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Cooperation between Home and School in the Finnish Core Curriculum 2014

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ABSTRACT
This article examines, with the help of document analysis, how cooperation between home and school is presented in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014, which was implemented in autumn 2016. It was found that references to home-school cooperation comprise four themes: cooperation based on values, cooperation as a cultural meeting-point, cooperation to prepare for the future and support through cooperation. The precise guidance provided by the Curriculum on cooperation concentrates on actions performed at the individual level, which in turn steers the focus of cooperation towards the individual. Questions of communality are avoided, and the school as an institution is assumed to have endless resources to act. The multiple faces of cooperation between home and school and the effects and possibilities at the individual and community levels should be discussed more versatilely.

Keywords: *cooperation between home and school, basic education, core curriculum*

Introduction

Interest in the relationship between home and school can be found in many countries. A well-functioning relationship between home and school is reported to enforce educational outcomes, support the continuity of education and even improve the home atmosphere (Cox, 2005; Dotson-Blake, 2010; Epstein, 1995; Fan & Chen, 2001; Gonzales-Dehass, Willems, & Doan Holbein, 2005; Soininen, 1986). The terms used to describe this relationship, such as involvement, engagement, participation, collaboration and cooperation, vary widely, and precise definitions of these terms as well

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as the relationship between them are not delineated. Involvement is often used as an umbrella term (Bæck, 2010; Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004; Helgøy & Homme, 2017), but involvement is also arguably a term that describes what parents do (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004). In the Core Curriculum 2014 (CC14) the term involvement is used to describe pupils' active role in learning. The term engagement has also been suggested as describing a pupil's overall orientation towards collaborating (Barton et al., 2004), but it is used more often to refer to active forms of participation and commitment by parents (Widding, 2013). The term engagement is not used at all in CC14. Other common suggestions for umbrella-terms are cooperation and collaboration (fe. Cox, 2005; Helgøy & Homme, 2017; Hirsto, 2010; Widding, 2013). In CC14 cooperation refers to something that *is* while collaboration refers to something that *is done*. In Finnish the term 'cooperation' is often used as an umbrella term, encompassing both orientation and action (fe. Siniharju, 2003), and has previously been used to describe school-centred orientation and action without specifying cooperation between home and school (Lämsä, 2013).

In sum, the definitions of terms related to the relationship between home and school are often subjective, and no consensus can be found even amongst researchers (Averill, Metson, & Bailey, 2016, pp. 112–113; Barton et al., 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001, p. 3; Lee & Bowen, 2006, p. 194). More consensus is found in the use of the term participation, which is understood as parents taking part in school activities, or in other words, 'being there'. In its use of participation, CC14 also specifies ways that parents can take part or attend. It is understandable that even though researchers highlight the multiplicity of terms used to define the home-school relationship, in many cases they settle upon using these terms synonymously, or they focus on describing the relationship and pay less attention to the terminology used (Averill et al., 2016; Crozier, 1997; Englund et al., 2004; Helgøy & Homme, 2017; Hirsto, 2010; Räty, Kasanen, & Laine, 2009). Similar to international research, the terminology used in Finnish educational research is diverse and even debated (see Kekkonen, 2012; Lämsä, 2013). Variation in the use of terminology can also be seen as a reflection of the multi-faceted relationship between home and school. All of the concepts presented refer to power, sharing, dependence and partnership between actors (see D'Amour, Ferreda-Vileda, San Martin Rodriguez, & Beaulieu, 2005, pp. 118–119). The term chosen for this study is 'cooperation' because it is the term used in the primary source used – the Core Curriculum 2014 (CC14). This article examines how cooperation between home and school is presented in the Finnish CC14.

Parents' part in education

Arguments for cooperation between home and school often originate from ecological theories of child development, where a child's different actions in diverse contexts are acknowledged, and the transition between these contexts is seen as crucial for development (Brofenbrenner, 1986). Systems-thinking underscores our understanding of home-school cooperation as a concept that is broader than merely the culture

of schools. Home-school cooperation encompasses not only the relationship between guardians and teachers but also their life situations and professional traditions.

According to Ferguson and Ferguson (1994, pp. 30, 36), for parents the meaning of cooperation is tied particularly to the child's progress verified in the out-of-school-context. Development which is not visible or otherwise notable outside of school is not necessarily motivating for guardians. If the target of cooperating is merely to support the child to adjust to the demands of school, then parental motivation to participate and become involved might be lacking. From the parents' point of view, successful cooperation between home and school is easily affordable, gives credit to work done as parents and enables parents to form networks with each other. Parental participation seems to depend on an understanding of one's role as a parent and a sense of efficiency related to school issues (Bæck, 2010; Crozier, 1997; Dotson-Blake, 2010; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Räty et al., 2009). Non-participation can be either active or passive; some parents decide not to participate although they have the resources to do so, whilst others lack the necessary skills, strength or time to participate (Dotson-Blake, 2010; Pugh, 1989, pp. 5–7). Parents with higher levels of education are found to cooperate more with the school and thereby potentially have more influence in the school community (Bæck, 2010, pp. 560–561; Crozier, 1997, p. 198; Räty et al., 2009, p. 290). Though parental variables play a significant role in children's academic success, the positive effects of cooperation are mostly restricted to families with parents who already share the school's vision and have good social status in society. Efforts made by lower-class parents have been noted to have less impact on academic success (Alameda-Lawson, 2014, pp. 204, 207; Baquedano-Lopez, Alexandra, & Hernandez, 2013, p. 149; McElderry & Cheng, 2014, p. 244; Strand, 2011, p. 209). Emphasis on the importance of parental engagement can have both positive and negative effects; schools might be blamed for not doing enough to involve parents and thus fail in getting better results, likewise, parents might be blamed for their children's academic failures (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013, p. 152).

Epstein (1995) writes that schools and families can form caring communities through actions which include support to parents, efficient information, voluntary work, parental involvement in decision-making, possibilities for learning more at home and networking beyond the school community. Finnish parents are found to be interested in cooperating with the school, but the role they are expected to take on, is to support and approve work done at school (Metso, 2004, pp. 46, 81; Lehtolainen, 2008, p. 370). In practice, parents are involved through meetings, discussions, bulletins, school celebrations, theme-days, parents' clubs and increasingly by questions, concerns and ideas sent using Internet applications. According to an inquiry conducted by the Social and Health Ministry, nearly all parents were found to consider cooperation with the school to be important, but less than 60% of parents are satisfied with the prevailing engagement. One possible reason for this result might be that only 40% of parents felt that their opinions were heard by the school (Kanste, Halme, & Perälä, 2016, pp. 79, 86). Not all studies point to such dissatisfaction (Räty et al.,

2009), but it appears that Finnish schools are still struggling with how to interact with families.

Since the 1980s, Finnish schools as institutions and teachers as professionals have changed their culture towards a more cooperative style (Siniharju, 2003, pp. 107, 114). Amongst teachers, the belief in the importance of cooperation is strong (Räty et al., 2009; Siniharju, 2003), but teachers have long felt that teacher education at the university level does not develop the skills needed for this cooperation (Blomberg, 2008, pp. 190–191; Niemi & Tirri, 1997, p. 44) and that teachers need more skills in areas such as self-control, conflict management, receptivity to serving others and collaboration (Virtanen, 2013). Even though Finnish teachers report needing more training in cooperating with parents, amongst teachers the need for more knowledge about societal dimensions is rarely seen as necessary for in-service training (Mikkola & Välijärvi, 2014, pp. 61–62). This situation could be interpreted as a sign of a lack of understanding of the effects of the school and schooling on broader society. In the British context, teachers have been found to prefer to interact with parents they regard as 'normal' and make these judgements of normality based on one-dimensional conceptions of parenthood (Lasky, 2000, pp. 849–852, 857). This relates to Blomberg's (2008) findings on Finnish novice teachers, who were found to be troubled by parents' differing value-systems.

Finnish basic education and the role of the core curriculum

Almost all Finnish children attend basic education provided by comprehensive schools (Kumpulainen, 2015, p. 12). The state regulates the norms, information and resources (e.g. funding) of basic education. The guiding norms of education include laws, decrees and the core curriculum (referred to as the CC), which regulate the local authorities (mainly municipalities) operating as education providers. The legislation concentrates on regulating school conditions, and the overall aims of education are set by the government. The ultimate target of basic education is to provide equal rights to education for all. This includes the aim of reducing the risks related to low socioeconomic background and regional differences in educational outcomes. In recent years, these objectives have been reported to be in danger: according to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), differences in educational outcomes amongst pupils have grown (Vettenranta et al., 2016), and worries associated with changing notions of parenthood and the fragmentation of society have arisen. Demands to create caretaker networks and to develop comprehensive schooling have increased, and cooperation between home and school has been marked as an important area for development in the Finnish school system (Bardy, Salmi, & Heino, 2001, p. 13; Launonen & Pulkkinen, 2004, pp. 32–33; Lämsä, 2013, pp. 11–12; Välijärvi, 2005, p. 105).

The CC14 is described as an opportunity to reform the set of values directing schools and to define the mission of education in society (FNBE, 2014, pp. 3–4, 6; Halinen, Holappa, & Jääskeläinen, 2013, p. 187). The CC, determined by the Finnish National

Board of Education (FNBE), is a legal norm and a strategic tool that defines educational policies and helps to develop education (Vitikka & Hurmerinta, 2011, pp. 5, 35). Local education providers are obligated to draw up local curricula according to the mandates of the CC. Implementation of CC14 started in 2016, and the period of transition will continue until the end of 2019. According to the FNBE, the aim of the CC14 is to enforce connections between school and society, and local curriculum work is highlighted as playing a central role in developing possibilities for cooperation.

One distinctive mark of a well-functioning cooperation programme is that cooperation with families is outlined as part of the curriculum (Epstein, 1995). In Finland, cooperation is outlined in legislation and in the CC. The guidance norms included in previous CCs gave guardians the possibility to join and take a more active role in relation to their child's education, but space for reciprocal communication at the level of the school community was smaller. The guidance given by legislation focuses mainly on cooperation when support for learning is needed. (Orell & Pihlaja, 2018.) The starting point of the study presented in this article is the question: *What is said about cooperation between home and school in the CC14?* This research question formed the platform for an inductive search for an understanding of cooperation and the actors who participate therein (see Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016, pp. 18–21).

The Core Curriculum 2014: Study material

The CC14 was developed through the broad cooperation of different administrations, and the basis for the curriculum was chosen in committees formed by invited representatives, such as teachers, principals, researchers and providers of teaching material. Society as a whole, as well as smaller communities, have also been recognised as contributors to reform (see Gellert, 2006, p. 314); the CC process included possibilities for all Finns to comment on drafts of the core curriculum on the FNBE's website.

The FNBE states that curriculum reform should encompass the following themes or areas of basic education:

- Securing necessary competences and encouraging learning
- Enforcing learning outside of the classroom as well and utilising technology
- Changes in subject content and starting points, optional subjects at an earlier age
- Transversal competencies developed in all subjects
- Learning the fundamentals of programming
- At least one multidisciplinary learning module per year
- Diversity in learning assessment
- Local curricula as key to cooperation between home and school (www.oph.fi)

These points suggest that the CC14 attempts to adopt society, learners and knowledge as the basis of the curriculum, with an integration of different elements of school work highlighted in particular. As in previous curriculums, the first part of the CC14 (12 sections) discusses issues relating to education at the general level, including the

significance of local curriculum work; the meaning and mission of basic education; the basis of the organisation of school work and operating culture in comprehensive education; instructions related to assessment; support and pupil welfare; and language and culture issues. Cooperation between home and school has its own subsections, one as part of the organisation of school work, and the other as part of support in learning and school attendance. The syllabus index is presented in three sections: Grades 1–2, 3–6 and 7–9. The text describing the tasks and objectives of subjects is extended from previous sections and presented as part of each section. This has extended the page total of the CC considerably. Compared to the CC04, the number of pages is three times higher.

The CC14 is published as a printed book and downloadable versions are available on the FNBE website. The document is available in Finnish, Swedish and English and partially in Sami. There is a fee for the English version of the CC14, but the other language versions are free.

Method and analysis process

This study was conducted using document analysis as the underlying orientation. The CC14 is understood as an artefact and as a formal organisational will that forms a part of the reality in which social settings are presented (Freebody, 2009, p. 195; Wolff, 2006). Documents are not neutral or asocial but rather produced by people acting in certain circumstances and within the constraints of specific conditions and power-relations (Finnegan, 2006, pp. 139, 144). This is why the language used expresses the political will, performs states and affairs and by doing so creates and defines social settings. Thereby, the document provides a mechanism for understanding social and organisational practices in education (Coffey, 2014, pp. 367, 369, 372).

Procedures used for analysing documents may vary, and multiple approaches may be applied to written texts. This study was conducted as a 'deepening process', moving from content analysis into thematic coding (Prior, 2008, p. 231). During the process, the interpretative approach towards the document and close attention to its narrative qualities were deepened (see Bowen, 2009, p. 32; Coffey, 2014, pp. 371, 375). To avoid misinterpretations, the analysis was conducted in Finnish, which, in addition, to being the researcher's native language, is the original language of the documents analysed (see Hermann, 2007, p. 154). Although analysis was conducted on the Finnish version, references are made to the downloadable e-book version of the CC14 English translation.

At the beginning of the analysis, the CC14 was gone through carefully through close reading. At this stage, the aim was to become acquainted with the language and vocabulary of the data and to identify text related to home and school cooperation (see Coffey, 2014, p. 375; Julien, 2008, pp. 121–122). The close-reading process made it possible to single out words and word abstractions that appear in the text related to cooperation between home and school. Words and word abstractions were used as tools to harvest all of the units of analysis from the vast document. All potential units of analysis found via the word search were gone through multiple times, and text

paragraphs found not to be related to home and school cooperation were removed. The help of other researchers was used to avoid false interpretations by presenting the harvested data collection before the final deletions (see Julien, 2008, p. 122; Weber, 1990, p. 52).

The unit of analysis was defined as a singular construction of conception, the structure of thought. In practice, the unit of analysis was a single sentence or a short paragraph of text, such as the following:

> 'It is vital that the pupils' guardians are also given opportunities to take part in the curriculum work, preparation of the annual plan and planning of the school's operation, in particular as regards educational goals, the school culture and cooperation between home and school. Special attention is focused on participation methods for the guardians [...]'. or 'In organisation of school work, the needs, capabilities and strengths of all pupils are taken into account. Cooperation with guardians and other parties supports the successful achievement of this aim.'

One unit of analysis usually consisted of several words or word abstractions used in scanning the data (see Table 1). The CC14 was found to consist of 262 units of analysis that refer to home-school cooperation. In comparison to the previous CC, the amount of cooperation-specific text has increased slightly (see Orell & Pihlaja, 2018, p. 153).

After thickening the data, we focused on the actors and the objects of the actions presented relating to cooperation between home and school (see Freebody, 2009,

Table 1: Words and word abstractions.

WORD/WORD ABSTRACTION FINNISH (ENGLISH)	ORIGINAL FINDINGS	RELATED TO COOPERATION
perhe- (family)	62	62
huolta- (guardian)	170	170
vanhe- (parent)	2	2
koti- (home)	206	68
kasva- (upbringing, education)	234	29
kodin- (home's)	43	35
kumpp- (partnership)	20	5
tiedott- (inform)	12	9
yhdes- (together)	244	10
yhtey- (in connection)	210	8
kuul- (hear, to be heard)	178	11
yhteisty- (cooperation)	453	162
osall- (participate, participation)	347	26

p. 180). According to Lepper (2000, p. 15), in textual analysis it is helpful to start by searching for action words because actions link to actors and the objects of actions. Due to this work, the units of analysis were arranged into categories by actor: school, pupil and guardians. The categories were gone through multiple times, giving attention not only to what is said and how specific arguments are presented but also to detect omissions and gaps (see Rapley, 2007). It was found that all actor categories included the same topics and areas of speech; these are roughly 'thickened' in Table 2. Due to this iterative process of identifying meanings and revealing underlying contradictions, it was possible to form the following four themes: values connecting to cooperation, cooperation as a meeting-point of cultures, facing future demands together and support given through cooperation (see Julien, 2008, p. 121).

Within the themes, actor categories were used as tools for detecting meanings structured for cooperation between home and school (see Lepper, 2000, p. 77). Firstly, cooperation between home and school is examined separately theme by theme. Themes

Table 2: Cooperation between home and school: Areas of speech from the perspective of the actors and objects of actions.

SCHOOL	PUPIL	PARENTS
Values	***Values***	***Values***
Shared values as a basis of school function, education and upbringing	To support wellbeing by hearing parents	To be heard
Trust towards school	Child-development	Support for parents to cooperate
Shared collective understanding	Healthy growth and development	***Culture***
Classroom atmosphere	Wellbeing	Cultural knowledge
To support school discipline	***Culture***	Evaluation knowledge of language learning
Parental networking to support community and schoolwork	Cultural identity	Awareness of Finnish educational system
Feedback as a support to school functioning	Language identity	and future educational choices
Culture	Cultural competence and flexibility	***Future***
To enrich schoolwork	***Future***	Knowledge of progress and evaluation
Cultural awareness	Growing to become a pupil	Awareness of support on future learning
Richness of school education	Educational continuity	Awareness of decisions to be made
Future	To cope with demands of studying	and effects of decisions made
Guidance towards law	Joining new groups	***Support***
To set goals for upbringing and behaviour	To understand the value of work	Guardian rights
To supply information supporting educational choices	Study motivation and language-learning of bilingual children	To protect family privacy
Support	To support educational decisions	Awareness of support and guidance
Commitment to shared goals	To support growth to independence	Knowledge about support given
To set rules and agreement for good behaviour	To solve problems and/or worries	Knowledge of benefits of support
Linking of education and upbringing	***Support***	Support to support learning
	Individual teaching, guiding and support	Support guardians as caretakers
	Acknowledging strengths	
	Shared collective understanding of child's needs	

are used as platforms for actors or objects of actions, which are revealed to have partially different explanations, incompatible roles or unclear missions for performing their part in the play of cooperation between home and school. Then, the analysis is deepened cross-thematically.

Theme I: Cooperation based on values

Cooperation between home and school is defined as being based on building trust, mutual respect and equality. Vital to creating this atmosphere is a shared knowledge of underlying values: 'Joint discussions on values lay the foundation for cooperation in educating the children'. Discussion relates to the non-hierarchical relationship between values. This kind of understanding of values is said to form the basis for a discursive framework for curriculum work (see Uljens & Ylimäki, 2015). Value-discussions are to be carried out as part of local curriculum work, and education providers are to create possibilities for different actors to participate: 'how the opportunities for participation of guardians in different life situations are accounted for'. For parents, these discussions are possibilities to be heard and supported in their involvement in school matters. Guardians are made visible not just in regard to the school but also to each other: actors in cooperation as an institution and guardians as a group.

Cooperation based on values is foremost cooperation to develop the school community: Value-discussions are described as enforcing safety and supporting pupils' wellbeing holistically, and cooperation between home and school takes on meaning as a multidimensional dialogue between guardians and the school. Though the importance of these value-discussions is highlighted in the CC14, in other parts of the CC14 the relation between home and school is mostly referred to only as *cooperation,* and actions taken are most often defined as *giving information*. Only in isolated instances are verbs – such as *giving feedback*, *guiding*, *agreeing*, *assessing*, *offering services, requesting*, *negotiating*, *listening* and *supporting interaction* – used to describe actions taken. The actual commitment to carry out these value-discussions is also questioned: 'the text of the core curriculum may be used as such to describe the underlying values'.

Considering the traditions of Finnish schools and the guidance given in previous CCs (see Anttonen, 1994; Launonen, 2000; Orell & Pihlaja, 2018), there is a possibility that value-discussions might be bypassed or treated superficially, for example, due to a lack of time.

Lack of shared value-discussions might form a setting in which home and school are faced with a collision of values in individual situations at the personal level. In this type of situation, guardians are invisible to each other, and for parents, cooperation is a connection at the individual level whilst the teacher is still acting in the name of the institution. It can be suggested that interest in cooperation is dependent on guardians' ability to recognise and relate to underlying values and means for reaching the values. Räty et al. (2009) found that Finnish parents with academic backgrounds attended parent evenings more often and had a more positive attitude towards them compared

to parents with less education. This result is consistent with international findings (see Bæck, 2010; Crozier, 1997).

Theme II: Cooperation as a meeting-point of cultures

The cultural basis of comprehensive school is described as being based on the diverse Finnish cultural heritage, which is to be appreciated: 'Internationalisation at home is an important resource for a learning community'. The Finnish translation of this concept as 'internationalisation at home' cannot be described as a set phrase or commonly understood. According to the booklet released by FNBE (2013), this resource is to be understood as offering free-of-charge possibilities to become acquainted with different cultures using, for example, the multi-culturalism of families as a resource for education. Cooperation between home and school is seen as the meeting-point of family-cultures and school, as well as the meeting-point of different cultural heritages on a larger scale.

The learning community is understood to be formed from different communities, which are to be appreciated: 'Pupils are guided to appreciate the traditions and customs of their own family and community as well as those of others'. The family unit offers special knowledge, which is to be appreciated. Cooperation with cultural minorities is mentioned specifically: 'The knowledge that the pupils and their guardians and communities have on their nature, ways of living, history, language, and cultures in their own linguistic and cultural areas are drawn upon in instruction'. Cooperation benefits the school, supports pupils' wellbeing and learning and supports guardians in supporting their children's educational path. Potential challenges in this area are left unstated.

According to ecological theory, transitions between different contexts are crucial for development (Brofenbrenner, 1986), which is recognised in the CC14. Family-culture is also a topic to be studied. Family-context is to be taken into consideration in language teaching, home-economics and in the teaching of religion and history. Through cooperation, pupils attain cultural competence and capabilities for functioning in multiple environments: 'In cooperation within the school community and outside of it, the pupils learn to discern cultural specificities and to act flexibly in different environments'. What actually constitutes the 'cooperation' carried out to facilitate this learning is not specified. Mostly, the target regards reflective skills: 'to help the pupil to identify changes in the history of his or her family or community and to understand how the same changes may have meant different things to different people'. Allusions to a cultural ideal can be traced: 'The contents allow the pupils to get acquainted with good manners, equal use of resources, and taking responsibility in the family'. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on attributes of family-culture: 'the pupil is able to reflect on how family, local communities and other social communities influence conceptions of health'. Considering that teachers feel troubled when interacting with guardians whose values, and presumed life choices, differ from their own (Blomberg, 2008; Björklund, 2013; Obondo, Lahdenperä,

& Sandevärn, 2016), dealing with these aims in a non-affirmative way might prove challenging.

Theme III: Facing future demands together

Continuity of education is emphasised in several parts of the CC14. Cooperation between home and school is seen as pivotal in overcoming transitional phases in the educational path: 'Cooperation is particularly vital at the transition points of a pupil's educational path'. Though education in the school community is considered to be the school's responsibility, the overall accountability for children is given to guardians: 'The primary responsibility for bringing up a child rests with the guardians. They must also ensure that the pupil completes his or her compulsory education'. To fulfil their task, guardians need feedback and information: 'To be able to take responsibility for their educational task, the guardians must be provided with information about the child's progress in learning and growth and of any absences'.

Ensuring parents' right to information about evaluation and knowledge about possibilities for future studies is accentuated as the core of cooperation, and student counselling involves guardians in planning for future studies. Schools are supposed to encourage pupils to discuss educational matters with their guardians and thereby to play an active role in cooperation between home and school. Feedback received from parents supports the school's functions and development and makes it possible to individualise teaching for better learning. The aim is to support children in reflecting upon alternatives and in understanding the value of work. The future is pictured as an individual path towards a successful, responsible and active adulthood. Instead of school, at the individual level the main responsibility for cooperation is placed on the guidance counsellor, whose role is to take a broad vision of the future: 'Guidance counselling supports the pupils in making decisions and choices that concern their daily lives, studies, further studies, and future based on their own abilities, values, starting points, and interests. (...) Guidance counselling is realised in cooperation with guardians'.

Abilities to meet future expectations and participate in an active adulthood are tied to cultural issues. Multi- and bilingual children are mentioned in particular regarding the aim to enforce study-motivation and skills improvement through home-school cooperation. PISA results have shown that children with migrant backgrounds tend to lag behind compared to native-born pupils (Vettenranta et al., 2016, pp. 55–56), which has probably affected the wording of the CC14. It is notable that whilst cultural knowledge is placed within the realm of families, future expertise lies within the realm of schools. Parents become aware of the Finnish educational system and possible educational choices through information provided by schools.

Crozier (1997) points out the necessity of detailed discussions with guardians: when working-class parents were asked about their aspirations for their children's future, their answers, such as 'to do well', often left professionals to determine what the parents meant. Finnish teachers are reported to value ethical discussions but experience

a lack of time to undertake these. Addressing ethical issues is seen as an essential part of being a teacher, but insights into ethical dilemmas vary. For example, the two most common ways teachers solve ethical dilemmas, via discussion and independent decision making, are opposite to each other (Spoof, 2007, pp. 126, 129, 132–133, 146–147).

Although cooperation between home and school is mentioned regarding the transitional phases for all children, more emphasis is put on cooperating with parents whose children need support and special arrangements to cope with comprehensive education and studies at the secondary level. It appears that threats to coping in the future are addressed at the individual level.

Theme IV: Support through cooperation (or without it)

A guardian's right to be informed about their child's educational achievement and how this achievement is evaluated is pointed out in several sections of the CC14. Guardians and pupils are to be given insight into learning progress. In 2010, the pupils' right to educational support was renewed, and an ideological standpoint towards more inclusive comprehensive schooling was enforced. Every child is entitled to have individual general, intensified or special support, depending on the child's needs. Support is to be given as part of mainstream schooling whenever possible.

For pupils, cooperation between home and school helps to solve problems and worries related to learning, wellbeing and growth. Cooperation with the school makes guardians aware of the support given in school, and they are also supported in supporting their child at home. Guardians also have the right to control the exchange of information amongst professionals. For schools, the information and help provided by guardians make it possible to recognise a pupil's strengths as well as special needs, which makes it easier for teachers to individualise the teaching, guidance and support they give.

In regard to these descriptions of attitudes and assets to be gained through cooperation, related action steps given in legislation are repeated in the CC14. For example, lack of progress is a major reason for more intense cooperation: 'When a pupil needs support, cooperation between home and school becomes more significant'. Parents are expected to be proactive in support measures, but the responsibility to ensure that a pupil receives the necessary support is the responsibility of teachers: 'Each teacher is responsible for the activities, learning and wellbeing of their teaching group'. It is notable that when problems occur at the individual level, the teacher is considered the actor instead of the school. Should this be interpreted to mean that problems only occur at the individual, and not the institutional, level? Instructions relating to support for learning include precise steps for mandatory hearings and discussions with parents, with the form of cooperation described in the document related to the support. Although support is expected to be planned via home-school cooperation, neither pupils nor guardians can refuse support: 'the pupil or the guardian may not refuse to accept support prescribed in the Basic Education Act'. This is one of the few points where cooperation is not necessarily carried out through mutual understanding.

A school's responsibility to recognise the need for support is not restricted to pupils. The needs of families should also be considered: 'The diversity of families and their need for information and support is taken into consideration'. It would seem that schools have endless resources to help professionals recognise various family situations and to operate with consideration of the heterogeneity among families. Still, it is notable that family needs are merely to be considered, and not necessarily acted upon. It is also specifically mentioned in the CC14 that all teachers must be aware of the norms guiding cooperation in terms of issues related to support for learning. This can be interpreted from several perspectives: as a targeted strike towards teachers' possible ignorance, as an underscoring of a pupil's right to support, or as an emphasis on the importance of cooperation or assurance of the implementation of power in situations where problems occur. Nevertheless, it also raises the question of whether it is less important to understand the other parts of guidance provided by the CC14 given regarding home-school cooperation.

Building bridges or making assumptions – from words to action?

After the themes were analysed separately, the analysis was deepened by discussing the themes together. At this stage, wording received special attention: what kind of meaning is formed?

The CC process is described as a possibility to re-form a set of values directing the school and to define the mission of education in society (FNBE, 2014, pp. 3–4, 6; Halinen et al., 2013, p. 187). The importance of developing locally adapted models of cooperation between home and school is emphasised in several parts of the CC14. But how deeply does the CC14 reflect the commitment to these value-discussions?

The theme of cooperation based on values reflects an overall understanding in regard to education and upbringing and discussions shared between home and school. Within the theme, however, we still found that although locality is emphasised, on the textual level of norms locality was not demanded. Other themes concentrate on more precise aspects of cooperation between home and school but have firm connections to the theme of values. Do the value-reflections of the other themes support cooperation based on values or undermine it?

Compared to previous CCs, Finnish society is presented as more diverse in the CC14 (see Orell & Pihlaja, 2018). Themes of cooperation between home and school as a meeting-point of cultures reflect changes in society and growing plurality. The descriptions of actions given relate to individual support, whilst work to be done at the level of the school community is only loosely referred to. The guidance provided on cooperation between home and school only provides a vague prescription for growth towards an active adulthood, in which the pupil is the centerpiece and target of actions: '[Educational task] means supporting the pupils' learning, development and wellbeing in cooperation with homes. Basic education offers the pupils possibilities for versatile development of their competence'.

Cooperation between home and school is promoted as profiting all: 'Cooperation with actors outside of the school enriches school work and connects it with the life in the community around the school'. However, the guidance provided focuses on the individual level: 'The teacher contributes to ensuring that the pupils' right to guidance and support in the areas of instruction and pupil welfare are realised. This requires interaction with pupils and guardians'. Whilst differences among families and their possibilities to cooperate with the school are said to be considered, specific methods for cooperating are left unstated. As feedback collected during the drafting of the CC14 indicated, deeper discussions do not arise merely by asking for comments or feedback (Cantell, 2013, p. 196; see also Jóhannsdóttir, 2018, p. 305).

The text of the CC14 presents an ideal parent – one who is willing and able to participate and who has much to offer the school community. For the majority of guardians, however, the meanings for cooperation arise outside of the school context (Ferguson & Ferguson, 1994, p. 30). When guardians are isolated from the community, they tend to be less likely to experience situations in which these kinds of verifications can emerge. For example, whilst educators might see language barriers or a lack of awareness as a major difficulty in cooperating with guardians, guardians focus on the social isolation they experience and are likely to consider other difficulties as consequences of isolation (Dotson-Blake, 2010, pp. 109–110). And again, if guardians feel they have no voice in society overall, will they recognise possibilities to interact with the school or understand its functions? We should be wary of not turning schools into marketplaces, where participating is actually lobbying the power-keepers, and the loudest voices are the ones to be heard (see McGhee-Hassrick & Schneider, 2009, p. 221; Landeros, 2011, p. 255). Renewal of school culture and a more vibrant relation with the broader society are undeniably aims to be pursued, but it must be acknowledged that social issues are more complex than parenthood abilities or cooperating with the school (Hartas, 2015, p. 33). Possible problems related to unequal possibilities among homes to cooperate with schools leading to inequality among children seem valid regarding actions taken as a result of the CC14. From the beginning of 2017, schools have been required to have equality plans to ensure equal opportunity in schools.

Maintaining a balance between the equality of individuals and of larger groups is acknowledged by teachers as a challenge, who have identified conflicts amongst values. Studies from the field have reported that teachers encounter difficulties, such as passiveness or value differences, in their communication with with a varied group of guardians (Blomberg, 2008; Siniharju, 2003; Spoof, 2007). More than two decades ago, Anttonen (1994) wondered how Finnish teachers would manage with cultural differences whilst the unifying value base focuses on just one representation of reality. She suggested Habermas's discursive ethics as a direction for moral learning: in a plural world, the collision of different discourses is unavoidable, and by giving these discourses constant possibilities to interact with an equal voice, it is possible to form morally acceptable unity (Habermas, 1996, pp. 97–98, 160–162, 168).

Features of discursive ethics can be seen in the CC14's emphasis on value-discussions: individual values are to be recognised and appreciated, but at the same time, basic education is set to be based on 'shared underlying values and a common concept of learning'. Whilst the importance of values and continuing discussions about them are underscored, examples of how these discussions can be carried out or potential difficulties that might be encountered in these discussions are not stated. Difficulties reported in research are bypassed by prep-talks, and cooperation obstacles between home and school are presented mainly as differences in mindsets. From the teachers' point of view, part of the demands of the CC14 could be interpreted as accusations of not doing enough or as poor cooperation strategies by the teacher. Teachers' abilities and attitudes towards cooperation with families are found to be partially inadequate (Blomberg, 2008; Kanste et al., 2016; Spoof, 2007, pp. 90, 103), but alternatively, teachers' understanding of the importance of cooperation between school and home is strong (Blomberg, 2008; Metso, 2004; Siniharju, 2003). These contradictions between actual school-life and the one presented in the CC14 might challenge commitment to the aims of the CC (see Heikkinen, Kiilakoski, & Huttunen, 2014, p. 23).

Schools as institutions are assumed to have endless resources to consider the differentiation of families and individual needs. This emphasis on the individual level bypasses the impact that schools have on the group and community levels, and undermines issues of communality. It is reasonable to claim that though differences between schools in Finland are still minor, the possibilities to fulfil curriculum obligations related to cooperation between home and school differ from school to school (see Vettenranta et al., 2016, pp. 55, 93–95). In some schools, implementing guiding norms might present such a challenge that teachers transfer to areas where they feel able to function and that schools with the greatest needs will end up having the least experienced or skilful teachers, those who are not able to work in more desirable schools (see Ede, 2006, p. 32).

When trying to develop cooperation between home and school, it should also be noted how other current reforms affect teachers' workload (Lasky, 2000, p. 858). Currently, Finnish schools are undergoing curriculum reform parallel with reforms in child- and family-services. The target is to develop universal basic services, such as schools, for early support of child- and family-welfare (Hastrup, Hietanen-Peltola, & Pelkonen, 2013, pp. 87, 90–91; Sosiaali-ja terveysministeriö, 2016, pp. 5–6). In future, the service network of school-aged children is to be built around student services, and universal services, such as schools, must be well-functioning and able to recognise needs for extended support (Hastrup et al., 2013, pp. 86–87, 90). Provisions for promoting welfare and prevention are to be transferred as part of the provision of basic services and included in their tasks (Lavikainen & Juurakko, 2014, p. 16). An example is the 2013 Pupil and Student Welfare Act. Undergoing curriculum reform and the reform of child- and family-services pressures schools to develop multi-professional work and communication with families. Overlapping reforms may support the development of cooperation between home and school, but they might also overload teachers and

lead to negative impacts. Neither the resources needed for cooperation between home and school on behalf of schools nor issues of consuming teachers' time are adequately dealt with as part of the CC14. Differentiation between schools is recognised and acted upon by the state by providing more resources to schools situated in challenging environments to fill in the gaps created by cutbacks in funding for basic education.

In Finland, actions carried out by schools are not commonly understood as politics in everyday school life (see Räisänen, 2014, pp. 266–267). Even though an individual teacher represents the school as an institution, an individual guardian does not necessarily represent all guardians. From the aspect of critical theory, schools as institutions implement power-keepers' visions through school policy, and cooperation with parents may also be used to educate children away from the home-environment and normalise society (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013, pp. 150–151; Bourdieu, 1993, p. 67). Processes of cooperation are mainly left to local decision making, but transferring these to the local level does not inductively translate to increasing democracy. Norwegian research indicates that local strategies for reproducing cooperation between home and school vary in a way that is not necessarily desirable (Helgøy & Homme, 2017).

The aims of advancing parental engagement need to be clarified. If the target is to enforce the ability to carry out parenthood, to be engaged in one's child's life in a supportive and educative role, the structures for engagement are, in many ways, different than if the aim is to engage in education and to ensure a better education for one's child. When the focus is set on education instead of the child, the lack of democratic features in schools becomes a problem (see Heikkinen et al., 2014, p. 30). As Crozier (1997, p. 198) writes: 'Parental involvement cannot be left to vagaries of the market'.

Conclusions

This study looked for an answer to the question of what is said about cooperation between home and school in the CC14 and what this cooperation entails. In Finland, cooperation between home and school has traditionally meant the supportive role of guardians, and connections between home and school have often related to negative issues such as misbehaviour or poor learning results (Blomberg, 2008; Metso, 2004). Previous studies suggest that challenges that occur in cooperation between home and school might partially be related to non-productive discourses in norm-guidance (see Orell & Pihlaja, 2018, p. 159). One of the aims of the CC14 has been to promote cooperation between home and school and include more integrative elements for guardians (Halinen et al., 2013).

In the CC14, cooperation between home and school is seen as integral to the functioning of schools. Actors, such as the school, guardians and pupils, were identified in passages on cooperation in the CC14, and cooperation was found to have the same meanings for all actors. Through cooperation, schools and homes construct a shared understanding, and cooperation functions as the meeting-point of cultures, helps

pupils prepare for future challenges and works as a supportive measure. Wellbeing on the individual and community levels, sound learning and the development of education are all understood partly as the result of cooperation between schools, pupils and guardians. More than actual measures, the CC14 describes the benefits gained by cooperation. Though passages regarding benefits can be found, passages on quality are absent in the CC14, and the relationship between individuality and communality is dealt with in a nonchalant manner. This raises particular questions of how the importance of value-discussions should be understood locally and how the curriculum relates to the reality of schools.

The CC14 process raised a great deal of discussion amongst Finnish teachers. Some teachers are eagerly awaiting the changes to school culture, and some think the changes will ruin the basis of education. This study is an attempt to add science-based knowledge to an emotion-filled conversation. Overall, implementation is the greatest challenge facing curriculum planners (see also Saylor, Alexander, & Lewis, 1981, p. 79), and it is yet to be seen how the guidance will turn into action. The critique presented here must not be understood as an effort to undermine the work already done. The points made are merely to facilitate the ongoing development process of basic education. More discussion is needed to ensure the true transparency of cooperation between home and school. In future, more research-based information is needed about local implementation in Finland.

To ensure the validity of the study, all methodological steps are described precisely to allow the reader to be able to reflect on the researchers' choices (see Bowen, 2009, p. 29). In analysing the data, the trustworthiness of the interpretations was tested with the help of research colleagues and by comparing the findings to previous studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 713). The study's data are accessible for audiences of many language groups, and hence, the claims can be contested. Still, it must be noted that differences among languages and cultures pose limitations for generalising the results of this study.

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