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## **Why Does Changing the Orientation of History Teaching Take So Long? A Case Study from Finland**

Jukka Rantala and Najat Ouakrim-Soivio

This chapter will outline the shifts in curricula and teaching orientation within the basic and upper secondary school levels in Finland throughout the past three decades, as well as how teachers have interacted with these changes. We will also describe the results of the survey of history teachers' contentment with the latest curricula. Our survey reveals that the change of the teaching orientation is starting to pay off. At the end of our chapter, we discuss and give some explanations for this question – Why did changing the orientation of history teaching take so long?

### **Introduction**

“I taught at the time of three different types of curricula [from the 1970s to the 1990s] — and always the same way.” This quotation takes place a quarter of a century ago, when Syrjäläinen was studying the implementation of the new curriculum.<sup>1</sup> The interviewee seemed to be proud of his maintained independence from the national guidance policy. The quotation also reveals, however, that the designers of the curriculum had not succeeded in convincing him about the necessity of the reform.

In this millennium, the core curricula in Finland have been normative, in other words, educational providers, schools and teachers have been required to follow the objectives, contents and the assessment criteria that are assigned in the curriculum documents. The regions or municipalities and schools design their own local curricula that are based on the national core curricula. It is necessary, in Finland that teachers accede to implement the national core curricula because there are no mid-level actors whose task is to make sure that they are implemented at the local level.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, we study how the national level curriculum texts have been accepted by Finnish history teachers. We are interested in the recontextualization of curricular policies. As Apple aptly states, the state can never monopolize power in curriculum production because of the pedagogic recontextualization at the school level.<sup>3</sup> From international comparisons, we know that teachers do not always adopt new

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<sup>1</sup> Eija Syrjäläinen, *Koulukohtainen opetussuunnitelmatyö*, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Cécile Mathou, “Recontextualizing curriculum policies.”

<sup>3</sup> Michael W. Apple, “Does Education have Independent Power?” See also Basil Bernstein, *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity*, 33.

curriculum ideas in the way the designers planned,<sup>4</sup> and as Cuban sums up, “The gap between adoption of a policy and its implementation in classrooms (and there always is one) varies from an inch to a mile wide.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the heart of this chapter hangs off the question of how satisfied teachers are with the core curriculum as a guiding instrument of their work.

### **The National Guidelines Are Disregarded**

In Finland, the school system changed from a parallel system to a coherent ‘basic education for all’ in the 1970s. From the 1970s, nine years of comprehensive basic schooling have been compulsory for all 7 to 16 year olds. At the same time, optional upper secondary education (high schools) became more popular. Today, half of the age 16 cohort continues to general upper secondary schools after basic education (elementary and lower secondary schools).

The national core curricula for basic education and upper secondary education have been renewed approximately every ten years since the 1970s. Shifts in curricula on the national level frequently also entail a new approach in history education orientation. Up until the early 1990s, the aim of history teaching in Finland was to enhance collective memory with teaching the great national narrative and the emphasis was on substantive historical knowledge. From the middle of the 1990s, teaching the disciplinary criteria for deciding what makes good history became essential. The number of core subject areas was reduced, and historical thinking skills were brought into the core of history curriculum.

In the early 2000s, history instruction was thought to be discipline-based, which meant that teachers were to teach historical thinking. However, the national curricula in history for basic and upper secondary education went their separate ways. The core curriculum for basic education was based on the disciplinary approach and the one in upper secondary education a compromise between the disciplinary and collective memory approaches.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the objectives in history curricula also for upper secondary schools since the 2000s stress the importance of disciplinary ways of thinking. Overall, the trend from the collective memory approach towards the disciplinary approach were similar in Finland and many Western countries; though, the orientation changed later in Finland than in the Anglo-American countries.<sup>7</sup>

During the 1990s, history teachers became the curriculum designers for their subject at the local level, when the school-based curriculum work was launched in Finland. It was a shift away from nationally-prescribed topics to the topics chosen by teachers. Teachers could enjoy their curricular autonomy for a decade before the State

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<sup>4</sup> Christine Counsell, “History teachers as curriculum makers”; Richard Harris, and Katharine Burn, “English history teachers’ views”; Johan Samuelsson, and Joakim Wendell, “Historical thinking about sources.”

<sup>5</sup> Larry Cuban, *Teaching History Then and Now*.

<sup>6</sup> About epistemological assumptions and alternative orientations to history teaching see Peter Seixas, “Schweigen! die Kinder!”

<sup>7</sup> Rosalyn Ashby, and Christopher Edwards, “Challenges facing the disciplinary tradition”; Mario Carretero, Stefan Berger, and Maria Grever, eds., *Palgrave handbook of research in historical culture and education*; Henrik Å. Elmersjö, Anna Clark, and Monika Vinterek, eds., *International perspectives on teaching rival histories*; Maria Grever, and Siep Stuurman, eds., *Beyond the canon*; Chris Husbands, Alison Kitson, and Anna Pendry, *Understanding history teaching*; Jukka Rantala, and Sirkka Ahonen, *Ajan merkit*.

started to diminish it. Even so, international comparisons show that Finnish teachers are still exceptionally independent today.<sup>8</sup>

In the mid-1990s, when teachers were given the great deal of freedom in designing school-specific curricula, teachers' views concerning curriculum work was studied whereas in the 2000s, history teachers' contentment with curricular decisions has not been studied properly.<sup>9</sup> The National Board of Education gathered feedback in 2002 from teachers with a survey. At that time, teachers were not ready to buy the disciplinary approach. Many of them saw skill-based assessment criteria as being too difficult to implement. They also demanded that 'general knowledge' or 'basic knowledge' should be added to the objectives of history teaching. It was apparent that not all teachers were pleased with their curricula.<sup>10</sup>

In Finland, the implementation of core curricula can be assessed with the help of the sample-based assessments of learning outcomes. Thus far, the first and only assessment aimed at students' knowledge of history was carried out in 2011. During the same assessment, a sample of teachers completed a questionnaire about their opinions on the history curriculum. The assessment revealed that disciplinary ways of thinking had not been realized in teachers' work in the manner that the official national policy required.<sup>11</sup>

The discipline-based approach was clearly seen in the curriculum documents but many teachers did not follow the guidelines. It can be explained by the autonomy enjoyed by Finnish teachers in their everyday work and the lack of mid-level actors who are responsible for the evaluation and control of teachers. In Finland, there are no inspections of schools or of learning materials. Nor are there national tests for the whole age cohort at the end of basic education. The only national test in the Finnish general education system is the Matriculation examination which takes place at the end of general upper secondary education, when the students are approximately 18 years old.<sup>12</sup>

The other explanation comes from the significance of the contents of national history for some teachers. They think that teaching the history of the nation is one of the most important aims of history education.<sup>13</sup> Those teachers might have found the collective memory approach to be the most suitable for themselves, and therefore, did not care what the core curriculum was intended to determine.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Maria Erss, "Complete freedom to choose within limits"; Jukka Rantala, and Amna Khawaja, "Assessing historical literacy; Erja Vitikka, Leena Krokfors, and Elisa Hurmerinta, "The Finnish national core curriculum."

<sup>9</sup> Nigel Norris et al., *Arviointiraportti peruskoulun opetussuunnitelmauudistuksesta*; Asta Pietilä, and Osmo Toivanen, *Opetussuunnitelmatyö kunnissa ja peruskouluissa*; Syrjäläinen.

<sup>10</sup> Jukka Rantala, "Historian ja yhteiskuntaopin opettajat."

<sup>11</sup> Najat Ouakrim-Soivio, and Jorma Kuusela, *Historian ja yhteiskuntaopin oppimistulokset*.

<sup>12</sup> The Matriculation examination at the end of general upper secondary education is a graduation exam, which also qualifies the student for entry into university. The student has to participate in at least four tests. The student has to choose at least three tests from among the following four tests: the test in the second national language, one foreign language test, mathematics, and one test from the subjects of humanities and natural sciences. The test of mother tongue is mandatory for all. History is chosen moderately. For example, about one-fifth of the examinees, who chose humanities and natural sciences, took the history test in 2015.

<sup>13</sup> See Tom Gullberg, "Facts, functions and narratives."

<sup>14</sup> Jukka Rantala, "How Finnish adolescents understand history."

### **The Shortcomings of Students' Historical Thinking Skills, Shown Through the Assessment of Their Learning Outcomes**

The 2011 national-level assessment of students' learning outcomes within basic history education assessed students at 16 years old. The goal of this solitary assessment was to gauge how these students fulfilled the 2004 core curriculum objectives.

In fulfilling the core curriculum's concept of historical thinking, a student would have to demonstrate the capacity to:

- obtain and use historical information
- use a variety of sources, compare them, and form their own justified opinions based on them
- understand that historical information can be interpreted in different ways
- explain the purposes and effects of human activity
- assess future alternatives, using information on historical change as an aid.

These objectives emphasize studying the form of historical knowledge. Students were expected to learn the second-order concepts of cause, change, significance, evidence and empathy.

In Finland, the final assessment criteria helped teachers to formulate history teaching. According to these criteria, at the end of compulsory education students would be able to demonstrate:

- knowing how to distinguish between factors that explain a matter and secondary factors
- the ability to read and interpret various sources
- the ability to place the events being studied into their temporal contexts, and thus into chronological order
- knowing how to explain why people once acted differently from how they act now
- knowing how to present the reasons for, and consequences of, historical events
- the ability to answer questions about the past by using the information they have obtained from different sources, including information acquired through modern technology
- the ability to evaluate and formulate their own justified opinions about events and phenomena.

The core of the 2004 curriculum listed widely-defined content areas, giving teachers an outline in which they could focus their historical thinking education. Examples of content areas such as "Nationalism and life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century" demonstrate the leniency that this would have afforded to teachers in their planning.

Due to historical thinking entailing both substantive and procedural knowledge, the 2011 assessment was aimed at determining students' understanding of both content and skills. Multiple choice questions and questions that could be distinctly marked right and wrong comprised two-thirds of the students' tasks. The remaining third consisted of broader and open-ended essays.<sup>15</sup>

One segment of the test focused on the students' ability to use substantive knowledge, and the tasks that this segment consisted of were mainly closed in nature. For

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<sup>15</sup> Rantala, "How Finnish adolescents understand history."

example, the majority of the students grasped the concept of ‘war child,’ a concept pertaining to the events of World War II in Finland. The majority could also list eight European nations (Finland included) that had consequently secured independence after World War I. Sixty-two percent of the students answered these tasks correctly.

The terms ‘historical thinking’ and ‘mastery of history’ within the scope of this chapter entails a student’s capacity to use both substantive and procedural knowledge. The productive tasks in this assessment measured the mastery of this dichotomy. This can be accomplished, for example, by using primary sources as a means of creating rational argument.

When gauging students’ abilities of historical thinking, they were expected to utilize the substantive knowledge they had acquired by connecting newly-introduced pieces of evidence. Students were given a task pertaining to the food prices in Russia from 1913–1917 with the focus of measuring their understanding of causal explanation. This task required the students to explain the historical events that brought about a food shortage and an inflation in price. Similar tasks pertaining to students’ historical thinking skills were also provided: for example, explaining why prisoners of war had been treated poorly by soldiers during World War II through reading a newspaper article, or reading a diary excerpt and explaining why in 1933 the Germans had voted for the National Socialists.

With the students’ score of these tasks being divided by the theoretical maximum and converted into a percentage, the results 35%, a considerably low score. This demonstrates the challenge that the students faced, and their weak performance in this aspect suggest that the Finnish approach regarding historical knowledge and historical thinking concepts have not been accounted for sufficiently within the teaching framework.<sup>16</sup>

This assessment demonstrated that, in general, many students had a poor development of historical thinking and lack the necessary interchange between substantive and procedural knowledge. This is evident in their lack of ability to connect new evidence to familiar context: despite having sufficient substantive knowledge, students understood the sources as information rather than evidence. Through the assessment, it became apparent that teachers had placed their focus predominantly on substantive history rather than on the national core curriculum’s objective, and that students subsequently lacked the necessary conceptual tools to understand history as a discipline.

In conclusion, the assessment being carried out at the end of the Finnish basic schooling suggested that the approach to teaching history in the early 2010s was still pervasively based on collective memory, a continuation of the teaching approaches of the decade earlier.

### **New Curricula Differentiated by Descriptions of Content Areas**

In August 2016, new curricula were implemented in Finnish schools, five years after the aforementioned assessment. As shown in the objectives and assessment criteria (Table 1), in the new basic education curriculum a specific emphasis is placed on historical thinking skills.

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<sup>16</sup> Rantala, “How Finnish adolescents understand history.”

Table 1. Final assessment criteria for good knowledge and skills in history (numerical grade 8) at the end of basic education (NBE, 2014, pp. 503–4)

<b>The objective of the instruction of history is</b>	<b>Knowledge and skills for the grade 8</b>
<i>Significance, values, and attitudes</i>	
to strengthen the student's interest in history as a field of knowledge and as a subject that builds his or her identity	Not used as a principle for grade formulation. The student is guided in reflecting on his or her experiences as a part of self-assessment.
<i>Acquiring information about the past</i>	
to activate the student to acquire historical information from diverse age-appropriate sources and to evaluate their reliability	The student is able to search for information from different historical sources of information and detects differences in their reliability.
to help the student understand that historical information can be interpreted in different ways	The student is able to read and interpret different sources.
<i>Understanding historical phenomena</i>	
to strengthen the student's ability to understand historical time and the related concepts	The student is able to place the studied topics into their temporal contexts and thus in a chronological order.
to guide the student in understanding factors that have influenced human actions and decision-making in different historical situations	The student is able to put himself or herself in the position of a person of the past and to describe the motivations of his or her actions.
to help the student to consider different reasons for historical events and phenomena	The student is able to separate factors explaining historical events or phenomena from less important factors.
to guide the student to analyze historical change and continuity	The student is able to explain why in some spheres of life, people once acted differently than people act today and in other spheres in a similar way.
<i>Applying historical knowledge</i>	
to encourage the student to make interpretations	The student knows how to form his or her own justified interpretation is able to form justified interpretations of historical events.
to guide the student to explain the intentions of human activity	The student is able to describe the intentions of human activity.
to guide the student to explain why historical information can be interpreted and used differently in different situations and to critically evaluate the reliability of interpretations	The student is able to evaluate the reliability of interpretations of historical events or phenomena.
to guide the student in developing his or her competence in using a variety of sources, comparing them, and forming his or her own justified interpretation based on those sources	The student is able to answer questions about the past by using information he or she has obtained from different sources.
to guide the student to evaluate alternative futures based on his or her knowledge of history	The student is able to describe how interpretations of the past are used to justify choices made for the future.

Students developing a sense of identity—as well as becoming active members within their society—are goals that history as a subject can promote. The history of a nation functions as a cultural bond that encourages fellowship and has the potential to strengthen the ties of its citizens. Despite these functions of history, there is no overall consensus regarding the content of collective memory supported by history education. There is a danger that it would exclude some people from the narrative of the common past, and hence identity education in Finland has been based on supporting the students in building their personal cultural identity—the concepts of ‘national identity’ and ‘Finnish identity’, for example, have been left out from the national curricula. Conversely, scholars generally agree on the critical skills that the students need in present-day society. Therefore, the history curricula emphasized historical thinking.

In the basic education, five pages of the history curriculum deal with the objectives and assessment criteria.<sup>17</sup> Only one page is dedicated to key content. In the basic education, the emphasis is on the form of historical knowledge, historical thinking (second-order concepts like evidence, change and cause) and historical literacy as can be seen in the excerpt of the description of the task of the subject:

In the teaching and learning of history, the students focus on critical analysis of information produced by different actors and the dimensions of historical source material. The students also focus on the premise of historical research according to which the aim is to form a perception of the past that is as reliable as possible based on available evidence. The objective of the instruction is to support the development of historical literacy: the ability to read and analyze sources produced by the actors of the past and to competently interpret their meaning and significance. The students are guided to understand that historical information is open to interpretations and has multiple perspectives and to explain changes and continuity apparent in historical development. The instruction of history helps the students recognize the society's values and the tensions in them, as well as their changes in different times.<sup>18</sup>

The content domains are defined loosely so that teachers have a leeway for their teaching. A typical example of key content area descriptions is the following: “The origins of the world politics of today: The students explore the shared history of developed and developing countries and the origins of new kinds of political tensions in the world as well as solutions for them.”<sup>19</sup>

Eleven such content domains exist during the four-year studies in basic education. Numerically, teachers have 24 lesson hours for each content area which reveals that teachers have time to teach that content thoroughly and in discipline-specific ways. The interplay of substantive and procedural knowledge can thus be at the core of the learning process.

In upper secondary education, however, three obligatory courses have 14 themes, which have 36 content areas.<sup>20</sup> Teachers have three hours for each content area which explains that there is not much time for an in-depth study. Basically, the curriculum is disciplinary-based but the emphasis is on the body of historical knowledge. The learning objectives are highly connected with the content areas and there are no criteria for assessment even though the Matriculation examination in the end of secondary education is criterion-based. The contents of the Matriculation exam have an effect on the instruction and the learning that precedes it.<sup>21</sup> Balancing breadth and depth is difficult, when the tasks in the Matriculation exam are bound to the numerous content domains of the curricula. Managing the examination excellently is not possible if students explore only a few historical events in-depth.

The obligatory Finnish history course follows the canon—the historical grand narrative, consisting of “selected figures, events, story lines, ideas and values, colligated

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<sup>17</sup> National Board of Education 2014, 95–9, 496–500.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 496.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 497.

<sup>20</sup> National Board of Education 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Eero Salmenkivi, “Ylioppilastutkinnon rakenne- ja reaalikoeuudistusten vaikutuksia”; Richard Harris, and Suzanne Graham, “Engaging with curriculum reform.”



by definite plots, perspectives and explanations.”<sup>22</sup> “Finland in World War II,” is a typical example of content area description. It is understandable that the canon exists because historical research and history teaching at schools supported the nationalistic ideas of the Finnish nation and state from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and there still is pressure from that tradition.<sup>23</sup> Overall, the content domain descriptions still follow the orientation in which the purpose of history teaching is to give an overview of significant historical phenomena.

### **Most Teachers Today Approve of the Disciplinary Approach**

The renewal process of the core curricula seems to be a success if you read the interviews of the leaders of the project or some principals. Ill-founded beliefs that most teachers support the contents of the new curricula is also seen in some publications.<sup>24</sup> It is understandable that there is great faith in the process and obvious reasons for the participants of that process to assure the unanimous acceptance of the new curricula. However, based on the work of historians of education, we know that school reforms usually lead to very small and short-term changes at schools.<sup>25</sup> The above-mentioned information concerning history teachers’ attitudes toward the disciplinary approach tells that it was not yet generally accepted among teachers in early 2000s. We wanted to know how the development process concerning the new curricula affected teachers and what teachers think about their curricula today. Therefore, we decided to study the present situation. The main purpose of our study was to find out the following: did the transition that started in the 1990s within disciplinary history teaching finally succeed from the respondents’ way of thinking? The target group in our study was history teachers in basic school at lower secondary grades 7 to 9 (for those aged 13–15) and in upper secondary schools (for those aged 16–18). In the survey, the subject specific questions focused on the teaching and learning objectives of history in the national curricula; whether they were clear and corresponded with the respondents’ own views to the objectives of history teaching. We also asked whether history teachers thought that the descriptions of the contents were adequate, and if they give a clear starting point to the planning of their teaching. Moreover, we inquired whether the competence requirements of the core curricula are suitable and to what extent the curricula offer support for evaluation and assessment? The respondents were also asked to give feedback to the developers of the curriculum.

A total of 339 teachers completed the web-based questionnaire, which was open for a month at the beginning of 2017. Of the respondents, 243 taught at a basic school and 96 at an upper secondary school. Our questionnaire reached about one-fifth (21%) of all Finnish history teachers.<sup>26</sup> 154 (46%) of the respondents were female, 180 (54%) were male and five respondents did not indicate their gender. 324 (96%) of the respondents were teaching at schools for Finnish-speaking students and 11 (4%) at schools for Swedish-speaking students. The gender and language ratios in our study corresponded to the population of history teachers in Finland.

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<sup>22</sup> See Siep Stuurman, and Maria Grever, “Introduction: Old canons and New Histories.”

<sup>23</sup> Arja Virta, and Esko Nikander, “Historical Education, Historical Culture”; Eemeli Hakoköngäs, and Inari Sakki, “Visualized Collective Memories.”

<sup>24</sup> Jenna Lähdesmäki, “Case Study: The Finnish National Curriculum,” 414.

<sup>25</sup> Larry Cuban, *Inside the Black Box*; David F. Labaree, *Someone Has to Fail*; David Tyack, and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia*.

<sup>26</sup> Kari Nissinen, and Jouni Välijärvi, *Opettaja- ja opettajankoulutustarpeiden ennakkoinnintuloksia*, 28, 53

We urged the teachers to answer the questions according to the school level they teach the most because some of them teach at both school levels. With the questionnaire, we wanted to have the teachers' overall impression of their curricula. Therefore, we asked teachers to grade their own core curriculum of history. The grading scale was from 4 to 10, where 4 signified 'failed' and 10 'excellent'. The mean value of given grades was 7,7 ('good') among basic school teachers and 7,3 ('satisfactory') among their upper secondary colleagues.

We did not find major differences between teacher groups' perceptions of the objectives of history education expressed in the core curricula. Teachers at the basic education level were slightly more pleased with them than their colleagues in the upper secondary education. One tenth of the respondents from basic schools told that their core curriculum lacked some important objective. Among the upper secondary teachers, one quarter of respondents saw some significant aims missing. It is worth noting that very few of basic education teachers revealed what objective was lacking (in their opinion), whereas the upper secondary teachers were more willing to express their opinions on that question.

The debate of breadth versus depth can be seen comparing the content descriptions between the two core curricula. The history working group for basic education reduced the number of key content areas and got rid of the master narrative of Finland and the Western countries. The respondents in the survey were in favor of that decision. The upper secondary school teachers were more concerned about the definition of the content areas than their colleagues in basic education. Nearly half of them said that some important content domains were missing from their core curriculum, whereas only one tenth of basic school respondents appraised that some significant key concept area was missing. The upper secondary teachers also had more to say about the contents than their basic school colleagues. More than one third of them gave written feedback about the content definitions. They complained about the contents being too heavy. Some decisions with key content areas, such as changing the course of the development of the European worldview noncompulsory, were also met with resistance.

Assessment was the dimension which teachers were most dissatisfied with. According to the history teachers, the new curricula do not give enough guidance for assessing students' performance. The teachers of both school levels criticized the deficiency of guidelines for assessment. This result was expected, as practically all nation-wide assessments of learning outcomes have shown the evaluation of students to be the area that is the most critical and needing the most improvement.<sup>27</sup>

Similar studies about teachers' contentment with their curricula have been executed elsewhere. For example, Harris and Burn and Harris and Graham undertook studies in the UK with a research frame and data collections that were close to those used in our study.<sup>28</sup> In the research by Harris and Burn, the focus was on history teachers' views on what substantive content young people should be taught, and in the Harris and Graham's study on history teachers' willingness to support curriculum change. Comparing to those results, Finnish history teachers seemed to be relative satisfied with their new curricula.

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<sup>27</sup> Najat Ouakrim-Soivio, *"Toimivatko päättöarvioinnin kriteerit?"*

<sup>28</sup> Harris and Burn; Harris and Graham.

### Some Explanations for the Changes in Teachers' Attitudes

Teaching at schools will not change because of the orders given by the school administrators, as we have discussed earlier in our chapter.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, it is worth examining what kind of factors were promoting or hindering the changing of the history teaching orientation in Finland.

The articulation of the textbook publishers advertising explains something about the discussion culture bounded with the change of the orientation. From the late 1990s but specifically in the 2000s, textbooks were advertised with discipline-based slogans. The phrase 'skills in history' was repeated in advertising.<sup>30</sup> Despite the disciplinary rhetoric in marketing, the textbooks in Finland followed (and continue to follow) the collective memory approach, in other words, they are burdened with the substantive historical knowledge and there is no space for content that engages students in developing expertise in history as a discipline. In Finland, there have not been any textbooks that have been termed "death by sources A to F", unlike in the UK but neither of the textbooks have had an in-depth approach.<sup>31</sup> Two big publishing houses have avoided changing their selling concept. Therefore, the teachers who were going to implement the disciplinary approach in their instruction did not have the tools for it.

The capacity of national core curricula to guide has been questioned. Heinonen who studied teachers' conceptions of the importance of curricula and teaching materials revealed that teaching is more influenced by learning materials than by the state's curricular direction.<sup>32</sup> Ninety-one percent of the respondents in our study appraised the printed textbook to be among the top four teaching materials they use. The percentage is surprisingly high because the Finnish government has put €100 million during the past four years into digitalization. Similar results about the prominence of textbooks in history teaching have also been found earlier.<sup>33</sup> Finnish history teachers rely on the textbooks more often than their colleagues in the USA, for example.<sup>34</sup> Today suitable materials from the Internet can be found, but compiling teaching materials increases teachers' work load. To summarize, textbooks were not supporting teachers to change their teaching orientation.

Counsell argues about the need for a coherent, public discourse among teachers. She states:

The more we create conditions for as many teachers as possible to engage freely in a curricular conversation, to find rigorous means of refreshing their own practice and to build their own standards for critically assessing others', the more curriculum change has some chance of acquiring a deep and defensible rigour and some meaningful enactment on a national scale.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Cynthia E. Coburn, "Beyond decoupling: Rethinking the relationship"; Margaret Troyer, "Teachers' adaptations to and orientations."

<sup>30</sup> See Kleio 1998–2017.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Counsell, 57, 60.

<sup>32</sup> Juha-Pekka Heinonen, *Opetussuunnitelmat vai oppimateriaalit*.

<sup>33</sup> Ouakrim-Soivio and Kuusela.

<sup>34</sup> Jeffrey D. Nokes, "Observing Literacy Practices," 518.

<sup>35</sup> Counsell, 79.

The start of that type of curricular discussion, however, was difficult in Finland. Almost all history teachers are members of their association but for a long time, that association was not interested in spreading curricular conversations among its members.<sup>36</sup> In previous decades, the association concentrated on the supervision of the interests of its members, organizing excursions and in-service training. The association has had courses for their members but the focus in those in-service courses have been on substantive historical knowledge. Not until the 1990s did the association start to organize pedagogical courses, but even then, the content was often strongly connected with transmitting substantive knowledge. Teachers were more willing to learn the body rather than the form of historical knowledge and how to teach it. Neither did the National Board of Education offer in-service training to teachers in the implementation phases of the new curricula. Therefore, it was hard for teachers to adopt the orientation of discipline-based curricula.

As stated above, leading professional organizations and textbook publishers in Finland did not support the principles and practice of disciplinary history unlike those in the UK.<sup>37</sup> Only the university-led teacher education tried to promote it. The basic requirement for a history teacher for basic and upper secondary school is a Master's Degree and over ninety-nine percent of history teachers in Finland are formally qualified.<sup>38</sup> Usually, a history teacher's degree consists of History as a major subject and Social Sciences as a minor subject. All history teachers also study pedagogical studies at the university departments of teacher education. These studies take one year of history teachers' five years of study. The main didactics studies concentrate on the nature of historical knowledge, historical learning and thinking, teaching and studying history, the history teachers' role and professional development and some special issues like cross-disciplinary themes.<sup>39</sup> The problem in Finnish history teacher education is the weaknesses of subject-specific didactics at some universities.

In Finland, eight universities train history teachers. Each university also has a teacher training school at which history teachers guide teaching practice. Many of them—like many of the history educators working in teacher education departments—have a Doctor of Philosophy, either in history or educational sciences, and at least a major in the other field. However, some universities and their teacher education departments do not have history educators, who are themselves specialized in history education. Some people working in these posts are general pedagogues without a deeper historical competence, historians without deep didactic competence or history teachers without either. Presumably, they do not follow the scholarly discussion in the field of history education and thus can only transmit the didactic knowledge of the old teaching orientation. Such types of history educators do not teach historical thinking or historical inquiry processes and therefore, their teacher education students might not learn how to teach those skills to their own students.<sup>40</sup>

The double-edged history education in Finnish universities has existed for decades. Teacher-driven, curricular conversation concerning disciplinary thinking, however, became stronger at the beginning of the 2010s. That can be seen from the discussion of the journal of the history teachers' association. During the 20 years from 1998 until 2017, only 39 articles concerning history curricula were published in the

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<sup>36</sup> See Kleio 1998–2017.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Stuart Foster, "Teaching About the First World War."

<sup>38</sup> Timo Kumpulainen, ed., *Opettajat ja rehtorit Suomessa*, 41, 51.

<sup>39</sup> Virta and Nikander.

<sup>40</sup> See Chara Haeussler Bohan, and O. L. Davis Jr., "Historical Constructions"; Peter Seixas, "Student Teachers Thinking Historically."

journal. Of the nearly 4,900 pages, only 86 concentrated on curricular issues.<sup>41</sup> It is noteworthy that most of the articles concerning curricula were published between 2013 and 2017. Even in 2008, one of the leaders of the History Teachers' Association complained about the lack of curricular discussion:

Are teachers willing to have changes in their curriculum or are they even interested in it? The questions came to my mind when visiting the discussion section of our web pages. I was sorry for the moderator who asked questions but had to answer herself when nobody participated in the discussion.<sup>42</sup>

Five years later, in 2013, the leader of the basic school division of the history teachers' association gave rise to a debate on the objectives of history teaching:

The new core curriculum will emphasize learning the historical thinking skills. Students should make historical investigations and interpret history. They should also try to find causes and consequences. In addition, they should practice historical empathy. [...] Substantive knowledge is not inconsistent with procedural knowledge – on the contrary they need each other. History lessons, however, are limited. You cannot treat all the contents and practice skills. Therefore, you have to reduce the number of contents.<sup>43</sup>

The change in teachers' curricular discussion in public was clear. In the early-2010s, the members of the association discussed more on the Internet and the association made surveys about their members' opinions about curricular matters. Even though many teachers did not participate in those surveys, they still had an opportunity for discussion. The local networks of history teachers also seemed to be active in curricular discussion unlike the previous decades.

One thing that unquestionably influenced upper secondary teachers' orientation to history teaching was the Matriculation exam. The first document-based task in the exam was seen in the 1980s and it created discontentment among teachers, who had not prepared their students for answering questions of that kind. Typically, the tasks so far directed students to memorize historical content knowledge accurately and repeat it in their answers without interpreting it. As Virta pointed, the old exam tradition did not prevent students from critical thinking but neither did it spur them towards it.<sup>44</sup> The tasks based on different kinds of source material became gradually general because the history working group that developed the tasks tried to read heterogeneous teachers' opinions and avoid big changes in the exam tasks. Therefore, the tasks in the exams of the 2010s have still been a compromise between the old and the new orientations to history teaching as can be seen on the following excerpts from the history tasks of the Matriculation exam, autumn 2013:

Question No. 6: How was Finnish wood industry developed and what effect did it have on Finnish society from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the outbreak of the Second World War?

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<sup>41</sup> Kleio 1998–2017.

<sup>42</sup> Marja Asikainen, "Onko tarvetta muuttaa," 5.

<sup>43</sup> Riitta Mikkola, "Kill your darlings," 3.

<sup>44</sup> Arja Virta, "Historia ja yhteiskuntaoppi reaalikokeessa."

Question No. 9: The following excerpts describe the Peasants March in Finland in 1930 by the Lapua Movement [Finnish radical nationalist and anti-communist political movement]

[Three excerpts from the newspapers of different political opinions]

- a) Compare the views of the participants and their objectives presented in the newspapers.
- b) Discuss on the elements that threatened democracy in Finland in the 1920s and 1930s.

The first question (Question No. 6) poorly represents the range of cognitive processes typical to history but the second—a document-based question (Question No. 9)—is a complex writing task. At the moment, many upper secondary teachers long for an exam which consists only of problem-based tasks which require historical thinking skills. For them, the changing of the Matriculation exam is linked with defending the place of their subject in the upper secondary schools. History is no more as popular subject among the students in Matriculation exam than it used to be. One reason for that is that many young people do not see the relative meaning of the subject for themselves in the future. The other reason for promoting change is connected with the growing significance of the results of the Matriculation exam when applying to enroll in university. In both cases, the skill-based Matriculation exam would be of benefit to the school subject of history. Big reform is underway for upper secondary education, and the place of history as an obligatory subject is not secure. That has made many history teachers realize that historical thinking skills are essential, both in their own teaching and in the public sphere.

Big reform is also expected for basic education. In basic education, the phenomenon-based learning is challenging the disciplinary teaching, and the interdisciplinary curriculum the discipline-based curriculum. Yet, there has been news that Finland has done away with subject teaching.<sup>45</sup> Although the news is false, there is, nevertheless, a discourse that has made teachers anxious. The rhetoric concerning the purpose of history teaching and the discussion culture among teachers has changed in the 2010s. The concept of ‘powerful knowledge’, for example, has been included in the pedagogical discourse. According to this concept, the school is supposed to offer such knowledge that empowers “students through its ability to take them beyond their own experience.”<sup>46</sup> Increasingly, teachers consider that students need access to ‘powerful knowledge’ and with history it means the disciplinary ways of thinking. Teachers have found this kind of rhetoric as essential in defending the future place of history as a subject in school curricula.

### **What is the Future of History Education in Finland?**

Our survey reveals that the change of the teaching orientations is starting to pay off. The teachers are increasingly going to accept teaching the disciplinary ways of thinking instead of teaching the body of historical knowledge. As Burkhauser and Lesaux found out, teachers at the early stage of their career approve of curriculum change more than

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<sup>45</sup> Kabir Chibber, “Goodbye, math and history”; Richard Garner, “Finland schools: Subjects scrapped; Penny Spiller, “Could subjects soon be a thing.”

<sup>46</sup> John Morgan, “Michael Young and the politics”; Kenneth Nordgren, “Powerful knowledge, intercultural learning”; Michael Young, “Overcoming the crisis”; Michael Young, and Johan Muller, “On the powers of powerful knowledge.”

veteran teachers.<sup>47</sup> In our study, however, there were no major differences between the responses of different career lengths. This reveals that the older teachers have also finally adopted the disciplinary approach.

Teachers are pleased with the core curriculum for basic education but not as pleased with the decisions made about the upper secondary curriculum. Basic teachers are particularly satisfied with the loose definition of the key content areas such as “Building the welfare state”. In the recent core curriculum, the number of the content domains was reduced and the definitions loosened. However, there are not yet any results about how the teachers can utilize the increased autonomy accomplished by this loose definition of the contents. It should be studied because the freedom to choose the contents also brings challenges about the essentiality and coherence related to the contents, as we have seen in the example of history education in New Zealand.<sup>48</sup>

The core curriculum for upper secondary schools needs to be revised. The number of content domains should decrease to increase the contentment of the teachers. We also think that it is the time to change the approach to the post-modern one. When teachers at basic school already concentrate their teaching on disciplinary thinking, the students at the next school level are supposed to be ready to process rhetorical and narratological strategies. The central objective of history teaching at the upper secondary level is to provide tools for students to analyze different narratives of historical actors and the purpose of the general upper secondary education is to prepare students to study in the university.<sup>49</sup> The present approach, a compromise between collective memory and disciplinary approaches, is not giving students enough capacity for independent thought and understanding of the complex texts required at the university.<sup>50</sup>

Finnish adolescents have performed exceptionally well in literacy in the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).<sup>51</sup> Young Finns seem to succeed in general literacy skills quite well, but they have problems in historical literacy as research has indicated.<sup>52</sup> Young Finns need to train their critical competence during this ‘post-truth time’ when political polarization is growing in Finland and people are increasingly starting to think that everyone can rely on their own facts. The disciplinary approach at the basic school level and postmodern approach in upper secondary history teaching might be an answer to this challenge.

As stated above, most history teachers have finally approved the objectives of the state level curricula. However, we see two topical threats to history education in Finland. First, the ongoing development process of the general upper secondary education, which might change history from an obligatory to an elective subject while reducing the significance of the subject when applying to university might reduce the attraction of the

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<sup>47</sup> Mary A. Burkhauser and Nonie K. Lesaux, “Exercising a bounded autonomy”; See also Andy Hargreaves, “Educational change takes ages.”

<sup>48</sup> Barbara M. Ormond, “Curriculum decisions”.

<sup>49</sup> See Robert Thorp, “Towards an epistemological theory”; Anna Veijola, and Jukka Rantala, “Nuorten näkemyksiä historian käytöstä.”

<sup>50</sup> Jukka Rantala, and Marko van den Berg, “Finnish high school and university students’ ability.”

<sup>51</sup> E.g. Sirkku Kupiainen, Jarkko Hautamäki, and Tommi Karjalainen, *The Finnish education system*.

<sup>52</sup> Rantala and van den Berg; Anna Veijola, and Simo Mikkonen, “Historical Literacy”; Anna Veijola, and Jukka Rantala, “Assessing Finnish and Californian high school students’.”

subject among young people.<sup>53</sup> Secondly, the university faculties are increasingly engaging general pedagogues instead of subject didactics for the posts of retired subject didactics teachers. Both threats burden those few history educators in Finnish universities. They must try to influence the state-level discourse. In addition to their pre-service education, they also have to participate in in-service education to supplement the education of young history teachers, who have not been enlightened with the disciplinary or postmodern approach to history teaching at their own universities.

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<sup>53</sup> About similarities in the USA see Christopher W. Berg, "Why Study History?"



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