks when they are 20 years old. And when they earn a salary, they go to the supermarket and buy our milk" (Spierings, cited in Brookes, 2013).

The following chapter explores the development of New Zealand's inconsistent approach to feeding children at school and debate about responsibility for it in the country's sociohistorical context.

# 8 Chapter 8: The development of the inconsistent approach to school food and the debate that hinders it in New Zealand's sociohistorical context

Understanding New Zealand's inconsistent approaches and attitudes towards meals must explore historical context to better understand their causes, which with lessons from Finland can help consider opportunities for agreement and action (Chung, 2019, p. 185; Simola, 2005, p. 457, 2014, p. 274). This is a complex topic deserving of more explanation and nuance, but this chapter summarises relevant considerations about the country's demographics, colonial heritage, geographical and diplomatic positions, social and political culture, human rights landscape, education system and broader history.

## 8.1 Significant features of New Zealand's context

### 8.1.1 Demographics and geopolitical position

Unlike Finland, New Zealand does keep official statistics on ethnicity and is significantly more diverse. Nearly 30 percent of the population are Pākehā (of European descent), 16.5 percent are indigenous Māori, or tangata whenua | people of the land, 8.1 percent Pacific, 15.1 percent Asian, 1.5 percent Middle Eastern or Latin American, and a further 1.2 percent not identified. Before COVID-19 New Zealand has been characterized as a country with high immigration since 1840, and in 2018 nearly 30 percent of all inhabitants were born outside of the country (Statistics NZ, 2018). New Zealand is similar in size to Finland, in both land mass and population, making them more comparable as "laboratories" for trialing significant interventions such as government-funded school meals. Additionally, their position on the world stage is not too dissimilar, widely seen as progressive countries with high standards of living that punch above their weight and do not always follow the rest of the world. However, as Finland's membership of the Nordic countries and historical relationship influences its values, attitudes and actions, so too does New Zealand's identity as an Anglo-Saxon liberal welfare state strongly influenced by its colonial relationship with England (Thrupp, 2007, p. 1393).

### 8.1.2 Inequalities and food insecurity in New Zealand

More detail about the challenges of inequalities and food insecurity in New Zealand can be found in the previous chapter. To summarise, over the last decade between 20 and 25 percent of children have suffered the challenges of hunger, food scarcity and other symptoms of poverty, and Māori and Pacific children are especially affected. Where Finland has reduced the relationship between family background on education outcomes, it persists in New Zealand.

### 8.1.3 Te Tiriti o Waitangi and a legacy of colonization

Perhaps most significant is Aotearoa New Zealand's bi-cultural relationship established by Te Tiriti o Waitangi between the British Crown and many, but not all, Māori rangatira | chiefs. Most of these rangatira agreed to and signed Te Tiriti in te reo Māori | language which guaranteed their rangatiratanga | sovereignty and "the full benefits of living within the nation of New Zealand" (Bishop et al., 2010, p. 10). Māori were supposed to be equal as British citizens, but the new colonial government quickly reneged on their promises, referred to the roughly translated English version that stated Māori ceded sovereignty, and undertook a campaign of land acquisition and cultural assimilation. Although progress has been made in recent decades and Māori are diverse, the impact of continuing colonization and institutional racism has compounded in collective overrepresentation of Māori in poor education, health, social and economic indicators: "In short, governments here for 140 years failed the 'responsibility to protect' test for a large and distinguishable minority of our citizens" (Bishop et al., 2010, pp. 10–11; OECD, 2011, Snook & O'Neill, 2014, cited in Grudnoff et al., 2016, pp. 451, 453; Harris, 2017, pp. 99–100). The question of government responsibility for food in schools therefore is also a Treaty issue, not just for improving the disparities and making redress, but also for complex concepts such as rangatiratanga | sovereignty and mana | dignity that others are better placed to explore. Critical historical research about New Zealand must recognize the historical and ongoing damage, listen to and platform indigenous people, and support decolonization.

### 8.1.4 New Zealand's social and political culture

It is difficult to generalize the culture of a country as diverse as New Zealand, but while Pākehā values and structures dominate, the country is enriched by Māori, Pacific and other cultures'

belief systems, languages, values, and ways of working. Like Finland, New Zealand has a strong egalitarian tradition. This has been influenced by both the social organization of Māori whānau, hapū and iwi groups and from values held by early European settlers escaping the inflexible Victorian class system in England (Lauder & Hughes, 1990, p. 43, cited in Thrupp, 2007, p. 1394; Macpherson, 1993b, Spoonley et al., 1994, cited in Novlan, 2010, p. 8). Even so, New Zealand's social culture is challenged by racism and classism. This tension of division with egalitarian ideals has been a fixture in New Zealand (Rata, 2009, pp. 104-105) Additionally, New Zealand is influenced by global trends and events, and has tended to react with policies that will support economic stability but also maintain basic social welfare for vulnerable people (Novlan, 2009, p. 9). Significant and ideologically-driven changes in vision and policy are brought with new governments, but enduring values such as fairness, equality and security also characterize New Zealand's political culture (Levine, 2012).

#### 8.1.5 New Zealand's human rights and child rights setting

New Zealand has signed and ratified the international human rights treaties outlined above and "has a strong and long-standing reputation for promoting and protecting human rights" (Amnesty International, 2012, p. 5).. Colin Aikman, leading New Zealand's delegation to the United Nations during the drafting of the UDHR, made a rousing speech supporting the equal importance of economic, social and cultural rights with civil and political rights, pronouncing that

> "Experience in New Zealand has taught us that the assertion of the right of personal freedom is incomplete unless it is related to the social and economic rights of the common man. There can be no difference of opinion as to the tyranny of privation and want. There is no dictator more terrible than hunger. And we have found in New Zealand that only with social security in its widest sense can the individual reach his full stature…. These social and economic rights can give the individual the normal conditions of life, which make for larger freedom. And in New Zealand we accept that it is the function of government to promote their realisation."
>
> (Colin Aikman, speech from 1948, quoted in 1998 reflection, p. 5).

However, New Zealand is criticised on "the lack of enforceability of ESC rights within [its] domestic legal system". The nature of New Zealand's unique constitutional framework and domestic human rights legislation has limited the enshrining of the economic, social and

cultural rights expressed in the Convenant into domestic law. New Zealand does not have an embedded written constitution, unlike all but two other countries in the world, and its constitutional framework is comprised of a range of sources that includes: "[Te Tiriti o Waitangi] | The Treaty of Waitangi; various statutes of constitutional significance from both England and the United Kingdom incorporated into New Zealand law; as well as domestic legislation such as the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 (BORA) (*New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 No 109*) and the Human Rights Act 1993 (HRA)" (Amnesty International NZ, 2012). This means international law, including human rights treaties such as the ICESCR 1976, is not automatically integrated into domestic law upon its ratification. Instead, international law must be overtly expressed in domestic legislation that passes the Parliamentary process. Until then, New Zealand legislature and judiciary must have regard to its international obligations being a Party to the treaties, but with some discretion (ibid., p. 6). A result of this is that "while New Zealand's domestic human rights legislation, including the HRA and the BORA, provides explicit legal protection for the civil and political rights enshrined within the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), it provides no legal protection to the Covenant's ESC rights other than the right to non-discrimination and the rights of minorities to enjoy their culture" (ibid., p. 7). This has led to a fragmented and inconsistent approach to legal recognition and protection of ESC rights in New Zealand (ibid., p. 9).

Amnesty International and others have advocated for the incorporation of ESC rights into BORA 1990 to strengthen their legal standing and protection (Amnesty International NZ, 2012, p. 10). New Zealand's five-yearly Universal Periodic Review before the Human Rights Council has consistently shone a spot-light on the need to improve protection for children's rights and incorporate ESC rights into domestic legislation. To illustrate, in its first cycle six countries called on New Zealand to "consider integrating the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights into domestic legislation to ensure the justiciability of these rights" (UPR, 2012), and New Zealand was urged to deal with economic and social inequalities that disproportionately affected vulnerable groups such as Māori. Twenty recommendations focussed on ESC rights in the second review . Three of these were specifically about enshrining the ESCR into the Bill of Rights Act 1990, but these suggestions were only noted and not accepted by the New Zealand Government. Additionally, eight recommendations were made to effectively tackle causes and symptoms of child poverty, all of

which the Government accepted, including Canada's suggestion to formally measure child poverty (ibid.).

### 8.1.6 State and direction of education in New Zealand

Education and related social policies can be highly variable between governments, as dominant political parties hold divergent perspectives on the role of education and government investment and involvement. The system has long held egalitarian aims, and these have been used to justify policies that both increase and withdraw government responsibility (Beeby, 1956, cited in Thrupp, 2007, p. 1395). Historical pillars of the education system include "social equity, economic stability, and to a lesser extent local political controls" (Novlan, 1997, p. 10). Despite these aims the New Zealand education system continues to struggle with inequalities, and international assessments such as PISA have highlighted a large gap between high and low achieving students and a clear relationship between family background and education outcomes, though overall achievement is fairly high (OECD, 2011, cited in Grudnoff et al., 2016, p. 453). Consecutive governments have attempted to address this issue in different ways, motivated by different ideologies. For example, the National-led government which rejected further government responsibility for school meals also introduced high stakes nationally standardized assessments and a public-private charter school model. O'Connor and Holland's critical analysis of legislation over this period highlights little public consultation or research and "the ideological agenda of privatization and deregulation that has marked government policy since the 1980s" (2013, p. 146). These National Standards and charter school policies were almost immediately revoked by the Labour-led government which established Ka Ora, Ka Ako, set up the Kōrero Mātauranga national conversation to develop a shared vision and priorities for education, and is undertaking broad reform across the system.

## 8.2 The development of debate about collective/government or individual/parent responsibility for feeding children at school in New Zealand's history

This section provides a brief diachronic overview of the historical context in which the inconsistent attitudes and approaches to education and food in schools developed. Following the guidance of Kosunen and Hansen (2018) in Chapter 6, it is organized into six periods defined by relevant "historical events, unintentional happenings and intentional acts" (pp. 719-720):

1. *First period: Before Te Tiriti o Waitangi 1840*
2. *Second period: Colonisation in the 19th century*
3. *Third period: Political shifts, war and economic depression in the early 20th century*
4. *Fourth period: The Welfare State and school milk provision 1930s-1950s*
5. *Fifth period: Global crises and economic pressures in the 1960s-1970s*
6. *Sixth period: The influence of neoliberalism since the 1980s.*

### 8.2.2 First period: Before Te Tiriti o Waitangi 1840

Written sources from before European contact do not exist, but the rich oral tradition of Māori speaks of the value of knowledge and learning | mātauranga Māori in the collective social organisation, and Māori were eager to learn and engage in new knowledge presented by the arrival of sealers, whalers, traders and missionaries (Jones et al., 1995, Smith & Smith, 2001, Jones & Jenkins, 2008, cited in Stephenson, 2009, p. 1). Early European arrivals observed the general health and wellbeing of Māori, the hospitable and respectful social interactions, and kind and community-supported parenting of happy and cared-for children (Banks, 1769, Earle, 1832, Marsden, 1814, 1820, Polack, 1842, cited in Groundwork Facilitating Change, 2021, p. 6). Māori iwi and hapū were independent, geographically spread out, and had unique dialects and tikanga | cultural practices (Macpherson, 1993, p. 71). The first to come were explorers, sealers and whalers, and traders in timber and iron, followed by missionaries from the 1810s; mainly Anglican or Presbyterian, and some Catholic. The relationship with Māori was largely cooperative and mutually beneficial, and Europeans were only there by the grace of Māori hospitality, interest and desire for trade. As in Finland, clergy were instrumental in the development of literacy and basic education. A main paternalistic goal of missionaries in New Zealand was to 'Christianise and civilise' the Māori population through education, and save them from the ills that befell colonized peoples in other places (Ward, 1974, cited in Stephenson, 2009, p. 2). Missionaries learned te reo Māori and transcribed into a written language, primarily for Bible passages and prayers. Literacy in te reo Māori and the utility of the English language for trade drew Māori to the schools set up from 1816 (Stephenson, 2009, p. 2). Sometimes they learned alongside the children of missionaries and settling traders, sometimes in separate schools with a more limited curriculum (ibid., p. 3).

### 8.2.3 Second period: Colonisation in the 19th century

Te Tiriti o Waitangi | The Treaty of Waitangi established the Crown to govern the country through a representative, and Māori were guaranteed rangatiratanga | sovereignty in the te reo version signed by most rangatira. The signing of Te Tiriti on 6 February 1940 coincided, and was propelled by, the arrival of the first boat of settlers from Britain. The strategy for immigration was planned with social equality in mind for both Great Britain and its citizens in the new colony, but settlers' schooling took little focus (Barber, 1989, Spoonley et al., 1994, cited in Novlan, 1998, p. 8; Stephenson, 2009, pp. 2-3). Settlers outnumbered Māori in 1858, and as immigration grew governors and early colonial governments disregarded Te Tiriti and enacted a myriad of policies to acquire Māori land and increase the dominance of the fledgling government and Pākehā population. From 1845 they were in conflict with Māori in different parts of the country over these breaches (Harris, 2017, p. 18)

Egalitarian values were present in the hopes of European settlers for a better life than Victorian England, for example, had to offer, and many were of lower to middle classes 'in the same boat' in this colonial venture. Life in New Zealand was harsh and demanded high levels of independence and self-reliance of these arrivals, but also of co-dependence and support for each other in challenging, sometimes life or death, circumstances, embedding this tension of values in the foundations of Pākehā society (Macpherson, 1993b, cited in Novlan, 1998, p. 8). Immigrants also arrived from other parts of Europe, and increasingly from China with the discovery of gold (Stephenson, 2009, p. 4). Governance of the new State was not straightforward but challenged by disunity. The nature of settlements in the early colony far from Britain meant support for regional or local political interests and authority outweighed that over a distant central government that took weeks to travel to (Macpherson, 1993, p. 71; Stephenson, 2009, p. 12). Problems of social inequality developed with the discovery of gold leading to abandoned families and transient work demanded action. The 1867 Neglected and Criminal Children Act gave government support to charity organisations, differing from Britain which tended to rely on philanthropy for such services (Wills, 2009, pp. 133-134).

Education was largely the responsibility of missionaries, volunteers, small councils and private actors in local regions and provinces until 1877 when it transferred to the newly formed central

government. Settlers brought their own ideas about education, and community schools were variable and reinforced values of hard work and determination (Macpherson, 1993, p. 71; Stephenson, 2009, p. 5). Missionaries sought support for boarding schools to provide basic and agricultural education to Māori learners, and the government partnered with them from 1847 as part of its racist assimilation strategy. The 1867 Native Schools Act reinforced assimilation of young Māori into European society (Stephenson, 2009, p. 7). The newly established central government took responsibility for universally available education in 1877, but the system was administered by regional boards as part of the negotiation of local and national concerns (Openshaw, Lee & Lees, 1993, cited in Stephenson, 2009, pp. 7-8). Politicians debated about the role and purpose of public education and knowledge, morals and values, and social cohesion (McLean, 2009, p. 57; Bowen, 1877, cited in Stephenson, 2009, pp. 8-9). The importance of the individual and its relationship with the early democratic State through taxes and public services saw concept of the social contract develop at this time (ibid.). The size and relative classlessness over these decades the Women's Christian Temperance Union agitated and lobbied for women's vote and political representation, in large part to exert a moral influence and meet the challenges of social ills and inequities. New Zealand women led the world by winning the right to vote in 1893.

### 8.2.4 Third period: Political shifts, war and economic decline in the early 20th century

The early 20th century was a time of prosperity in New Zealand but industrialisation, a rural to urban drift, universal primary education and increased access to secondary schooling, WWI and the Depression changed the opportunities, challenges, and inequalities in New Zealand society (McKenzie, Lee & Lee, p. 71, cited in E. Rata, 2009, p. 105). New Zealand made significant contributions and sacrifices in the World Wars, but they were fought off our lands and therefore did not have the same effect or elicit the same response in New Zealand as in Finland. Over these decades however, New Zealand moved towards the creation of a welfare state driven by egalitarian and collectivist values. The national schooling system needed to adapt to these changes. By WWI the central government was responsible for directing the national curriculum and school inspections and established universal secondary education soon after. Education reforms since the late 19th century "were explained and driven by four educational-policy myths that were each, in turn, subsumed: selective support; equal opportunity; equal outcomes; and

most recently, equal power" (Beeby, 1986, pp. 11-45; Renwick, 1986; Macpherson, 1987, cited in Macpherson, 1993, p. 71).

Social changes were also evident in the shifting political scene. There were three main parties in New Zealand at the time of WWI. The Reform and Liberal Parties were not very distinct from each other but formed a majority National Ministry government as "uneasy wartime allies" from 1915-1919. The newly formed Labour Party was small but growing in staunch opposition with prominent members as conscientious objectors (Chapman, 1969, pp. 1–5). Labour presented its platform as being moderate in 1919 to broaden its attraction to voters, but there was disagreement in the Party about this from the more radical Socialist members. The Party planned the case for establishing state ownership of industries and services, but though Labour entered Parliament this was not a popular idea among the public who stuck with the Reform Party as government. Soldiers returning from war, dissatisfaction with the stagnant political situation, and the cuts made by Liberal and Reform Parties through the Depression brought Labour more support. Liberal and Reform responses were to cut spending in public services and government departments leading to strikes and civil protests, strengthening Labour's "vigorous opposition" in Parliament (Chapman, 1969, pp. 6, 14-15). The creation of the Dairy Board lent the Reform Government support. In the mid-1920s, the Liberal Party adopted the National Party name but had little influence, and Labour was the real opposition (Chapman, 1969, pp. 29-30). The fall of export prices and another economic slump in the second half of the decade effected the popularity of Reform, while Labour members organised with people struggling on the ground to build its grassroots movement towards equity. Fearing this threat, Reform MPs derided Labour as Bolshevik radicals, and though media headlines and cartoons did similar, Labour was the main opposition presenting an alternative by the 1930s (Chapman, 1969, pp. 43-44, 63-64).

### 8.2.5 Fourth period: The Welfare State and school milk provision 1930s-1950s

> "The government's objective, broadly expressed, is that every person whether his level of academic ability, whether he be rich or poor, whether he live in town or country, has a right, as a citizen, to a free education of the kind for which he is best fitted and to the fullest extent of his powers" (Peter Fraser, AJHR, 1939, cited in Ray, 2009, p. 25)

The strength of recession deepened in the 1930s, another war with Germany loomed, and John Keynes' economic theory that advocated greater government responsibility and control over the economy and social services to stabilise and rebuild the economy and protect its people from hardship. This "was contingent on the reconciliation between the public interests of the state and the private interests of the entrepreneur" (Spoonley et al.,1994, p. 134, cited in Novlan, 1998, p. 9), and "In spite of New Zealanders belief in local control and self determination, they appeared willing to turn that control over to the government and increasing amounts in order to regain economic stability"s (Macpherson, 1993b, cited in Novlan, 1998, p. 9). It was in this climate the first Labour Government was elected in 1935 under Prime Minister Peter Fraser and led the world as a "welfare state" (Novlan,1998, p. 9). The Government took responsibility for significant social services such as unemployment support, health and housing. Despite broad support for these welfare state policies, "in general, there is an assumption of popular sovereignty, and centralism has remained in bad odour" (Arnold, 1985, cited in Macpherson, 1993, p. 71)

Shifts in education's role, management, accessibility and pedagogy was changing around the world, and New Zealand was influenced by these just as Finland was. This government recognized and emphasized the relationship between education, family background, and social mobility (Beeby, 1977, p. 71, cited in Rata, 2009, p. 106). To this purpose, it removed barriers to education such as the entrance examination for secondary schooling. Educational psychology and more child-centred pedagogies influenced by John Dewey were incorporated (Stephenson, 2009, p. 11-12). The 1944 Thomas Report reinforced values of equality in education, democratic principles, and the provision for all children's development (Ray, 2009, p. 18).

Importantly, this government established the first milk in schools scheme from 1937, and this too was debated and discussed extensively in the years prior. There was little available in the way of cabinet papers and other documents from Archives New Zealand on the establishment of milk in schools, though the National Library contained tomes of relevant parliamentary speeches from the 1930s. A particularly interesting difference when considered alongside the analysis of the 2015 debates is the broader support across Parliament for a milk in schools

scheme funded and organized by the Government with support of the Dairy Board. Also significant is the similarity of reasoning and phrasing used in parliamentary speeches from nearly 100 years ago. Concern was raised about insufficient funding for school resources including school gardens (Samuel, cited in NZ Parliament, vol. 238, June - Aug 1934). Liberal and National MPs supported the venture for the health benefits, potential employment, and the commercial interests of the dairy industry (de la Perelle, cited in NZ Parliament, vol. 238, June - Aug 1934). Labour MPs were enthusiastic and called for expansion of the programme to all schools, all year round, and referred to benefits seen in examples of schools providing hot milk in winter months (Sullivan, cited in NZ Parliament, vol. 238, June - Aug 1934). The scheme was planned for roll out across the country after the election of the Labour Government, and "there will be no discrimination between the children. The rich and poor children alike will be given their half pint of milk, and none of them will have to pay" (Thorn, cited in NZ Parliament, vol. 246, 21 July – 2 Sep 1936). Universal provision was considered "wise and sensible" by Labour and National MPs for the health of children and of the milk market (Thorn, Polson, Fraser, cited in NZ Parliament, vol. 246, 21 July – 2 Sep 1936). Current controversies about the impact of sugar on dental health and the export of New Zealand food while people here go hungry were reflected in political debates even then (Barclay, Broadfoot, Herring, Fraser, Wright, cited in NZ Parliament, vol. 246, 21 July – 2 Sep 1936). As the rollout across the country began in 1937 to reach a third of children in schools, MPs sought lessons from other countries:

> "Some of the smaller states, particularly the Scandinavian states, are more comparable in size and population… I think a little country like New Zealand has more to learn by the progress made by the smaller states… because we have not the wealth, the equipment, or the possibilities that the greater states have" (Bloodworth, cited in NZ Parliament, vol. 248, Sep 1937).

When the school milk scheme was well established, discussions continued in Parliament about the addition of fruit and malted milk, and MPs shared reports of "remarkable results" benefiting children from across the socioeconomic spectrum (Fraser, Sexton, Smith, Roy, Bodkin, NZ Parliament, vol. 249, Nov – Dec 1937; Nordmeyer, Fraser, Polson, cited in NZ Parliament, vol. 255, Aug 1939).

### 8.2.6 Fifth period: Global crises, economic pressures and the end of school milk 1950s-1970s

New Zealand's post-war era saw an expansion of the welfare state (Lauder, 1990, p. 4). As in Finland, education was valued for its role in progress, equality and democracy, and for advancing the rights of individuals as well as collective society (Middleton et al., 1990, p. viii). The 1962 Currie Report on education reinforced the importance of equality of opportunity, and was largely supportive of government responsibility for public education. However, it noted growing inequalities for Māori, disabled, and rural learners (cited in Ray, 2009, p. 19). The New Zealand economy slowed and faced impacts of global crises and economic busts. Social tensions, raised costs of living and increased taxation led to significant employment disputes, strikes and protests (Ray, 2009, p. 18).

School milk continued with fairly broad support into a National government from the end of World War II but was more frequently questioned in the 1950s for its eventual disestablishment in the late 1960s. An examination of school milk scheme reports, cabinet papers and memoranda from Archives illustrates the growing disagreement about the costs and need, ways to reduce the serving sizes, and supplementation with milk powder or malt (Department of Agriculture, 1956; Department of Education, 1953; Office of Minister of Marketing, 1951; Office of the Minister of Agriculture, 1953; Office of the Minister of Health, 1951; Offices of the Cabinet, 1951, 1952a, 1952b). This doubt and debate led to agreement on the in-principle decision to discontinue the milk in school scheme in 1961. It was said to have "outlived its usefulness, and could, from the health point of view be safely abandoned" as there was little malnutrition in the country, or at least targeted to deprived groups such as Māori children. However, surveys conducted by the Education Department showed that most parents supported continuation of the scheme in some form (Office of the Minister of Agriculture, 1961). Handwritten speech notes from Labour Leader Walter Nash in response to this decision. also reflect similar arguments as those analysed in Chapter 9. Nash challenged comments made by the Government Minister about parents reneging on their responsibility, and looked to examples from the national scheme and other countries to prove its worth for children and their communities (Nash, 1961). Despite pleas and evidence to continue the programme, it was gradually pared back and discontinued by the 1970s.

### 8.2.7 Sixth period: The influence of neoliberalism since the 1980s

Education had largely been a topic of consensus since the 1930s, but became more debated in the 1980s with the domestic and external pressures, and the influence of the Global Education Reform Movement. Central steering of public education and welfare was questioned for its efficiency, and a market model was posed as a more competent solution (Desjardins, 2015; Ray, 2009, p. 26; Wiborg, 2015 407-423). The Fourth Labour Government was elected in 1984, and swiftly followed advice from Treasury to deregulate and privatise state assets and the education system (Lauder, 1990, p. 1; Novlan, 1998, p. 11; Ray, 2009, p. 24). It was argued the State had become too bureaucratic and the only logical alternative was for a withdrawal of government responsibility in many areas in favour of the market (The New Zealand Treasury, 1987, pp. 32–33). Decentralisation of education administration happened rapidly in the 1980s, as it did also in Finland in the 1990s (Macpherson, 1993, p. 68; Middleton et al., 1990, p. vii). In New Zealand, this perspective grew in dominance and there was shared agreement on the need to reform, even ”across groups with these conflicting views of the role of the state and of the nature of society” (Ray, 2009, p. 26). The values and underlying ideologies of these reforms favoured competition, individualism and personal responsibility, and were disseminated in public discourse and enacted in policies (Grace, 1990, p. 27; Harris, 2017, pp. 13, 59-60). Education shifted from its role as a public good to a commodity with these ’Tomorrow’s Schools’ reforms (Lauder, 1990, p. 2; The New Zealand Treasury, 1987, pp. 32–33). Despite their intentions, these reforms entrenched inequalities and social divisions widened in the 1990s under a National-led government and ’the mother of all budgets’ (Harris, 2017, p. 57; Novlan, 1998, p. 13; OECD, 2008, cited in Rata, 2009, p. 106; Thrupp, 2007, p. 1397). The next Labour-led government under Helen Clark repealed or amended policies of the its predecessor in line with Third Way moderation, following the effects of austerity cuts and the too-rapid decentralization and deregulation (Harris, 2017, pp. 270-271; Macpherson, 1993, pp. 79-80; Ray, 2009, pp. 27-28). From the end of school milk to the period outlined in Chapter 7 there was no centrally-supported food in schools programme and provision relied on charities and volunteers.

# 9 Chapter 9: A Critical Thematic Analysis of New Zealand parliamentary debates about government responsibility for school meals

Politicians hold a significant and unique position in society, with access to a privileged platform for "managing public consensus" and enacting policies (van Dijk, 1993, pp. 254-269, 272). To establish common ground and identify differences in New Zealand's political debate, this chapter answers Question 1 through a critical analysis of arguments in two parliamentary debates on expanding government responsibility for food in schools.

Mana Party leader and sole MP Hone Harawira's *Education (Breakfast and Lunch Programmes in Schools) Amendment Bill* was first deliberated on 28 May 2014, but was interrupted with the rise of the House to resume again on 18 March 2015. Over these two sessions, MPs across Parliament delivered 12 speeches of 4-12 minutes supporting and opposing the Bill, and at their conclusion the 120 parliamentarians voted narrowly against it along party lines, casting 59 Ayes and 61 Noes. Following the defeat of Harawira's Bill, the MPs argued over Labour Party leader David Shearer's similar *Education (Food in Schools) Amendment Bill* that same evening. Eleven speeches of similar length were exchanged and MPs cast an equal 60-60 vote, with the one United Future MP who had voted against Harawira's Bill moving to support Shearer's. Without a majority vote however, this second proposal also failed to progress to Select Committee stage, where it could have been considered by different Party representatives (Education (Breakfast and Lunch Programmes in Schools) Amendment Bill — First Reading, 2014; Education (Food in Schools) Amendment Bill — First Reading - New Zealand Parliament, 2015). I critically examined the video recordings and transcripts of participating politicians' speeches to identify and analyse thematic patterns and underlying ideologies in their arguments for or against collective/government responsibility for ensuring children are well fed and supported in their learning at school.

The coding and analysis method largely follows Braun and Clarke's six-step guide to Thematic Analysis (2006, pp. 15-24; 2019), integrated with Owen's three indicators of *repetition, recurrence* and *forcefulness* (1984) and layered with Lawless and Chen's two-step coding

process for thematic analysis (2019, pp. 98-99). In summary the steps entailed: 1) Becoming familiar with the data; 2) Generating initial codes; 3) Generating for themes using Owen's indicators; 4) Reviewing themes; 5) Defining and naming themes; 6) Map to underlying ideologies and 6) Producing the report.

Familiarising myself with the videos and transcripts of the debates, I noted possible themes that emerge in the speeches, initially on paper manually then digitally to look for patterns in the codes more systematically. I initially worked through the transcripts on paper to manually code the speeches freely, and repeated this process digitally to looking for repetition of meaning and recurrence of words and phrases more systematically. Rewatching the videos alongside the transcripts, I was able to hear and see the emphasis put on certain words or phrases, and made adjustments to the codes. The extracts I coded ranged from a few words to a few lines, and my codes were largely semantic taking the text at face value and paraphrasing, for example: "poverty due to selfish inaction"; "children pay the price"; "current model sufficient"; and "reference to experts". Some codes hinted towards more latent meanings, or issues and ideologies underpinning the arguments, such as "personal responsibility" or "deficit view of parents in poverty". I noted those that were connected or similar in meaning to each other and some were coded more than once if they raised multiple issues. In generating themes and sub-themes from these codes I kept close to the discourse asking *what* was being said, *how* it was being said, and what is *meant* by it? Adding a critical lens I mapped the themes and subthemes against the ideological debate outlined in Chapter 4, and considered questions about power and representation borrowed from Critical Discourse Analysis. Three areas of common ground and three main points of divergence are illustrated below.

**Table 1. Areas of common ground and points of divergence in New Zealand parliamentary debates about school meals, 18 March 2015.**

| Common ground | Points of disagreement |
|---|---|
| **1.** MPs' views and positions on the Bills were influenced by personal experiences. | **1.** Whether legislation is needed considering current initiatives for provision. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **2.** Every MP acknowledged the impact of hunger on learning, and that this is a problem in New Zealand.<br>**3.** Agreement that problems, causes, and solutions are complex and will require cooperation. | **2.** Whether responsibility lies with individuals and parents, or collectively through the government.<br>**3.** Each side had a distinct view of 'the other' argument and of the people promoting it |

## 9.2 Commonality 1: MPs' views and positions on the Bills were influenced by personal experiences

It was possible to identify common ground shared by Members of Parliament on both sides of the debate, namely a recognition of the relationship between hunger, nutrition, and learning outcomes, and that this was a challenge faced by many New Zealand children. Nearly every politician also reflected on their own personal experiences, and how these shaped their different views on what to do about this problem and their position on the Bill. A number looked back to their own childhood and school life in New Zealand or other countries, reflecting on their time at school and how it informed their perspective on responsibility for school meals.

Some politicians for and against experienced or witnessed poverty as children, and while that led some to advocate for collective responsibility as adults it also reinforced notions of personal responsibility for others. Green MP Mojo Mathers' rural school in Wales provided a hot two course meal using local food and recipes she "absolutely loved" that helped with the long walk home; she saw feeding children at school a common, low-cost way to directly make a difference for them. However National MP Jian Yang and his family of teachers were sent to the Chinese countryside in the 1960s Cultural Revolution for "re-education". His own experience of poverty in Communist China where "everyone was equal, but everyone was poor" made him understand the importance of the issues raised in the Bill, but reacted against big Government. National's Melissa Lee reflected on her school in late 1970s Korea, the large numbers of students and the hardships of winter. She said no children were provided lunch by the school as it was their parents' responsibility, and shamed New Zealand parents who did not provide lunch. MPs who had more privileged childhoods also responded in different ways. National's Paul Foster-Bell talked about parents at low decile schools he attended still managing to feed their children and

did not want ”to take away from the responsibility of parents”. In contrast, Labour’s Chris Hipkins’ own fortunate childhood and family vegetable garden made him lament many children’s lack of access to land for growing, and suggested that schools could partner with local organisations and authorities to explore that option.

Others talked about schools they had visited or in their communities, and how they supported children without food. Hone Harawira, the sponsor of the “Feed the Kids” Bill described more than 1,500 children happily chanting “Feed the Kids” after lunch at an event, and National’s Jonathan Young referred to his pride in attending the launch of the Government’s investment in Kickstart Breakfast Programme with Fonterra and Sanitarium. Green and Labour MPs talked about their visits to schools “up and down the country” working to educate the children in their care, and struggling with hunger “can place enormous strain on the school... enormous strain on the classroom teacher and strain on the other kids” (Hipkins | Labour). David Shearer, Labour leader sponsoring the second Bill, drew on his experiences as a humanitarian in Somalia, and changed his position on the Bill he had drafted after his observations in schools and conversations with health practitioners. The use of personal narratives by politicians reflects the influence of lived experience on the formation of views and values, and is a persuasive communication strategy to connect human to human and garner empathy for their perspective.

### 9.3 Commonality 2: Every MP acknowledged the impact of hunger on learning, and that this is a problem in New Zealand

Every Member of Parliament across the two debates at least acknowledged the impact of hunger on a child’s learning and wellbeing, and that children being hungry at school is a problem in this country. How this was talked about and emphasised varied across speeches, with those supporting the legislation emphatically and repeatedly coming back to this as the problem they hoped to fix while those against it may have agreed to that point but felt the Government was doing enough to address it.

Harawira implored for collective action to face “…the crisis of child hunger and its devastating effects on brain development, health and learning”. His Green and Labour colleagues spoke to the evidence that ”we know” children in this country go to school hungry”, ”we know” food

supports learning, and ”we know” children deserve the right to not be hungry at school (Shearer | Labour; Turei | Green): ”It is really simple: hungry kids do not learn” (Hipkins | Labour). They accused the Government of being in denial about the extent and impact of child poverty and hunger, listed statistics and reffered to anecdotes from teachers to support evidence-based policy making (Mathers | Green).

The Government's National Party MPs acknowledged the existence of children going hungry to school in NZ, and that hunger impacted their learning. However, they spent less time on the topic and tended to use language that could be seen as defensive against accusations from the Opposition that they didn't recognise the problem. They made statements such as "Nobody denies that there is considerable hardship... that a child who is consistently hungry at school is ill prepared to learn (Macindoe | National), "absolutely something we would all agree on" (Foster-Bell | National), and "I have to say that it is very hard to disagree" (Yang | National). Judith Collins, currently leader of the Opposition, felt "…everybody in this House would agree that the situation of young children going to school without breakfast and being hungry until lunchtime or even until they go home again is a very sorry thing to happen in this country—this land of plenty, God's own country". However despite each National MP acknowledging the problem of children's hunger and its impact on education in New Zealand, each also prefaced or followed these statements with an account of the initiatives already established by the Government and their corporate partners, charities, social enterprises and community groups, because "the reality is that we are already doing it" (Hudson | National).

### 9.4 Commonality 3: Agreement that problems, causes, and solutions are complex and will require cooperation

Both sides recognised that the problem/s, and the causes and solutions, are complex. Even MPs supporting the Bills explained they did not view the legislation as the panacea to child hunger, and recognised the compounding causes connected with housing, employment and education issues. They acknowledged that "We have got to tackle the causes of kids arriving at school hungry" (Hipkins | Labour) such as "increasing employment opportunities, upgrading housing, improving access to health care, and developing better educational pathways" (Harawira | Mana cited in Turei | Green). However, while work was being done to address these underlying

complex causes, “all the while our kids go hungry” (Harawira | Mana cited in Turei | Green), so “in the meantime, let us make sure they have got food in their tummies when they are at school” (Hipkins | Labour).

Both sides also talked about the need for community collaboration in the solution/s to this problem, but had different ideas about how that would ideally work. Both National Party and Opposition MPs applauded “…schools around the country [that] have started their own breakfast clubs with support from teachers, students, parents, local businesses, and the wider community…” (Harawira | Mana). They were “…heartened and humbled by the schools and community organisations in my electorate early each morning delivering food in schools programmes and breakfasts in schools…” (Macindoe | National). However, each side drew on these examples of collaboration in different ways to promote the world-views underpinning their distinct positions. Government MPs used them as evidence that legislation was not needed because of work already undertaken “…by this Government and by many generous companies, organisations, and individuals” (Macindoe | National). These “…people in our communities who have a strong commitment to the welfare of our society” (Young | National) were not forced but chose to do this work “…to meet the needs of children in their community – children whom they know well. It is not blanket compulsion” (Macindoe | National). While lauding these initiatives, supporters of the Bills to expand government responsibility stated they did not meet the desperate need, and questioned the reliance on charity and business when secure government funding ”would be a godsend” (Harawira | Mana; Hipkins | Labour). The Opposition MPs entreated for the Bill’s passage so Select Committee could hear from “those involved in school and community gardens… from those who know best and those who care most”, because success “will require the efforts of the whole community” (Harawira | Mana). However, though both sides recognise cooperation is needed to ensure children are fed at school, they disagree on the necessity of legislation, on who is responsible, and have a distinct view of ‘the other’.

### 9.5 Disagreement 1: Legislation is needed because current initiatives for provision are inadequate

The overarching argument from Mana, Green, Labour and NZ First MPs speaking in favour of the Bills was the view that the collaboration required could be built through the Select

Committee process. Submissions from experts and the public would inform discussions and a more effective solution to child hunger. The Government's mixed approach and reliance on business and charity was ineffective and while the legislation was not perfect, it provided an opportunity to build consensus and collaborate because ”doing nothing is not an option” (Hipkins | Labour; Turei | Green).

Supporting MPs called for a solution to take “a broad, comprehensive, evidence-based policy approach” (Mathers | Green), and that although “approaches [to school meals] differ, they all share the same view, backed up by the same kind of research and information from teachers, doctors, nurses, and policy analysts that is available to us here: kids need a good feed every day if they are to develop into healthy and well-educated adults” (Harawira | Mana). They referred to “absolutely alarming statistic[s]” of children facing material deprivation, particularly Māori and Pacific children (Ardern | Labour; Harawira | Mana). Government-corporate partnerships and charities fed about 22,000 children a day, but nearly 80,000 were still going hungry (Harawira | Mana; Turei | Green).

The cost of poverty, hunger and obesity was repeated by supporters of the Bills. “New Zealand continue[s] to be one of the worst performers in the OECD on child well-being” (Harawira | Mana), and our PISA results show our children's wider context and social deprivation impact on their education outcomes (Ardern | Labour). While the impact on individual children and their families was clear, the wider cost for society was also stressed. Shearer focussed on New Zealand's high obesity rates that will cost “billions and billions of dollars” in taxes to support public health problems, justice system and in lost pro ductivity (Harawira | Mana; Shearer | Labour). Ardern cited these costs and appealed to the Government's fiscal conservatism, saying ”if we do something positive for children, we can actually save ourselves money as a country”.

Those who faced hunger and those who sought to alleviate it shoulder this cost and understand what is needed to lift it, so the schools, communities and families that work to ensure their children are fed must be heard by a Select Committee, along with Māori and Unicef, Plunket and other organisations and experts advocating for action (Harawira | Mana; Shearer | Labour; Turei | Green). Supporters of the Bills suggested valuable lessons could be learned from schools

and communities that worked to supplement available initiatives to provide their own breakfasts, trial Garden to Table models, and teach nutrition to students (Harawira | Mana; Hipkins | Labour; Shearer | Labour; Turei | Green).

MPs also looked to different countries with school food programmes: "The really embarrassing thing, is that that nearly every country in the OECD, apart from us, already runs programmes to feed kids at school… NZ really needs to join the rest of the enlightened world and make a commitment to feeding our kids…" (Harawira | Mana; Mathers | Green). They questioned this "bizarre sort of attitude to food in schools in New Zealand" when other countries we compare ourselves with have functioning system-wide school meals programmes (Hipkins | Labour). Finland was presented as having an internationally successful education system that "…provide[s] fully State-funded meals to every school student as part of a wider framework of child well-being" (Harawira | Mana; Mathers | Green). Sweden, the United Kingdom and United States were also presented as various examples. Along with lessons from other places, MPs also looked back to other times, as when milk was widely distributed and accepted across schools. New Zealand First's Tracey Martin had held conversations with her constituents raised in that time, who reported "…there was not a single headline that said their parents were neglectful parents… It was not a conversation about that. It was a conversation about: These are the children of our country—give them something to eat". Metiria Turei brought the debate back to the here and now, reminding the House that "New Zealand in 2015 is not Korea in the 1970s and neither is it New Zealand in the 1970s or the 1980s". In 2015, "one major [charity] that is working with schools to provide lunch and breakfast in those schools is already feeding 15,000 kids a day", yet "thousands of New Zealand children go to school without breakfast or lunch" (Turei | Green).

The evidence of the problem and need for collective government action was supported by experts and organisations. MPs advocating for the Bills referenced reports from advisory groups about the importance of Government investment and leadership, the "extensive coalition of NGOs" and "a whole host of child, family, health, education, and faith organisations all around the country" (Ardern | Labour; Harawira | Mana; Turei | Green). The proposed legislation also had support from most schools and the broader public. Harawira referred to a television poll the year before "…that 70 percent of Kiwis now support a Government-funded food in schools

programme, and food in schools was the only policy issue to make the top 10 news stories of 2013". Shearer noted that the Māori and United Future Parties supported his Bill despite being in coalition with National, but their representation in Parliament was not enough to progress it.

The MPs supporting the Bills "are not wedded to any particular solution, and…are open to changes to the Bill" (Turei | Green), so there would be no downside for Government MPs to pass the Bill "so we can have a discussion on how we should meet the responsibilities as a collective, as a country, for the needs of our kids" (Turei | Green). Select Committee would enable this conversation (Martin | NZ First), and provide

> "...an opportunity to canvass the issues properly, to get submissions from the public, to look at what is happening now and what is working, and to look at how things might be improved… an opportunity to talk about the various alternatives and the various options that are available to us…. an opportunity for us to look at a whole variety of options and potential outcomes… an opportunity to develop a robust policy and a good policy that will gain cross-party support and community support, which people can buy into, to address what is a very real problem in our schools—kids coming to school with either the wrong food or with no food." (Hipkins | Labour)

It would allow "parliamentarians [to] hear from schools, from communities, from families, and from teachers about the scale of the problem and what the options are for solutions" (Turei | Green). This opportunity, bemoaned Shearer, was being "squandered—absolutely squandered".

## 9.6 Disagreement 1: Legislation is not needed because current initiatives for provision are sufficient

The overarching argument of each National MP was that amending legislation was not necessary as "the Government is hard at work supporting vulnerable children and working with families to ensure that children get a great start in life through early childhood education and right through their schooling years" (Young | National). They stressed the Government saw caring for children as "one of the most important things that we can do". The Government wanted all children to succeed at school, which is why they supported different initiatives to help children and reduce hardship (Hayes | National). The aim of these strategies was not to undermine parent responsibility for their children, and the Government focused on

"…supporting New Zealanders off welfare and into work, because that is the single most important step households can take to help themselves" (Young | National). The Kickstart Breakfast programme and other initiatives with corporate partners and charities negated the need for these Bills that would "force schools to feed children": "There is no legislative impediment that this amendment bill would address or that an amendment bill needs to address… they are trying to introduce legislation that this Government is already delivering on. Their bill is completely redundant" (Hudson | National).

To demonstrate the success of the "fantastic" existing initiatives, National MPs referred to the Government's financial investment in the programmes, their reach to needy students, and positive responses from participating schools. Government's financial support illustrated they were taking sufficient responsibility, and the numbers of children supported by the mixed partnership-government-charity-community initiatives was to show the problem was being managed (Foster-Bell; Hayes; Hudson; Macindoe; Yang; Young). Government MPs focussed more on quantifiable numbers than the qualitative responses from schools and children, and there was only a little discussion about the positive outcomes of the initiatives on children's learning (Yang | National). While Opposition MPs praised current initiatives were able to list organisations, evidence and reports that supporting the Bills for more government responsibility so these initiatives could be scaled up, few Government MPs referred to public support for their maintenance of the status quo (Young | National).

### 9.7 Disagreement 2: Individuals/parents are responsible for feeding children at school

National MPs called for a limited role of government, preferring to centre the role of corporations and charities in initiatives targeting those children whose parents did not meet their responsibility. They believed Government has an important role to play but it should not be extended through the proposed legislation. It should be limited in partnership initiatives with "…a strong degree of corporate social responsibility" because "we all have a shared responsibility for children". The Government MPs wanted "...our communities all stepping up….organisations stepping in to do their bit…We applaud companies like Sanitarium, like Fonterra, that step up and give back to Kiwi kids in our communities" (Young | National). Speeches repeatedly referred to the shared responsibility with "many generous companies, organisations, and individuals" and "Businesses in New Zealand have stepped up to do their bit

for children" (Hayes | National; Macindoe | National). This "stepping up" to responsibility of contributing to New Zealand's wellbeing was "applaud[ed]" and framed as a social repayment for the company's success (Collins | National; Young | National). Partnering with corporates and charities in a fiscally conservative targeted approach was preferable to the cost of the proposed legislation. Harawira's Bill was estimated to cost approximately $100 million annually and deemed too expensive by Hayes and Macindoe considering what the Government, businesses, charities, organisations and individuals were already doing (*FTK*).

National MPs against the Bills also did not believe it was schools' role to provide food. While they praised those that did, this needed to be a choice and not forced through not "blanket compulsion" to do something "they may be totally unwilling and ill-equipped to do" (Macindoe | National). They disliked that Harawira's bill "forces boards of trustees of decile 1 and decile 2 schools to deliver a breakfast and lunch programme to students", arguing this took away from the governance role boards were established to provide (Hayes | National). The Government's support of the KickStart Breakfast programme opened it "to schools of all deciles that wished to participate. It is their choice. It is about choices, and that is what this Government is about" (Hayes | National). Schools did not have the infrastructure required either, and the Government did not want to inject capital funding into building kitchens "when the vast majority of parents, as we know, are perfectly able and capable of making sure their children take a packed lunch to school" (Foster-Bell | National).

There was a lot of attention from National MPs on the responsibilities and choices of parents to feed their own children, rather than that being the role of schools and the State. Speaking against the legislation, National MPs promoted self-reliance and independence and personal responsibility, with some demonstrating objectively deficit views of parents living with poverty. They accepted the existence of children coming to school with no food and that the government would have to step in with corporations, organisations and communities, but "ultimately, parents are responsible for feeding their children" (Young | National) and "we are a Government that is about a hand up, not a hand out" (Hayes | National). Government MPs "…respect what parents' roles are in raising their children. We respect that, and that is why we

want to be able to give some support to them, but not take away their mana [dignity] as a parent raising their children" (Hayes | National). Of course the Government wanted all children to be well-fed at school, reiterated Foster-Bell, "…but we do not want to take away from the responsibility of parents to make sure that their children are turning up to school nutritionally able to undertake a day's learning".

Some MPs using this argument held a deficit view of parents whom they saw as at fault for not meeting their personal responsibilities. Melissa Lee reflected on the hardship of 1970s Korea when "the parents knew their responsibility", contrasting this with "one of the most progressive social welfare systems and yet there are parents who will send their children to school without breakfast, without lunches. And shame on them". Judith Collins also demonstrated a similar view, expressing disbelief with the story that some parents are unable to feed their own children: "I do not believe for a moment that because a family does not have a lot of money they cannot put two pieces of bread in the toaster, and some margarine, or butter, or whatever, and jam, or something on the toast for their child". While she acknowledged some people faced hardship, "We also know that some people simply do not make this a priority for their children". She clarified it was not necessarily from ill-intention, but rather ignorance about the importance of breakfast and "they just do not understand it". Claudette Hauiti took the position that parents relying on the State to feed their children undermines tino rangatiratanga and mana motuhake. The struggle of Māori for their rights under Te Tiriti were not so "…we could then turn round and tell the State to feed our children… so that the State could pay for kai for our tamariki… relinquishing our rangatiratanga and motuhake so that the State could then turn round and feed our babies."

Raising the role of parents over supports the National and Act Parties' insistence on a targeted rather than universal approach. The decile funding system was criticised for being "inefficient and inexact" in its measurement of need, and the Bills' "blanket approach … imposes huge cost, in many instances where it is not justified, in order to try to meet the needs of those who do require help" (Collins | National; Hayes | National; Macindoe | National). The Government's KickStart Breakfast programme on the other hand did not use the decile system, but instead

was made “available to any school that wants it” (Collins | National) and not all schools took up the offer (Hudson | National).

## 9.8 Disagreement 2: Collective/government responsibility is needed to feed children at school

Hone Harawira launched his opening speech with a call to Nelson Mandela’s assertion that “…there can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way it treats its children”. Contrasting with the Government MPs, those in favour of the Bills stressed responsibilities and choices of Government and society, appealing for votes to progress the Bill as “the right thing to do”. The Government has the ability and responsibility to make a choice and comprehensively act to meet the problem of hungry children at school. Poverty is perpetuated by inaction at the political level, and “We have a responsibility to put children at the heart of all the decisions we make in this Parliament, and we fail to do that over and over”. Metiria Turei especially emphasised this argument in her speech, questioning the purpose of Parliamentarians if not to protect the children they governs:

> We know that a child who is well and who is well-fed is ready to learn. If we want to combat the effects of poverty on our communities, we must make sure that our kids get the best possible education. Therefore, we have an obligation to remove the barriers that prevent them from doing so, and hunger is a barrier to kids’ learning. This legislation sets out one method for achieving that aim of protecting our children, as we are obliged to do as members of Parliament. We listen to the prayer every day in this House when we are sitting in this Chamber that asks us to put the well-being of the people of this country ahead of all else. Do we take that seriously or not?
>
> (Turei | Green)

This was a decision for action or inaction: “By voting for the bill we declare that children are the most important priority; our most important constituency. By voting for this bill we declare that we will put aside our political enmities and focus on the needs of kids. By voting for this bill we declare that the whole point of our being in this debating chamber is to make life for our children better” (Turei | Green). Following the first Bill’s defeat, she repeated this sentiment in support of Shearer’s: “We sit here in this Parliament with all the resources of our entire nation available to us to fix that problem. We have already had today a discussion … where the Parliament could have chosen to support hungry kids and provide them with the solution. We have another chance today to fix the mistake that was made this afternoon” (Turei | Green). While they acknowledged the legislation was not the sole answer to a complex problem, not

acting would be to fail the children in need, who had the right not to be hungry at school (Hipkins | Labour; Mathers | Green; Shearer | Labour). Work was needed to tackle the structural causes of poverty, “but all of those things take time to implement, and children are going hungry right now. We can do something about that” (Mathers | Green). ”In the meantime, let us make sure they have got food in their tummies when they are at school, so that they can actually focus on learning and so that their teachers can be focused on teaching them, rather than dealing with the consequences of them being hungry” (Hipkins | Labour). The fundamental issue was thousands of children were hungry at school, and ”this House...has the power to change that.” (Turei | Green). Ultimately, Governments have choices, and this was an opportunity to choose to take this issue to Select Committee (Shearer | Labour). Ardern used a moral argument challenging Government MPs’ stance on the question ”do you want our kids to go hungry?” (Ardern | Labour), and Turei borrowing a strategy normally used by individualists that positioned support for the Bill as ”the rational, responsible thing for this Parliament to do” (Turei | Green). Members of Parliament who voted against expanding government responsibility for food in schools, particularly those whose could sway the result, were failing these children and should be ashamed (Martin | NZ First; Shearer | Labour; Turei | Green).

Government MPs were united in agreement that schools’ role was not to feed children, but there was less consensus and some contradiction on this among Opposition MPs who spoke in favour of the Bills. The Mana and Green MPs envisaged school as essential social services and commnity hubs but Labour MPs were less sure and more reserved of their view. Many schools were already occupying that role but would benefit from government support for their initiatives (Harawira | Mana). It could be possible for schools as hubs to exercise their “rangatiratanga, their choice, and their control”, still cooperate with communities and businesses, and use the funding flexibly ”as they best see fit to provide lunch to their kids in the way that best meets the needs of those children, because those communities know what their problems are and they know how to devise the solutions to those problems” (Mathers | Green; Turei | Green).

Labour MPs were less united on the role of schools, sometimes contradicting each other and themselves. Hipkins said they “do not necessarily think it is the role of schools to be feeding kids, but if kids are arriving at school hungry, then they are not going to be learning”. Later in the speech he questioned ”the bizarre sort of attitude to food in schools in New Zealand. We

say that it is not the role of the school at all; it is the role of the parents", and highlighted international examples like Finland with "institutionalised food in schools programmes" that have embedded this role of schools as "commonplace" and "very standard". If the role of schools is to "focus on teaching", this will be easier if we "ma[d]e sure [children] have got food in their tummies when they are at school, so that they can actually focus on learning" (Hipkins | Labour). They too were uncomfortable with the obligation put on schools through legislation, and wanted a solution that upheld the autonomy of schools in our decentralised system. David Shearer's thinking on the role of school changed between the time he drafted his Bill and when it was pulled from the ballot to be read. This shift in position was influenced by his observations in schools he visited and by conversations with health professionals, with a comparative reflection to the acute malnutrition and starvation he had witnessed as an aid worker in Somalia. He did not want to force schools to provide food: "I do not want to impose... on schools a diktat from on high... What I want to see is that these schools… have the opportunity to access the resources and the money that will enable them to run programmes". He explained "I want to see us move away from feeding as an emergency interaction… I do not want to see kids being dependent, families being dependent, on a feeding programme". Although he disagreed with some of the approach in the legisaltion he sponsored, he called for its passage so these issues could be deliberated and worked out collaboratively with support of evidence and input from experts, schools and the public, and lead to policy that fed children but was also "about being independent, being self-reliant, and teaching lifelong skills". Schools are uniquely positioned to alleviate hunger and support learning through food provision, land for gardens, partnering with communities and businesses, and nutrition education. If the Government helps schools to ensure their children are well fed and knowledgeable about nutrition and health, then this "will go home with the kids and make a real difference in the homes that they come from" (Shearer | Labour).

Politicians who supported the Bills challenged the individualist discourse about irresponsible parents, and remarked that this was not a point in public discussion during the universal free milk scheme in the 1930s-1960s (Martin | NZ First). They rejected the more extreme views that shamed and reinforced negative stereotypes about poor people and beneficiaries. Most parents try their best in challenging circumstances and there are many reasons why children are not well fed, including a lack of awareness or low income and limited resources. While they

acknowledged parents' responsibilities and did not want to undermine them, they argued that children should not pay the price and the Government had a role to step in with support:

> "I hear the kōrero about feeding the kids being a parent's responsibility, but the truth is that a lot of people have been so poor for so long that they struggle to make the right choices and often end up making the wrong ones, and all the while our kids go hungry." (Harawira | Mana)

Harawira objected to the shaming of parents and accused the Government of using 'individual responsibility' to justify its own inaction: "blaming those who are too vulnerable to care for themselves and their children speaks more about our selfishness than it does about the hopelessness of poverty." (Harawira | Mana). Turei moved the responsibility from the shoulders of parents, recognising the situation has been brought about by Government's neglect and abdication of responsibility: "…we must make sure that no child suffers because of the neglect we have seen of their families over decades. That neglect is our responsibility to fix, and this legislation gives us one more opportunity to do so. Let us not waste that" (Turei | Green). Children are the "greatest victims" of poverty and should be at the centre, because while the debate continues and other work is done on structural causes, "all the while our kids go hungry" (Harawira | Mana) and "… and because they are hungry they cannot learn properly and their whole lives are affected by what happens as a result of the decisions we make" (Turei | Green). Supporters of the Bills were "uncomfortable" with the "overtones of Victorian England" in the speeches of Government MPs (Mathers | Green):

> "... it is not because their parents are lazy. It is not because their parents do not care or do not love their children. As a country, we should not tell people to go to their church and prove they are good enough to get some charity. That is not where we want to be. That was 18th century England; this is 21st century New Zealand." (Martin | NZ First)

They proposed National MPs would not turn away an individual hungry child to go home to empty cupboards and tell their parents it is their responsibility, so questioned why they are voting against feeding under-resourced children as a collective group (Martin | NZ First).

> "Not a single one of us in our own communities would stand in front of a hungry child and refuse to give them food—not a single one of us would do that... Why would we do that when there are 20 children, or 40 children, or when there are 59 of us standing in front of those kids? Not one of us individually would say no to a hungry child. Why would we say no collectively? It makes no sense." (Turei | Green)

Ardern accused Government MPs of failing children to prove a point, and disagreed with the Government "support[ing] a hand up not a handout, and mana for families" (Hayes | National): "There is no mana in poverty. There is no dignity in poverty. The children who are afflicted by it, and who lose the opportunities as a consequence of it, are the ones who lose their mana, because where are they then left?" (Ardern | Labour).

While the MPs supporting the Bills did not have clear agreement on some of the issues discussed above, they all advocated for its passage through Select Committee to develop their vision of what the Bills could bring. They admitted the draft legislation was "not perfect" so "the solution…might not be the right one", but it was an opportunity to explore possible models they described as examples. They described schools as community hubs, different partnerships for provision, Garden to Table initiatives, and opportunities for integration with the Curriculum as examples of what could be done for "long-term, sustainable change". (Hipkins | Labour; Martin | NZ First; Shearer | Labour; Turei; Green). The supporting MPs had common ideas across their different visions, though they occupied different positions along the universal - targeted continuum. Despite the varied views, all believed the legislation "needs to go to the Select Committee, because the lessons we can learn from this bill are ones that have a profound impact on New Zealand" (Shearer | Labour) and the outcome of that process was not pre-determined (Hipkins | Labour).

## 9.9 Disagreement 3: MPs supporting more government responsibility are well-intentioned but misguided

Another significant theme that came clear in the analysis of the debates is each side having a distinctive view of 'the other' side of the debate and what this said about the people advocating for it. The Government MPs defending existing initiatives had "sympathy" for individual Opposition MPs and their "very passionate speech[es]", and described them as "well-intentioned" but ultimately misguided. They rejected "appalling accusations" that they lacked compassion, and argued their Government did more for children than the previous Labour-led one (Collins | National; Foster-Bell | National; Lee | National; Macindoe | National; Yang | National; Young | National)..

## 9.10 Disagreement 3: MPs supporting individual/parent responsibility MPs lack compassion and downplay the problem

Politicians supporting the Bills painted the National-led Government as collectively lacking in compassion by choosing to vote against an opportunity to feed children and support them in their learning. They dismissed arguments against the Bills as ”bizarre”, and were “deeply disappointed” in National MPs who ”should be deeply ashamed of themselves... for not supporting the bill’s referral to the Select Committee”. If the Government helped progress the legislation, “It would show the community that it is listening to the evidence the community has, and it would show that it is capable of putting aside ideology, in favour of kids who are hungry” (Ardern | Labour; Hipkins | Labour; Shearer | Labour; Turei | Green).

The three areas of common ground can be used as a starting point for building understanding and consensus on this issue, but the three main points of disagreement must be worked through.

# 10 Chapter 10: Findings and discussion

## 10.1 Question 1: Points of common ground and divergence in New Zealand's debate about responsibility for school meals

Chapter 9 identified three key areas of common ground and three points of divergence in a criticaly analysis of two 2015 parliamentary debates on legislation proposing to enshrine government responsibility for school meals in New Zealand. These are summarised below.

**Table 2: Areas of common ground and points of divergence in New Zealand parliamentary debates about school meals, 18 March 2015.**

| Common ground | Points of disagreement |
|---|---|
| **1.** MPs' views and positions on the Bills were influenced by personal experiences.<br>**2.** Every MP acknowledged the impact of hunger on learning, and that this is a problem in New Zealand.<br>**3.** Agreement that problems, causes, and solutions are complex and will require cooperation. | **4.** Whether legislation is needed considering current initiatives for provision.<br>**5.** Whether responsibility lies with individuals and parents, or collectively through the government.<br>**6.** Each side had a distinct view of 'the other' argument and of the people promoting it |

### Common ground to build on

The analysis showed three main areas of common ground to be built on in speeches made by Members of Parliament about government responsibility for food in schools. The first commonality was that MPs drew on their personal experiences from childhood or school visits to explain their view and frame the debate. This approach is not unusual in making the politicians seem more relateable and in touch with the key issues, and it provides an opportunity for engagement on shared experiences or values to build understanding and agreement. A potential challenge is that personal experience tends not to generalise well across the population and may be used to deflect from a more reasoned debate, where personal narratives cannot be challenged. Politicians have access to a unique platform that grants them more influence on the

public mind, and also on tangible actions (van Dijk, 1993, p. 280). The way New Zealand politicians talk about social and education issues such as responsibility for school meals both influences and is influenced by the debate among the public they serve.

An essential point of common ground to build on is that every MP recognised the link between hunger and learning, though supporters of the proposal were more emphatic about this to show the need for change. Moreover, recognising this is a problem in New Zealand, allows for opportunity to ask the question about possible solutions. While the solutions to this question may be delivered through different policy and operational mechanisms, the opportunity to focus on this common thread is one that cannot be ignored, especially in the New Zealand political climate in which that debate and challenge are the norm.

That said, they also agreed there are no easy solutions to the issue. MPs recognised that solutions will have to address a number of interrelated structural causes of food insecurity and hunger, and that cooperation was needed to do this. Most importantly, the analysis revealed a willingness of members to work together and cooperate given the opportunity, for example in the Select Committee process or through partnerships with business and organisations. It is this feature in the debates that allow consensus to be built; if ideologies can be set aside as has been done in Finland and shared values can be established, then a way forward could be forged.

**Points of difference to address**

However, there were also points of disagreement that must be bridged or put to the side for consensus and collaboration on this issue to be realised. The first relates to the role of legislation in being a key agent of change. MPs opposing the legislation did not believe it was necessary as the government-supported initiatives with businesses and charities already in place were sufficient. Those is favour demonstrated evidence of these initiatives' limitations as well as support from a variety of social organisations for change. Although the legislation was not perfect, if it was passed in the House it could proceed to the Select Committee process and be deliberated on by MPs across different parties, and be informed and improved by public submissions.

Added to this were divergent views on individual and parental responsibility versus government intervention for the collective good. These are intertwined issues with the role of legislation, if, for example, government should take responsibility, then policy and legislation are the key enablers. These deep-seated beliefs can be firmly entrenched, and shifting ideologies can be challenging. However, individuals and groups can be influenced by competing ideologies, and do not always hold a clear and consistent position (Fairclough 1992b, cited in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 76). This is evident in the political and social debate about school meals in New Zealand, where inconsistency of views and arguments presented was demonstrated.

The third main area of disagreement was related to how each side viewed the arguments of their opponents, as well as of the type of people promoting those views. Those supporting the proposal were considered well-intentioned but ultimately misguided or not logical, and those against were accused of lacking in compassion. This likely illustrates attribution bias, where people assume what drives the behaviour of others, and can be an ugly feature of New Zealand's Parliament when taken in the extreme. Setting aside preconceived notions of others based on their political views or experiences will be necessary to form understanding and agreement moving forward.

## 10.2 Question 2: How New Zealand's debate and inconsistent approach to school meals has developed compared with the broadly supported and sucessful model in Finland

When evaluating the transferability of lessons from *Kouluruokailu*, context is essential in understanding the lessons that can be gained from evaluating the development of the Finnish programme against the New Zealand one. Earlier chapters illustrated significant differences between the Finnish and New Zealand contexts, and these must be understood and considered when evaluating the lessons from the Finnish programme. These include differences of geography and relationships with other nations, extent of ethnic and cultural diversity, influence of neoliberalism, approaches to education and welfare, political cultures, and significant events and actions in history. The evaluation took a diachronic approach that organises time into

periods that are characterised by "historical events, unintentional happenings and intentional acts" as significant points of change (Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, pp. 719-720).

These periods are set out below, but note they do not intend to compare exactly.

**Table 3: Historical periods of the Finnish and NZ contexts**

| **The history of Finnish school meals and consensus** | **The history of NZ's debate and inconsistent approach** |
| --- | --- |
| First period: pre 1917 independence | First period: Before Te Tiriti o Waitangi 1840 |
| Second period: Building a nation – Independence, Civil War and World War II. | Second period: Colonisation in the 19th century |
| Third period: Modernisation and re-building, integral role of education and school food | Third period: Political shifts, war and economic depression in the early 20th century |
| Fourth period: Comprehensive schooling from the late 1960s | Fourth period: The Welfare State and school milk provision 1930s-1950s |
| Fifth period: Challenge to consensus and the comprehensive school | Fifth period: Global crises and economic pressures in the 1960s-1970s |
| Sixth period: The age of PISA and international attention | Sixth period: The influence of neoliberalism since the 1980s. |

The investigation of contexts revealed a number of similarities and differences, including those outlined below.

**Table 4: Key similarities and difference in Finnish and NZ contexts**

| **Key similarities** | **Key differences** |
| --- | --- |
| Size of population and area<br>Egalitarian values and traditions<br>Role of the Church in education | Geopolitical and welfare state type eg Russia/Sweden, Nordic Anglo-Saxon and influence on social and political culture |

| Decentralised education systems<br>Nation building and welfare in context of hardship<br>Strong public education systems and heritage | Demographics and diversity<br>Colonial heritage in NZ, different to Finland relationship with Sami<br>Experiences of war – in FI and outside NZ.<br>Consensus politics after WWII in Finland |
|---|---|

It is clear that Finland's social and political culture has been shaped by geographical location between Russia and Scandinavia and Europe. These are significant influences on the Finnish way of being that have no comparable equivalent in the New Zealand setting. The effect of this this position is a factor supporting the development of social consensus in Finland (Simola, 2005, p. 457), which cannot be separated from its membership with Nordic welfare states (Sahlberg, 4 June 2018 interview). This influences its deeply-ingrained views that focus on inclusion, collective responsibility, universalism and equality as well as high standards of government services Chung, 2019, p. 45; Esping-Andersen and Korpi, 1987, cited in Kuisma, 2007, pp. 9-10; Esping-Andersen, 1990 cited in Hansen & Kauko, 2018, p. 117; Jørgensen, 2001, cited in Esping-Anderson, 2006, p. 399; Sahlberg, 4 June 2018 interview; Timonen, 2003, p. 113; Markussen, 2003, cited in Imsen et al., 2016, pp. 1-2; Kuisma, 2007, p. 10). This explains, in part, the success of the Finnish model, when shared values strongly influence its welfare system and programme delivery, and there are fewer barriers for implementation because of the united belief in the need for and value of food in schools.

As stated earlier, Finland's relative ethnic and cultural homogeneity may be a partial explanation for students' educational success and consensus and cooperation in the system (Frame, 2000, p. 8; Kuisma, 2007, p. 20; Reinikainen, 2012, pp. 12-13; Sahlberg, 2007, p. 149; Simola, 2005, p. 465). Hence, the ability to compare Finland with New Zealand is limited given New Zealand's strong bicultural background and cultural diversity. While there are arguments that demographic make up has been changing in Finland since the 1990s (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 149; Scott, 2014, p. 17), it is argued that demographic differences, while influential, are less influential on the programme's success than other factors such as its geopolitical position, ideologies and traditions. While Finland also has an indigenous population, the Sámi, they do not have a similar cultural history akin to New Zealand and the relationship between Māori and the British Crown and a history of inequity for Māori.

There are, however, similarities between the countries that permit potential transfer of lessons, including focusing on intentional and unintentional happenings. This latter point is important, since the identification of intentional acts can aid the application of lessons to support New Zealand's implementation of food in schools, guiding the development of consensus and collaboration that would support improved provision of food in schools in New Zealand.

Both Finland and New Zealand have egalitarian values and traditions, and have looked to each other in history for inspiration on progressive policies. Literature on Finnish culture describes it as traditionally egalitarian and cooperative, with comparatively few social class distinctions (Sarjala, 2013, pp. 32-36, cited in Scott, 2014, p. 116; Chislett, 1996, and Singleton, 1989, cited in Chung, 2019, pp. 40-41). New Zealand's egalitarian values and traditions stem from Māori social organisation and values, as well as those of settlers escaping the rigid class structure of Victorian England to the harsh frontier of the new colony. However, there has been a persistent tension between this and more individualist or economic views in New Zealand.

The role of the Church was significant in the provision of schooling and development of literacy before the 20th cetury in both places. In Finland, clergy were literate and played a leading role as teachers in Finnish communities. Church law in 1686 insisted a person wishing to marry must first demonstrate they could read (See Junila, 2013, p. 187; Niemi, 2012, p. 21; Louhivuori, 1968 and Eskelinene, 1968, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 42; Gilmour, 1931, cited in Chung, 2019, p. 118). Parish ambulatory schools, the education of which was mostly religious, educated Finns in the countryside, and continue to do so even after the 1866 decree establishing folk schools for all, as in other Nordic countries (Kotilainen, 2013, pp. 114-115). As in Finland, clergy were instrumental in the development of literacy and basic education. A main paternalistic goal of missionaries in New Zealand was to 'Christianise and civilise' the Māori population through education, and save them from the ills that befell colonized peoples in other places (Ward, 1974, cited in Stephenson, 2009, p. 2). Missionaries and local organisations were responsible for schooling until the formation of the central government and public primary education in 1877.

Agreed upon provision for food or milk in schools was developed as a national building exercise during and following periods of hardship in both countries. The legislation enshrining Kouluriokailu was passed in the middle of the harsh experiences of WWII. At the end of the war Finland was still predominantly agrarian, and the resettlement of people displaced by changing borders led many to farming, particularly dairy, while the country also underwent swift industrialization (Ahonen, 2014, p. 83; Chung, 2019, p. 31; Prättälä, 2003, p. 4; Simola, 2005, p. 458; Sahlberg, 2007, p. 148). Rebuilding the nation after the war required modernization, and Finnish leaders looked outside the country for examples of opportunities and risks to consider lessons for themselves, including to New Zealand (Kettunen, 2013, pp. 34-35). New Zealand's broadly supported and accessible milk in schools scheme was established as part of the pioneering welfare state in the midst of economic depression and war.

## 10.3 Question 3: What we in New Zealand can learn from Finland considering the different contexts

The lessons to be learnt lean into more intentional acts, than unintentional ones. By this, I mean that there are socio-historic features of the Finnish system that cannot be replicated. The key is to focus on the key elements of a successful welfare and education system that enables the broadly supported and sustainable delivery of food in schools.

### 10.3.1 The challenge and potential to learn from Finland

Comparing different countries education systems is challenging as causal relationships are difficult to confidently identify, but despite its limitations and challenges, comparative education research can be a valuable exercise (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 164). Education and social policies are bound to cultural and social contexts, but it is possible to learn from other countries and borrow elements of their policies if there is careful consideration of different contexts and the necessary amendments to suit, and a sustained trial period long enough to allow for review and improvement over time (Phillips & Ochs, 2003, Ochs, 2006, p. 616, cited in Chung, 2019, pp. 195-196). Simola suggests Finland is an interesting case due to its size; its cultural mix; going against the flow; its membership of the Nordic welfare states; and "as an accelerated, compressed example of the global process of mass schooling" (Simola, 2014). Sahlberg identifies three elements of Finnish education that can transcend differences across places. The first is to build consensus

as Finland has done over a common and inspiring vision of what good and equitable public education should be. He also suggests countries form their own path like 'the Finnish Way' by adapting lessons from overseas while preserving the unique local contexts and traditions, and affirms the importance of supporting teachers and school leaders (2015, pp. 27-28).

Finland and New Zealand have experienced different events and unintentional happenings throughout history, but it is possible to learn from intentional acts of Finnish leaders to develop consensus and a successful school meals programme that benefits all of society.

#### 10.3.2 Lessons from Kouluruokailu and evaluations of schools meals internationally

The investigation of Kouluruokailu the Finnish model and of international reviews and evaluations have revealed the following several features that are the hallmarks of successful school meals initiatives. Many of these key features have been discussed earlier in Chapters 3 and 5, identifying critical elements such as: a need for consensus; protection of delivery through legislation; quality of meals; adequate resourcing; targeted and universal provision that reduces stigma, evaluation and review cycles. New Zealand policy makers can review Ka Ora, Ka Ako against these success factors, and progress towards them will require a common understanding and agreement on the need for collective and cooperative action to ensure all children are well fed at school, as has been developed in Finland.

#### 10.3.3 A shared vision

Sahlberg (2011) emphasises the need for inspiration. Inspirational goals, he argues, can create the impetus for change that can push through any barriers or resistance. The entire nation shares the spoils of this vision. He mentions that transformational change can occur through policies that supports the wellbeing of its citizens. New Zealand is currently undergoing widespread conversations to develop a shared vision for education, and reform programmes are informed by this.

#### 10.3.4 Human rights – universal provision

The approach to universal provision stems from a deeply embedded belief in support for people's basic rights of being fed. The essential nature of these basic rights are ingrained in the psyche of the population. These basic rights are not countermanded, but are considered

essential. Focusing on the person, and the collective, through a human rights (and other legislation or acts) lens underpins the delivery. Finland's constitutional framework and domestic human rights also underpins social and education policy, and should be viewed within its Nordic and European setting. Nordic countries have an excellent reputation for ratifying international human rights treaties, including economic, social and cultural rights (Lavapuro et al., 2011, p. 507). Wraparound services of the welfare state support children and their families, and the country is famous for progressive welfare policies including the baby box for expecting parents, the universal basic income experiment, grandparental leave trial and successfully tackling homelessness in its capital city. Universally-available healthy food at Finnish schools has continued into the 21st century,

### 10.3.5 The role of the state

Not reliant on philanthropic, or corporate sponsorship, State support for programmes ensures the continuity of provision and supply. Multi-agency approach and protection of the programme through legislative settings. Consensus is hard-wired into the system. The government's role in education is significant. With very little privatisation, collective responsibility for education is offered through taxes that fully fund comprehensive schooling and tertiary, and significantly subsidise early learning (Scott, 2014, p. 202). To achieve its vision, the Finnish government reduces other barriers to accessing education by providing free warm meals, health and counseling, and resources (Ahonen, 2014, p. 78-79; Sahlberg, 2007, pp. 154-161).

### 10.3.6 Consensus-driven politics

New Zealand has to move away from a near adversarial, ideologically-driven approach to politics and move toward a drive toward consensus if it is to achieve better outcomes. Driven by new demands from opposition parties in New Zealand to challenge and debate and hold government to account is necessary, but the singular drive toward this causes more harm (Auckland reporter, 2011). The consensus of support that protects Kouluruokailu, the 72-year-old universal free school meals programme is the model New Zealand needs. Kouluruokailu and the Finnish education system are looked to lessons improve equity and excellence and

reducing the impact of family background on children's education outcomes (OECD, 2016 & 2018; Schleicher, 2009, p. 253). Finnish leaders have consistently worked to maintain a general agreement about a long-term vision for the purpose of education in Finnish society, centring equality of access to education (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 153 and 2018 interview; Scott, 2014, p. 121; Chung, 2019, p. 119; Niemi, 2012, p. 23; Pellikka et al., 2019, p. 3).

*Potential to build consensus with lessons from Finland*

A critical view believes it is desirable and possible to find agreement and understanding about important issues in society. Horkheimer proposed that in a rational society, "all conditions of social life that are controllable by human beings depend on real consensus" (1972, pp. 249-250, cited in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005). Habermas (1981) proposed it is not just desirable but possible to reach rational consensus through truthful dialogue in 'ideal speech' situations characterised by the conditions of truth, rightness and sincerity (Corradetti, n.d.), but that this can be challenged by people's different backgrounds and experiences as evidenced in New Zealand politicians' use of theirs. The purpose of this thesis is to help shift the discourse, because consensus can be built "when discursive elements are articulated in new ways (Fairclough 1992b, p. 23, cited in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 76). Therefore a challenge of this research is to consider how we in New Zealand can develop "new ways of communicating that are mindful of positions of power, status-based hierarchies, and marginalisation" (Lawless & Chen, 2019, p. 103). The comparative view to Finland shows it is possible that different groups can form agreement on issues that divide similar groups in New Zealand. Consensus was not something that happened naturally in Finland, it was fought for and has been sustained intentionally over time (Chung, 2019, p. 111; Administrative leader 1 cited in Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 721).

New Zealand could build on the common ground identified in the political debates, and address differences with socially just and fiscally logical arguments demonstrating the evidential benefits of government-supported food in schools for the economy as well as individual and collective health. We could lean into our own unique opportunities of a majority government with a popular mandate for transformation, the COVID-19 crisis that presents the imperative for support, and Māori and Pacific approaches to consensus building and collaboration. It is possible

and necessary to depoliticize this issue of who is responsible to ensure all children are fed and supported in their learning.

# 11 Chapter 11: Evaluation and conclusion

## 11.1 Evaluation of research

I follow Sarah Tracy's flexible guideline to ensure quality, rigour and relevance of this research. This topic is timely as the debate about government and personal responsibility for food in schools continues in political and civil society, with reference to Finland as an example to learn from. Comparative research about education can lead to simplistic interpretations and uncritical policy borrowing. To avoid that I draw from a range of disciplines and approach the complex topic from many angles for a holistic, more thorough understanding, though it increases the scope and size. This demands brevity in places, but I use a myriad of quality primary and secondary sources to build a fuller, more nuanced picture, and dive deep in the analysis of parliamentary debate speeches.

There is potential for this research to contribute practically to my Ministry colleagues' work on Ka Ora, Ka Ako, as there is little research comparing New Zealand with Finnish education at this level despite interest. Additionally, this research deals with key issues raised in current debates and so hopes to be relevant and useful in the movement to build greater understanding and grounds for consensus. The opportunity within this research is to look at what intentional acts can support bipartisanship or a consensus-driven approach to support universal provision of food in schools. Starting with common ground and noting key differences may help shape policy, evaluation and continuation of the programme. This has raised ethical and potential conflict of interest issues with my role as a policy analyst in the Ministry of Education. Even as new lessons were being discovered about the positive difference these programmes can make, I needed to remain distant from the work the Ministry was doing to support the delivery of the trial and remain silent when there was criticism of the programme in the public arena. The delivery of food in schools is of high political and social interest, and attracts a range of well considered, and some less so, arguments for and against the programme. The programme remains extremely fresh in the eyes of politicians, commentators, and the public, and it has been challenging to remain neutral on this topic given the significant media attention.

I was also guided by Horkheimer's three criteria for a critical theory: it must be explanatory, normative and practical (1993, p. 21, cited in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005). In my exploration of the current reality of food in schools provision in New Zealand and Finland I identified the stark contrast between the universal, expansive provision in Finland, compared with the more narrow, targeted provision in New Zealand. While it is early in the trial of Ka Ora, Ka Ako, the implementation of the programme has a different philosophical underpinning than the Finnish programme. In New Zealand, this perhaps represents the programme's lack of maturity, agreement and certainty around the programme's most suitable and effective delivery model, as well as different views on the extent to which certain basic rights are inalienable. New Zealand is divided in its views on the role government plays in universal provision of meals, and its adversarial rather than bipartisan approach makes delivery more difficult. The Finnish context works in an environment where collaboration between political parties is expected. The way forward for New Zealand may require further work around bipartisanship and working to find common ground between disparate political ideological positions, learning from the Finnish approach toward building consensus to deliver a sustainable programme that makes a material difference to the lives of young New Zealanders.

### 11.2 Limitations and opportunities for future research

The size and scope of this research is pushed because I worked on it over a number of years in small stints, during which time the landscape of school food provision in New Zealand changed, I returned to New Zealand from Finland, and I moved from teaching into policy. This required changes to focus and structure of the thesis. The size is significantly larger than a standard master's thesis, but its critical purpose is to contribute to building greater understanding and agreement on actions such as school meals, and multiple approaches to understand the issue more holistically does this best. However, I have been selective with the contents of each section, ensuring and demonstrating relevance and significance to the purpose and questions. Some key issues, notably fiscal costs, were out of scope, but will need to be addressed if this research is used in policy development.

It is challenging to distil the essence of a nation's history and confine it to several pages. In no way can this research fully capture the nuancing around intentional acts that support universal provision, as well as the (unintentional) socio cultural forces and events that shaped both psyche and praxis. Moreover, being from New Zealand, language conveys culture and vice versa – there can be a lot that is lost in translation and I did not have the depth of Finnish cultural understanding to perhaps appreciate the sociohistorical landscape that stretched out before me. In saying that, as a trained teacher of history, my ability to critique the chronological cultural milieu has been honed somewhat through my professional background. The cultural gap was further exacerbated by the geographical distance between NZ and Finland difficult, and my lack of Finnish language. I did the bulk of research about Finland while living in Oulu, and NZ research back in NZ. Access to cultural advisers, be it through everyday interactions with academic staff or the Finnish people, was limited by the distance.

In terms of the cultural context in New Zealand, a te ao Māori (Māori world view) is a lens through which the problem, data, and possible solutions, could be viewed. A te ao Māori view may consider several key concepts that may look at key values critical to key principles valuing the collective and holistic approaches to wellbeing. This can only really be done by Māori, and the scope of the analysis did not permit the issue to be analysed according to a Māori world view. An interesting and important tension about Te Tiriti o Waitangi was raised that tangata whenua | Māori researchers are more appropriately placed to explore and present judgment on. Viewing the research through an examination of key Māori principles would add value, especially when viewing Finnish values of universal provision to look at similarities as well as differences. Perhaps this is a way toward universal provision, if support from iwi (tribes) and hapū (sub-tribes) can be gained to support the delivery of this programme to the benefit of all New Zealanders.

My intersecting roles and purposes bring possible biases, so I have been conscious and transparent about these. I have conducted my research in a systematic way that introduces academic rigour, while acknowledging my position as a researcher with multiple roles and identities. Identifying these issues do not mean that bias is not present, but it allowed me to appreciate the topic and impact of food provision programmes, and the many arguments for and against it. Experience and knowledge of the New Zealand political landscape aided, rather than

hindered my momentum. Relatedly, my deep interest in the research presented a challenge around what breadth and depth of research was necessary to adequately cover the topic. It was important to give due diligence to the forces that influenced food in schools, which cannot easily be honed down to simple principles or approaches. This was a constant tension within the scope of the research.

If I was to conduct this research again, it would be interesting to compare political speeches from Finland and New Zealand parliament in the two languages. Noting my lack of Finnish language, it would be important to have cultural advisers to provide a greater depth of cultural insight, to understand some of the intentional acts the Finnish government took to consensus, collaboration, and the cultural context. I also considered more interviews with Finnish academics, similar to the one with Pasi Sahlberg, but this was difficult after I returned to New Zealand. Upon my return I made plans to interview relevant politicians, but though I had tentatively arranged this it was too much to analyse speech and interview datasets while also including substantial context. My career change to the Ministry of Education while researching my thesis cut off that possibility with the need to minimize potential or perceived conflicts of interest. However, this would also bring further insight into the ideologies and even experiences that shape support, or otherwise negate support for food in schools programmes, including personal narratives in the analysis.

Further research could look at programme evaluation in New Zealand and different models of sustainable delivery. The Finnish model is more comprehensive and established, relying on cross agency support. The research could look at not only the impact on food insecurity, wellbeing and learning, it could look to vocational opportunities for senior secondary students to gain employability skills and more. It will also need to recognise that evaluation will have to be longitudinal in approach, since benefits realisation may take many years. This could include an examine of the conditions that support consensus building for this programme, focusing on the Finnish political context. New Zealand's adversarial approach has tended toward antagonistic approaches towards food in school in recent decades, rather than collaboration and consensus. Understanding how parties with different ideologies can work toward common goals is critical if the programme is to be sustained in New Zealand. Hannu Simola's discursive dynamics framework, or more from Critical Discourse Analysis, could support this.

### 11.3 Concluding thoughts

Children going hungry and insufficient nutritious food in these abundant islands of New Zealand is "unjust, unnecessary and preventable" (Duncanson et al., 2018, p. 13), and decisions and actions, and indecision and inaction, have led to the current situation. We have created these systems that shape our lives, and as self-creating producers of our own history we can change and improve them. Consensus can be built in the right conditions, and Finland provides an example of that. New Zealand must move from an adversarial approach to a more collaborative one. Finding common ground through shared outcomes is critical; while the underlying ideologies between parties may differ, raising the standard of living in New Zealand, and productivity, wellbeing, will have economic health and social benefits for individuals and collective sociaty. Despite differences of context, it is still possible for New Zealand to learn from Finland if lessons are carefully considered, selected and adapted for our own systems and people, and are supplemented with domestic evidence and international best practice.

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