Chapter 1
Introduction

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Over recent decades, the Finnish education system has become regarded by many as the best in the world, generating international fascination. An obvious manifestation of this has been the rise of 'PISA tourism'. Finland topped some of the first round of the OECD's PISA international testing programme in 2001 and over the subsequent decade international delegations increasingly flew into Helsinki, Finland's capital, for brief visits intended to find out the secret of Finland's success. Many Helsinki schools were getting international visitors on an almost daily basis. More than a decade later politicians, policymakers, educators and business investors from around the globe continue to show interest in many of the specific features of the Finnish education system, for instance the way that children don't start school until they are older than in most countries, and the general absence of high-stakes testing. Sometimes these are still discussed in relation to PISA success, but for many countries Finland also just acts as the exotic 'other': a reference society that allows those in other parts of the world to imagine a different kind of education system.[1]

Unsurprisingly, there have been plenty of texts extolling the virtues of Finland's education system. Pasi Sahlberg's books on *Finnish Lessons* are best known, and have

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underpinned his work 'on the circuit' explaining Finnish education to international audiences.[2] There are also a number of others, often written by international visitors to Finland, for instance Eduardo Andere.[3] Academic accounts are also written having Finland's education success in mind, for instance Hannu Simola's anthology *Finnish Education Mystery*[4] with a sociology of education perspective and Hannele Niemi, Auli Toom and Arto Kallioniemi's edited volume *Miracle of Education*[5] focusing on pedagogical aspects. This edited book, subtitled 'Unvarnished insights into Finnish schooling', has a distinctive purpose compared to all of these. With a focus mainly on comprehensive schooling for 7 to 15-year-olds, the editors and authors, who are nearly all academics in Finnish universities,[6] offer a 'warts and all' account of education in Finland. The perspective is contemporary and is not an attempt to explain the success of an education system, but to provide a nuanced analysis of its problems and possibilities. The 28 chapters here cover diverse aspects of comprehensive schooling in Finland, and all of them are intent on addressing the challenges facing education in this Nordic country in a rigorous and balanced way.

A Sociological and Education Policy Perspective on Finland

Why are we writing such a book, you might ask? Is it an attempt to tarnish Finland's educational reputation? The impetus for the book came from concern that the grand international narrative on Finnish education seems to be disproportionate. There are some details that have become explanations of Finnish education success, but which seem irrelevant or superficial based on Finnish research and scholarship. Then there are long trajectories and large societal shifts forming education that are disregarded in the international debates due to their complexity and lengthy timeframes. They are just too difficult to sum up in a catchphrase or a slogan.

It is important to recognise that stories of success and problems in an education system are not mutually exclusive. There are rich stories reported through research: that the foundational idea of equality in Finnish comprehensive education has been undermined by policies de facto pushing segregation between and inside schools; that the schools' success can be explained with a history of institutional robustness and political compromises; that edu-business is changing the landscape of public education in Finland.[7] If, based on these observations, we were to conclude that education in Finland is a success or failure, we would be oversimplifying the matter. We need to look at how the comprehensive school system has developed with regards to social justice and its outcomes, which can be measured either by learning outcomes and skills (as in PISA), which are often translated into 'quality' in the public discussion, or through measures of equality of opportunity, which relate to questions of systemic differentiation and stratification.

Another concern that gave rise to this book is that many of the key problems in public and political debates over "Finnish education" derive from methodological nationalism.[8] This is the viewpoint that informs international large-scale assessments, PISA being the most obvious example, which build an understanding of

different nations competing with each other in the international forum and the possibility of ranking their order. Yet something being Finnish does not make it a success or failure. Indeed, the proposition of a wholesale national success and failure is oversimplifying and artificial, and thus mostly uninteresting for research. Rejecting methodological nationalism, we pay more attention to schools, as sociological and political phenomena. In this book the focus is certainly on contexts, including national contexts, but we are wary of being too interested in the uniqueness of Finland or whatever we think that is. Hence this book is not only about Finland, rather it highlights how education is enacted in policies and practices in Finland. It draws on a more universal sociology and politics of education and to some extent on comparative education.

Finally, we are also concerned about the motives for the utopian account of Finland's education system, as well as its impact. Put simply, there is money to be made in peddling a glossy version of any successful approach to education, in this case Finnish. Individuals, institutions and indeed nations, including Finland and those it exports to, all benefit financially from overlooking complexity and contradiction. But as the chapters here will often illustrate, ignoring such detail causes many problems for students, teachers and others in Finland, as well as in countries around the world where products and services sold under "Finnish education" get applied uncritically and without enough attention to the local context or vernacular into which they are being enacted. We hope this book will also give insights into the field of travelling policies and practices and the educational export of any education: how deep one needs to look in order to understand the construction of an education system, and what needs to be accounted for when adopting policies and practices into other contexts. The contributors to this book shed light on the mechanisms that are embedded in the Finnish setting.

General Background to Finnish Schooling

What is now described as Finland was forged in the fault line of the Swedish empire in the west and the Russian empire in the east. When Russia took the land area from Sweden in 1809, there was a need to soothe the new subjects by giving Finland the status of an autonomous archduchy. The church-led education during the Swedish rule was expanded and secularized during the Russian era. Finland gained independence in 1917 in the turmoil of the Russian revolution. The moderate expansion of formal education was heavily boosted by industrialisation. The era after the Second World War saw the rise of a Nordic-style welfare state and the economic growth was able to support expansion of education at all levels.[9] Finland joined the European Union in 1995 and started using the Euro in 2002. Following global trends, the 1990s were also a sea change in Finnish education, recognised in historical and policy research.[10] Finland started to become influenced by the market-liberalist view of equity which emphasised "difference among pupils and everybody's right to receive schooling that fits his or her capacities, needs and individuality".[11] This

challenged the social-democratic agrarian tradition of equality in Finland, with its emphasis on similarity of pupils and the right to receive education independently of background. At the time of writing, policy borrowing in the Finnish education system has remained limited, in contrast to the dramatic marketisation developments in the Swedish or Estonian education systems, for instance. The Finnish system remains largely organised according to the equality idea: education is universally provided and funded by the state. While the Finnish education system is still managing relatively well in reaching this goal,[12] the chapters in this book along with previous research and scholarship by these authors and others illustrates that inequality remains a problem in relation to socio-economic and class backgrounds, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, language and special educational needs. Inequality often reflects multiple of these dimensions and varies across different urban and rural geographic settings within Finland as well.

The main focus of this book is on comprehensive schooling. The relationship between the state and its 309 municipalities (in 2022) forms the basic frame for the education system in Finland. According to legislation Finnish municipalities provide the comprehensive schooling from age 7–15, any other arrangement needs specific clearance by the state and in practice are mostly supervised by municipalities. (The proportion of fully-subsidised independent schools, typically Christian or Steiner, is less than 3% of all provision). The legal frameworks for setting the educational aims and managing the outcomes are uniform, but due to the municipal autonomy the state cannot interfere with municipal autonomy through decrees and thus its statutory power is limited in relation to implementation. The main means of national steering take place via the core curriculum, division of lesson hours by subjects, quality evaluation and funding. The state frames the core curriculum with the help of professional teachers, a professional culture is emphasised given the fact that there are no mandatory standardized tests or inspections. Quality evaluation draws on soft tools: education providers are required to evaluate their education and they are also subjected to national evaluations with a development purpose. Funding is the strongest steering mechanism in the state's toolbox: it is largely limited to the non-earmarked lump sum distributed to municipalities as well as project-based funding.[13]

In 2020, there were 2130 comprehensive schools in Finland. Comprehensive schooling typically educates children in primary schools (ages 7–12) and lower secondary schools (ages 13–15) but more than a fifth of them (471 schools) teach across all year levels.[14] In the primary phase children generally study with the same class teacher throughout their school week whereas in lower secondary there are subject-specific teachers in all disciplines. There are training schools for teacher education that are controlled by universities.

Recent Debates Over Finnish Schooling

Discussion of Finnish schooling in recent times has taken place at a variety of levels, these sometimes interact and sometimes ignore each other. Here we first characterise the place of Finland in global policy debates, second, consider the popular and policy debates about schooling that go on within Finland, and third, note some of the concerns of Finnish educational researchers and scholars, such as those who have contributed to this book.

As noted earlier, much of the discussion of Finnish schooling from a global perspective over the last two decades has been around its stellar PISA results and what might cause them. Compared with other countries and regions, Finland was first in PISA in reading (2001), mathematics (2003), and science (2006) and then dipped slightly in reading to second (2009), in science to fifth (2015), and more dramatically in mathematics to twelfth (2012).[15] By 2018, Finland had dropped further in science to ninth, while reading and mathematics did not change much but did not improve either. While these declining results have caused some consternation within Finland, the international discussion quickly moved on to other countries and regions that were now topping the PISA league tables, for instance Estonia.[16] Such is what Margaret Brown has called the "Tyranny of the international horse race".[17] The authors in this book would often argue that losing the PISA crown provides an opportunity for a less-hyped consideration of the advantages and challenges facing Finnish education.

Some accounts over the last few years have continued to extoll the virtues of the Finnish school system. There have been new editions of Pasi Sahlberg's book *Finnish Lessons* mentioned earlier, as well as academic and more popular articles written from outside Finland and reporting favourably on features of Finnish education.[18] There have also been some international critiques.[19] What is interesting about some of the critiques is the way they have sought to discount the academic performance and progressive elements of Finnish schooling as a means of undermining those who use the case of Finland to argue against the excesses of neo-liberal education policies elsewhere. For instance Gabriel Sahlgren's monograph about Finnish education[20] is published by the Centre for Policy Studies, described on its website as "Britain's leading centre-right think tank … founded in 1974 by Sir Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher, and … responsible for developing the bulk of the policy agenda that became known as Thatcherism".[21] It has the mission 'to develop a new generation of conservative thinking, built around promoting enterprise, ownership and prosperity'.[22] Together with colleagues, one of us (Jaakko), has been involved in debating with the viewpoints of Sahlgren in Finnish and Swedish media[23] as well as when teaching UK students, which is indicative of the power of a 'counter' narrative in the media. It is not just the assemblage of ideas expressed in international critiques of Finnish education that are important, but how they are subsequently used. One of us (Martin) has experienced a policy analyst at a right-wing think tank drawing on a blog by a cognitive psychologist to argue that Finland's success in reading tests was only because the Finnish language was significantly less complex than English. On

further investigation the blogpost included commentary that disputed this claim but this critique had been ignored.[24]

Some ways that Finland has recently become involved in global educational debates may be less expected. One is the form of some of the Finnish state's involvement in international bodies. For example, the first OECD "Global Education Industry Summit", an event being held annually, was hosted in Helsinki in 2015. This enthusiasm for edu-business was not inconsistent with the centre-right Sipilä Government in power in Finland at the time but it is not what many people would associate with Finnish education. Similarly, there are Finnish private actors who are reaching out to the globe. One example, HundrED, originated as a Finnish organisation with a social enterprise model: using business principles and practices to try to "help improve education through impactful innovations" nationally and internationally.[25] In 2017, when Finland was celebrating a century of independence, HundrED sought 100 educational innovations from around the world. The international innovations it chose were primarily private companies or consultants or social enterprises rather than an endorsement of innovations that originated within public education systems. It is clear that private actors like HundrED gain unwarranted advantage from being associated with Finland's reputation for having a strong public education system: again it is not what global audiences would usually have in mind when they think about Finland's famous education system.[26]

Within Finland there is also much interest in education amongst the public and in political and policy discussions. There have been various working groups to develop comprehensive schooling in Finland over the last decade, involving an extensive range of societal actors, including academics (one of us, Piia, has been involved in them all, Sonja in the most recent one). These groups have also involved different type of public hearings. For example, over 2014–2015 the Ministry of Education and Culture's *Basic education of the future—Let's turn the trend!* appointed a working group on "the flagship themes" competence and learning and motivation and teaching. This group, including 45 professors and researchers from various fields of education, put together a description of the current status of basic education, the phenomena associated with it and possible reasons for deteriorating learning outcomes. Development proposals were published as "Tomorrow's comprehensive school".[27] This work also had a steering group that contained representatives of the eight parliamentary parties and the Trade Union of Education in Finland, the Association of Finnish Principals, the Association of Finnish Independent Education Employers, the Trade Union for the Public and Welfare Sectors, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, the Finnish Parents' League, the Office of the Ombudsman for Children as well as secondary level student organisations. As part of the project, the Ministry of Education and Culture organised a national web-based survey in 2014, in which nearly 7000 people took part[28] and six regional events in cities to foster extensive public discussion on the future of basic education. This was followed by various similar groups during the next government and also the current one. At the time of writing the centre-left Marin Government had put out public consultation for an education policy report with broad aims to reform education policy and a report was being considered by the Finnish Parliament.[29] In short,

Finnish education policy processes are characterised by a great deal of consultation and discussion with different stakeholders, even if the outcomes of this openness to a range of perspectives is nearly always uncertain.

Global and national discussions about Finnish schooling do not always draw on Finnish educational research and scholarly work. Yet Finland has a significant workforce of educational researchers based mainly at its 14 universities. There is a Finnish Educational Research Association (FERA) and a number of Finnish educational journals. It is a lively scholarly community comprising experienced researchers and good numbers of emerging scholars and doctoral students as well, with many represented in this book.

Finland's educational scholars have discussed Finnish schooling from numerous sociological and political angles. The history has been examined in relation to greater societal trends such as industrialization,[30] as a struggle for equality,[31] a continuous debate of a few central dilemmas,[32] or in terms of the different epochs of time.[33] Education policy is analysed from a system perspective[34] or from the point of view of dynamics formed in history and discourses,[35] and through the differentiations such as gender.[36] There is also increasing interest in the relationship between urban segregation and school segregation.[37]

Globally speaking, Finland is a privileged place to teach and learn in schools. Societal settings are generally designed to support an egalitarian society and highly trained professionals work every day in schools educating and raising children. To ward off future problems, we need an understanding of emergent problems. This collection avoids simple solutions, and also seeks to broaden the debate on what constitutes good education. In Finland, as elsewhere, it is much more than is measured by global tests. Each chapter in this book offers nuanced analysis and opens up the complexities of education and the way they require long-term political programmes, skilled professionals, a broad take on society, good resourcing, and a critical understanding of the current situation.

In this book, chapters refer to equality, equity and social justice in many ways. The Finnish language has three words for describing how people are related to others in terms of economic, social, and other resources: *tasa-arvo, yhdenvertaisuus* and *oikeudenmukaisuus*, and they all intersect differently with similar English words. In the public debate in Finland these three concepts could all be referred to by a single word in Finnish, tasa-arvo. However, there are more specific concepts used in research for these. Equality can be translated either as tasa-arvo or yhdenvertaisuus in Finnish, jämställdhet in Swedish (particularly as in gender equality). Equity as a concept has developed throughout the years, referring to an equal or fair share of goods according to one's need. It could as well be called tasa-arvo in Finnish and jämlikhet in Swedish. As the categories based on which socially-just division of resources could emerge have increased only from binary gender into more intersectional approaches in research, the use of equity has increased during the past years. Social justice is easily translated into sosiaalinen oikeudenmukaisuus in Finnish and social rättvisa in Swedish, but it may sometimes be used in parallel with equity in the debate. In short the conceptual debate between equality, equity and social justice is somewhat fluid and continually developing in the Finnish context, and there is a lot of context

dependency between these concepts in the Finnish research literature, which is also a feature of this book.

The Chapters in This Book

After this introductory chapter the book proceeds as follows. Part One ‘Politics, policy, teachers and edu-business’ looks at a range of areas that are relevant to Finnish comprehensive schooling as a whole. The emphasis here is on understanding the workings of the system and recognising that many national patterns and processes are not as straightforward nor successful as the mythology around Finnish education would often suggest.

Opening this section, Mira Kalalahti and Janne Varjo challenge any simple view of Finnish schooling as monolithic (Chap. 2). They look at the changing relationship between national decision-making and authority and that which occurs at the more local level in municipalities. Kalalahti and Varjo illustrate that local governance at municipality level has become more important in Finland over time but that municipalities also differ widely in size and approach. This leads them to suggest that the previously more uniform education system is transforming into diverse local systems with important challenges for equality and fairness. This chapter contains descriptions of three municipalities which highlight some of the diverse circumstances under which Finnish schooling is provided.

In Chap. 3, Jarmo Kallunki, Jaakko Kauko and Oren Pizmony-Levy discuss Finland’s Ministry of Education and Culture and provide insights into policy-making processes within it. They analyse the membership of the working groups that the Ministry of Education and Culture now often uses to undertake policy work, having moved away from a committee model. The analysis by Kallunki and colleagues indicates the strong role of external working group members especially in linking between departments. This invites new questions about the application of networked governance and New Public Management in Finnish education policymaking. Again, it is an analysis which calls into question widely held views of how Finnish education policy gets made.

Finland’s education union, OAJ, is the focus of Chap. 4. Here Nina Nivanaho and Martin Thrupp ask whether OAJ influences Finnish education policy as it claims to given there has been little evidence of it contesting government policy in any overt way. To look at this they review education policy during the period of the centre-right Sipilä Government in power in Finland from 2015–19 and investigate the interests and responses of the OAJ over the same period. Nivanaho and Thrupp suggest that the OAJ prefers to work ‘inside the tent’, a positioning which Finnish educational politics continues to encourage and makes extensive provision for. This in turn reflects the way consensus-seeking remains key to political success in Finland.

Hannele Pitkänen looks at Finland’s distinctive quality evaluation discourse in Chap. 5. Instead of high-stakes approaches to testing or monitoring, the Finnish approach to quality evaluation rests mainly on sample-based testing approaches and

self-evaluations undertaken in municipalities and schools. Nevertheless, Pitkänen's analysis shows that the more typical approaches to quality evaluation seen internationally are also under discussion in Finland and she questions the extent to which the Finnish system will be able to continue to resist the power of global quality evaluation discourses. This chapter provides a reminder that while the Finnish education system is often distinctive, it is by no means immune to international pressures.

At a time of environmental crisis across the planet, Chap. 6 by Niina Mykrä is about the way Finnish comprehensive schools are being steered towards global goals of sustainability education. She argues that Finnish government policies and Finland's national core curriculum for basic education have a range of weaknesses in relation to sustainability education that mean that they often fail to translate into concrete actions by the time they become enacted in the day-to- day life of Finnish schools. Mykrä argues for better steering that enables ecological sustainability as a more comprehensive activity in schools: multi-voiced, multidisciplinary, and multilevel.

The Finnish approach to teacher education is examined by Janne Säntti, Mikko Puustinen and Petteri Hansen (Chap. 7). They question the notion of Finnish teacher education being research based and discuss how this has alienated teacher education from the day-to-day work of schools and has led to the decline of contextual studies within teacher education. Finally, Säntti and colleagues discuss Finnish teacher education in the changing context of university work. Overall this chapter provides a view that is far from the hype around Finnish teacher education which has occurred within the context of Finland's PISA success story.

Sara Juvonen and Auli Toom are also concerned with teaching and teacher education in Finland in Chap. 8. They provide a think-piece about the relationship between teachers and Finnish society as a whole. The focus is on expectations: Finnish societal expectations of teaching as a profession and the expectations of teachers themselves, often drawing on their own experiences as students in schools. Juvonen and Toom question whether Finnish teacher education prepares teachers enough to assume their teacher role in Finnish society and to keep up with continual changes in the field of education.

In Chap. 9, Piia Seppänen, Iida Kiesi, Sonia Lempinen and Nina Nivanaho look at the rise of edu-business in Finnish comprehensive schooling. Although Finland has a reputation for having the most public of education systems, they show that government collaboration with edu-business positions comprehensive schooling as a tool for a platform economy and a place where profit can be made. Drawing on interviews with key commercial actors, Seppänen and colleagues go on to investigate the rationalities, logics and modes of operation of edu-business in Finland and argue that this is a space that needs to be watched very carefully as it threatens democracy and Finland's commitment to public education.

Iida Kiesi further investigates the relationship of commercial actors and public actors in edu-business in the final chapter in this first part of the book (Chap. 10). Kiesi illustrates how edu-business networks that cross and blur the boundaries between public and private are the key to understanding how edu-business impacts education policy in Finland. She concludes that the shift to network governance is a matter

of concern because such networks lack commitment to transparent decision-making and accountability to the public.

Part Two 'Equity, inequality and the challenges of diversity, language and inclusion' begins with a focus on social class inequality and segregation within and between schools in a series of chapters that show Finnish educational provision is grappling with its own versions of these international problems. This is followed by numerous chapters that look at particular populations and contexts in Finnish education, all of them raising the need for greater social justice in the areas under discussion. Part Two concludes with several chapters about inclusion, another area in which Finland is generally perceived to have great strengths but where there are further important problems and gaps between perception and practice.

In Chap. 11 Venla Bernelius and Sonja Kosunen draw on their long-term research in the Helsinki area to provide a wide-ranging picture of how residential segregation and processes of school choice create significant and growing inequalities between schools in urban Finland. They argue that processes operating at a range of macro and more micro levels create vicious circles of segregation where segregation in schools and neighbourhoods feed into each other. Their research demonstrates that not even a relatively egalitarian educational system with high overall quality of schools is entirely shielded from segregation tendencies and they argue this may lead to a decline in equality and greater risks of educational exclusion.

Piia Seppänen, Terhi Pasu and Sonja Kosunen examine the wide range of pupil selection processes used in urban Finland in Chap. 12. They examine how urban comprehensive schools select and track their pupils through different admission criteria for teaching classes within schools. Selection processes for admission to emphasised teaching classes are fiercely competitive with schools not just evaluating pupils' aptitudes for certain subjects but applying wider criteria. Such approaches to including or excluding students reinforce social and economic inequalities in Finnish schools and society.

Everyday life in schools in disadvantaged areas is the topic researched by Marja Peltola, Heidi Huilla, Tiina Luoma and Riikka Oittinen (Chap. 13). They add to our understanding of the effects of segregation using interview data with students at five comprehensive schools in Helsinki. Drawing on the idea that most youth represent their lives as ordinary rather than adopting 'in-risk' positions, they argue that young people are attached to their residential areas and schools despite their awareness of local problems and inequalities. Their work highlights the need to understand the particularities and connections between schools and residential areas in discussions of segregation and attempts to address it.

In Chap. 14 Isabel Ramos Lobato and Venla Bernelius look at needs-based resource allocation as an important policy response to segregation used in Helsinki. They suggest that in a segregating society, the traditional egalitarian and universal "same level for all" approach of Finnish education no longer works so well. Rather the Finnish education system needs stronger support mechanisms that systematically allocate resources towards the individual needs of schools. Although they raise various problems of enacting such a policy, Ramos Lobato and Bernelius also report

favourable effects on pupils' learning. They suggest that targetting resource allocation schemes to disadvantaged schools is one way to counteract the risk of deepening cycles of educational segregation, deprivation, and inequality.

Tero Järvinen, Jenni Tikkanen and Piia af Ursin examine the significance of socioeconomic background for the educational dispositions and aspirations of Finnish school leavers in Chap. 15. Drawing on a study of 15-year-old lower secondary school students in the city of Turku and surrounding municipalities, they find that students with high-level literacy skills have positive dispositions towards learning and education despite their socioeconomic background but that this is not the case with educational aspirations. Järvinen and colleagues argue that self-exclusion of gifted low socio-economic status Finnish students from higher education decreases their future labour market opportunities and outcomes and also means a loss of potentially talented and skillful employees.

Recounting developments during a long academic career, Elina Lahelma provides a wideranging account of the history of gender discourses in education in Finland (Chap. 16). Supported by the first equality projects, gender research in Finnish education took the first steps in the late 1980s. A constant task was to challenge the simple juxtaposition of girls and boys that is sometimes evident in the concerns about boys' achievements. Using numerous bodies of data as well as her own experiences, Lahelma describes and analyses the interlinked histories of gender equality work, feminist studies in education, and the boy discourse, and provides reflections on change and sustainability in Finnish education policies.

In Chap. 17 Jukka Lehtonen looks at sexualities and gender diversity in Finnish schools, questioning the utopian image of Finnish education system as a 'rainbow paradise'. He discusses legislation, curricula, teachers, school textbooks, experiences of non-heterosexual, trans and intersex youth as well as LGBTI human rights organisations' work and the influence of COVID-19. Lehtonen notes several advancements in acknowledging sexual and gender diversity within Finnish education but points to serious everyday problems remaining for making schools safe for LGBTI students and teachers and treating everyone equally despite their sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.

Pia Mikander provides an analysis of racism in Finnish history, social science and geography school textbooks in Chap. 18. She finds that, in a range of ways, many portray the West as superior to the rest of the world. History textbook passages sometimes include images of racist caricatures to show the explicit racism of an era but Mikander asks whether they really belong in history teaching if they do not encourage a discussion about continued racism. Using textbooks with racist content requires that teachers are aware of racism and able to safely lead critical reflection. Particularly during a pandemic, when students are alone with textbooks, there is a concern about the democratic task of educating for anti-racism.

Hanna Helander, Pigga Keskitalo and Tuija Turunen look at Saami language online education (Chap. 19). After centuries of assimilation policies the teaching of Saami languages has begun to receive government support. The main challenge at present is to avoid the continuing loss of language. This chapter showcases how Saami languages are regaining their status via maintenance and revitalisation measures.

It also demonstrates Saami online language education as a solution for children and young people living outside the Saami homeland in the North. Helander and colleagues argue that starting to recognise Saami language education as an opportunity and a resource rather than a problem would be a key shift in language attitudes needed for comprehensive education based on social justice for Saami children and young people in Finland.

In Chap. 20 Jenni Helakorpi, Gunilla Holm and Xiaoxu Liu focus on the education of pupils with a migrant background in Finland. The chapter begins by discussing the structural issues and mechanisms behind the lower academic performance and poorer health of the pupils categorised as “pupils with migrant background” compared to other pupils in Finnish schools. Not only do migrant students and students with migrant background perform more poorly, but they are also bullied more in school. Helakorpi and colleagues treat the findings of inequalities between pupils with and without a migrant background as symptoms of a systemic failure not of failing students, families or teachers. They draw on critical race and whiteness theories and intersectionality research to argue the need for analysis of structural racism and an intersectional analysis of race, racialisation, whiteness, gender and social class in Finnish schools and society.

Marja-Liisa Mäkelä and Mira Kalalahti discuss immigrant origin girls and post-compulsory educational transition in Finland in Chap. 21. They conceptualise educational decisions as negotiations where families, teachers, counsellors and peers try to push adolescents to choose educational paths they see valued and preferred, and away from the choices they see as unfitting or less valued. Mäkelä and Kalalahti also illustrate with three ‘transitional stories’ the key challenges that girls with immigrant backgrounds encounter when making their educational decisions and integrating to education: structural boundaries, social boundaries and acculturation.

Johanna Ennser-Kananen, Erja Kilpeläinen, Taina Saarinen and Heidi Vaarala have written about access myths in language education policy in Finland (Chap. 22). They seek to debunk three myths: that multilingualism is politically valued, that the curriculum promotes multilingual education, and that the Finnish education system offers equal opportunities to all, regardless of language. Ennser-Kananen and colleagues conclude with a mixed picture. While relevant initiatives have been put in place, the societal status of national languages and constitutional bilingualism have also strengthened monolingual ideologies. They propose reforms in teacher education and a more systematic, long term, national supervision of (language) education policy to achieve equitable multilingual education.

In Chap. 23 Tuuli From looks at how Finland is an officially bilingual country with two national languages, Finnish and Swedish. Within this language context the separation of Swedish- and Finnish-medium schools has been presented as a precondition for protecting Swedish language. Nevertheless in both Finnish-medium and Swedish-medium schools, the linguistic backgrounds of pupils are increasingly diverse. In the past decade, an increasing demand for bilingual educational solutions has emerged and discourses of profit and commodification of language are starting to unfold. From concludes that the question of state bilingualism in Finnish schooling may be heading towards increasing differentiation in relation to the national languages.

Inkeri Rissanen and Saila Poulter discuss “the problem” of religions and worldviews in Finnish schools in Chap. 24. They introduce the foundations of worldview education in Finnish basic education, and analyse negotiations about the inclusion of worldview plurality in the every-day life of schools. Rissanen and Saila Poulter argue that, despite the official multiculturalist and inclusivist ideals, unrecognised monoculturalism prevails in Finnish schools as majority worldviews are not seen as worldviews but deemed universal and therefore neutral. While more superficial cultural differences are celebrated, recognition of diversity at a more profound level would demand willingness to question the universality of the core values and ideals of the education system.

Markku Jahnukainen, Ninja Hienonen, Meri Lintuvuori and Sonia Lempinen provide an analysis of inclusion in the Finnish school system (Chap. 25). There are problems around defining inclusion as well as a quite polarised debate about putting students with support needs in regular classrooms. Jahnukainen and colleagues discuss the historical development of Finnish inclusion and contrast myths and realities of the Finnish model in supporting students with support needs in the light of international trends in inclusive and special education. They also discuss possible future trends of inclusive education in Finland.

In Chap. 26 Anna-Maija Niemi and Reetta Mietola also look at inclusion especially the divide between special and mainstream education in the Finnish education system. Drawing on six studies to do with educational choice-making and pedagogical arrangements and practices, they analyse how this divide runs through educational experiences, opportunities and pathways of students receiving special education. Niemi and Mietola illustrate how distinct educational cultures make it challenging to move across the divide of special and mainstream education, and that this divide contributes to students understanding of themselves as learners.

Piia af Ursin, Jenni Tikkanen, Markku Vanttaja and Tero Järvinen are concerned with student disengagement in Finland’s comprehensive schools in Chap. 27. Students who disengage from school are at risk of a range of adverse outcomes and may leave school early. Various findings about Finnish students’ school engagement have raised concerns along with the question of why Finnish students repeatedly rank lowly in international comparisons of happiness at school. This chapter draws on a range of research and survey data to better understand student disengagement. af Ursin and colleagues characterise the process of student disengagement and argue that it is crucial to identify early signs of disengagement and individual, social, and institutional factors associated with it.

Finally, by way of an epilogue, the editors report a roundtable discussion with emeriti professors Sirkka Ahonen, Ari Antikainen, Leena Koski, Elina Lahelma, Risto Rinne and Hannu Simola (Chap. 28). These very experienced academics were asked about the greatest achievement of societally-oriented educational research in Finland as well as their biggest disappointment or mistake in this line of research. The resulting conversation is full of insights into the historical roots of critical studies of Finnish education particularly sociology, politics, and the history of education. The rich discussion also provides a moment to pause and reflect before thinking about schooling in the years to come.

Overall, this book, drawing on more than 50 educational researchers and focussed on Finland, provides an important corrective to the over-celebratory accounts of the last two decades. We hope it contributes to educational debate both within Finland and internationally, and that it plays an important role in creating more insightful perspectives on schooling in this Nordic nation.

Notes

1. See Waldow, F. 2019. Introduction: Projection in education policy-making. In *Understanding PISA's attractiveness*, ed. F. Waldow and G. Steiner-Khamsi, 1–21. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
2. Sahlberg, P. 2011. *Finnish lessons: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* New York: Teachers College Press.
   Sahlberg, P. 2015. *Finnish lessons 2.0: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* New York: Teachers College Press.
   Sahlberg, P. 2021. *Finnish lessons 3.0: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* New York: Teachers College Press.
   See also Sahlberg, P., and T.D. Walker. 2021. *In teachers we trust: The Finnish way to world-class schools.* New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
3. Andere, E. 2014. *Teachers' perspectives on Finnish school education: Creating learning environments.* Gewerbestrasse: Springer.
4. Simola, H. 2017. *The Finnish education mystery. Historical and sociological essays on schooling in Finland.* London: Routledge.
5. Niemi, H., A. Toom, and A. Kallioniemi. eds. 2015. *Miracle of education. The principles and practices of teaching and learning in Finnish schools.* Rotterdam: Sense.
6. Martin Thrupp is a New Zealand academic but has worked with Finnish educational researchers for several years, see preface.
7. For school choice policy see for instance Seppänen, P. 2006. *Koulunvalintapolitiikka perusopetuksessa: Suomalaiskaupunkien koulumarkkinat kansainvälisessä valossa.* Research in Educational Sciences 26. Turku: Finnish Educational Research Association.
   Also Kosunen, S. 2016. *Families and the social space of school choice in urban Finland*. Institute of Behavioural Sciences, Studies in Educational Sciences 267. Helsinki: University of Helsinki.
   For the history of institutional robustness and political compromises see Kauko, J. 2019a. The Finnish comprehensive school: Conflicts, compromises, and institutional robustness. In *Great policy successes: How governments get it right in a big way at least some of the time*, eds. P. t' Hart and M.E. Compton, 122–142. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198843719.003.0007.
   For edu-business in Finland see Seppänen, P., M. Thrupp, and S. Lempinen. 2020. Edu-business in Finnish schooling. In *Privatisation and commercialisation in public education: How the public nature of schooling is changing,* eds. A. Hogan and G. Thomson, 101–118. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429330025-9
8. Wimmer, A., and N. Glick Schiller. 2002. Methodological nationalism and beyond: Nation–state building, migration and the social sciences. *Global Networks* 2: 301–334.
9. See Leino-Kaukiainen, P., and A. Heikkinen. 2011.'Yhteiskunta ja koulutus'. In *Valistus ja koulunpenkki. Kasvatus ja koulutus Suomessa 1860-luvulta 1960-luvulle,* eds. A. Heikkinen and P. Leino-Kaukiainen, 16–33. Helsinki: SKS.
10. E.g., Ahonen, S. 2003. Yhteinen koulu: Tasa-arvoa vai tasapäisyyttä? Tampere: Vastapaino.
    Lampinen, O. 2003. *Suomen koulutusjärjestelmän kehitys,* 3rd ed. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
    Simola, H., J. Kauko, J. Varjo, M. Kalalahti, and F. Sahlström. 2017. *Dynamics in education politics. Understanding and explaining the Finnish case.* London: Routledge.

11. Ibid., p. 33.
12. Kauko 2019a, op. cit.
13. See Kauko, J. 2019b. Government, policy, and the role of the state in Primary education (Finland). In *Bloomsbury Education and Childhood Studies*, eds. J. Kauko, I. Menter, and M.T. Tatto. London, UK: Bloomsbury.
14. Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT) Koulutuksen järjestäjät ja oppilaitokset 2020. Helsinki: Tilastokeskus. https://www.stat.fi/til/kjarj/2020/kjarj_2020_2021-02-18_tie_001_fi.html. Accessed 21 Dec 2021.
15. Kauko 2019a, op. cit., p. 125.
16. Jeffreys, B 2020. Pisa rankings: Why Estonian pupils shine in global tests. https://www.bbc.com/news/education-50590581. Accessed 21 Dec 2021.
17. Brown, M. 1998. Tyranny of the international horse race. In *School effectiveness for whom?* eds. R. Slee and G. Weiner, with S. Tomlinson, 33–47. London and Bristol, PA: Falmer.
18. Nauman, A.D. 2018. Could it ever happen here? Reflections on Finnish education and culture. i.e.: *Inquiry in Education* 10(1). https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/ie/vol10/iss1/7.
19. Sahlgren, G. H. 2015. *Real Finnish lessons: The true story of an education superpower*. London: Centre for Policy Studies.
    Oates, T. 2015. *Finnish fairy stories.* Cambridge Assessment. https://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/insights/finish-fairy-stories-tim-oates/. Accessed 21 Dec 2021.
20. Sahlgren, op. cit.
21. https://www.cps.org.uk/about/
22. Ibid.
23. Kauko, J., and F. Sahlström. 2015. Pisa-valttimme on koulujen välisten erojen kapeus. *Finnish daily newspaper Helsingin Sanomat*, 21.11.2015.
    Kalalahti, M., J. Kauko, F. Sahlström, and J. Varjo. 2015. För snabba slutsatser om finska skolan. *Swedish daily newspaper Dagens nyheter*. 24.4.2015.
24. See http://www.danielwillingham.com/daniel-willingham-science-and-education-blog/the-pirls-reading-result-better-than-you-may-realize. Accessed 23 Jan 2022.
25. https://hundred.org/en#d7451a49 Accessed 23 Jan 2022.
26. Thrupp, M. 2018. Does private education actor HundrED gain advantage from Finland's global example? Paper given at JUSTED conference 22–23 May, Helsinki.
27. Ouakrim-Soivio, N., A. Rinkinen, and T. Karjalainen, T. eds. 2015. *Tulevaisuuden peruskoulu—Uuteen nousuun! Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö* 2015:8. http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-263-340-8. Accessed 23 Jan 2022.
28. Almost one half of the respondents were guardians of pupils. In addition to structured questions, the survey contained three open-ended questions. In the over 15,000 freely worded responses received in total, as strengths of the Finnish basic education came up openness of education, offering equal opportunities to all pupils regardless of their background, and basic education provided free of charge. In addition, the teachers' high standard of education, motivation and strong professional competence were highlighted in the responses. (Ouakrim-Soivio, Rinkinen, and Karjalainen, 2015).
29. Ministry of Education and Culture. n.d. *Consultation round for the education policy report, aiming to ensure access to education and educational quality and equality.* https://minedu.fi/en/-/consultation-round-for-the-education-policy-report-aiming-to-ensure-access-to-education-and-educational-quality-and-equality. Accessed 16 Jan 2022.
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    https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/Mietinto/Sivut/SiVM_19+2021.aspx Accessed 7 Jan 2022.
30. Leino-Kaukiainen and Heikkinen, op. cit.
31. Ahonen, op. cit.
32. Salminen, J. 2012. *Koulun pirulliset dilemmat.* Helsinki: Teos.
33. Lampinen, op. cit.

34. E.g., Lehtisalo, L., and R. Raivola. 1999. *Koulutus ja koulutuspolitiikka 2000-luvulle.* Porvoo: WSOY.
35. Kauko, J. 2011. *Korkeakoulupolitiikan dynamiikat Suomessa.* Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto. Simola et al., op. cit.
36. E.g., Mietola, R., E. Lahelma, S. Lappalainen, and T. Palmu. eds. 2005. *Kohtaamisia kasvatuksen ja koulutuksen kentillä: Erontekoja ja yhdessä tekemistä.* Suomen kasvatustieteellinen seura.
37. E.g., Bernelius, V. H., and M.K. Vaattovaara. 2016. Choice and segregation in the “most egalitarian” schools: Cumulative decline in the urban schools and neighbourhoods of Helsinki, Finland. *Urban Studies 53*(15): 3155–3171. See also Bernelius and Kosunen in this book.

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