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## **The roots of educational changes in the perspective of democracy challenges in Finland and England in the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

**Abstract:** This article presents Finnish educational changes in the context of The Nordic Model of Social Democracy improved since 1963 versus English model of Neoliberal Democracy based on conservatism since 1979 with its roots in the late eighteenth century in Europe. The reform of education in Finland was supported by a new curriculum and different methods of teaching. In 1963 students started to have an access to the highest-quality education and it was not related to students' place of living, richness or annual income.

On the other side in England, privatization and centralization were the main pillars of the reform with neoliberalism, neoconservatism and its market competition in education. The central government was responsible for the provision of educational services, educational policy, and planning the direction of the educational system. Teachers faced an ultimatum: "either submit to re-education or lose your job" (Jones, p. 43). The 1988 reform strengthened the ideological control of education and accelerated differentiation between schools.

**Keywords:** roots of educational changes, neoliberalism, neoconservatism, The Nordic Model of Social Democracy, educational change, equity in education

### **Introduction**

This article presents Finnish educational changes in the context of The Nordic Model of Social Democracy improved since 1963 versus English model of Neoliberal Democracy based on conservatism since 1979 with its roots in the late eighteenth century in Europe. My one week stay in London in 2013 enabled me to use library collections of the University of London (Department of Education), London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and the British Library in London but also to compare these materials to library sources of the University of Eastern Finland, which I visited within Erasmus Programme in 2017.

## **The Nordic Model of Social Democracy**

The roots of the Finnish welfare state so called the golden years of social democracy were present in Finland from 1945 till 1970. The Nordic model was exceptionally homogenous in its ethnic, linguistic and cultural circumstances. The Finnish population also profited from having a language with many features and having predominantly an Evangelical-Lutheran state. Finland put an emphasis on sobriety, puritanism and an awareness of right and wrong, which were the factors and precursors of the welfare state (Sejersted, 2005). A cultural consensus in Finland was based on the preservation of national identities “at a time when there was a rapid growth in industrial capitalism” (Sejersted, 2004; Slagstad, 1998). In the context of Nordic pension policies, Kari Salminen claimed that the Agrarian Party, between 1950s and 1960s, worked for the “citizenship model” with the Communists. They wanted centralized administration for financing the combining of the pay-as-you-go system and the state.

The Nordic Model of Social Democracy helps understand pragmatic aspects of professional teacher development in Finland. The first educational reform in Finnish educational system started in November 1963, but the Parliament approved the 1968 School System Act a bit later. The Finnish teachers were asked how to reform the system of education. Moreover, there were asked questions how to unify the old educational system into the new one.

On the other side, the Finnish old class society started to collapse between the 1960s and 1970s. The youth generation attacked traditional Finnish values like home, religion and fatherland. The young generation of the 1960s wanted democratization of education in Finland. The Finnish society had the main aim to change education into prosperous one. Scandinavian countries, among them Finland, have been cheerfully involved in the development of social security of all citizens. These countries introduced “dynamic economy with small wage differences” (Brandal, Bratberg and Thorsen, 2013, p. 11) and this model is almost totally resilient to changes in the economical situation of the country.

The Nordic countries have prepared the social democratic compromise which offered them equal protection against the communist and the fascist threat. It was named as a pragmatic and unique project which was treated as a model for the world (Sejersted, 2005; Slagstad, 2004). Finland, as other Nordic countries, chose the compromise named as “one of mankind’s greatest

discoveries” (Slagstad, 2004, p. 229). This solution overcame capital and labour tensions, find out how to bring together the freemarket and centralised planning, and the daily tensions between various classes in society (Aasen, 1999).

In Finland consequently, the left wing political parties accepted a moderate form of capitalism or market orientation, “while the right wing supported the ambition of full employment, Keynesian economic policy with a strong welfare state, and the rights of workers’ organisations” (Telhauga, Medias and Aasen, 2006, p. 245). The biggest reform of Finnish education started in November 1963 during the period of a rapid migration of villagers to the city centers. The Agrarian Party and the left wing parties prepared the new rules in education. The Finnish society wanted effective education for all students and the education reform was positively perceived by them. During the first phase of the reform previous teacher-centered methods of teaching were criticized. Since retirement of older teachers, the introduced educational reform has been accepted by society and teachers. Finland eliminated the system of external inspection and introduced procedures to improve the quality of teachers’ work. The Finnish education policy is appreciated because of high-trust to teachers’ job. Anthony Giddens claimed that: „Trust may be defined as confidence in the reliability of a person or system, regarding a given set of outcomes or events, where that confidence expresses a faith in the probability or love of another, or in the correctness of abstract principle” (Giddens, 1990, p. 34).

The reform of education was supported by a new curriculum and different methods of teaching. Moreover, students started to have an access to the highest-quality education and it was not related to students’ place of living, richness or annual income. In Finland “equity means having a socially fair and inclusive education system that provides everyone with the opportunity to fulfil their intentions and dreams through education” (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 44).

Schools have become an element of the welfare state in Finland and it makes sense to mention the first – economic or instrumental objective in Nordic countries, depending on the foundation that there was an association between the level of education and economic growth (Aasen, 1999). Supporters of the comprehensive school system also underline that this form of school organisation helped find out any hidden talent and created the best opportunity to work as an effective “head-hunter”. The social element was perceived as the second objective and as the main both for the comprehensive school system and for the heyday of social democracy.

The Nordic Model is based on a combination of collective risk sharing and openness to globalization. There is cooperative interaction between two factors: collective risk sharing which helps make globalization “acceptable to citizens, by facilitating adjustments that allow the economy to benefit from changing markets and to raise productivity and incomes” (Andersen, et al., 2007, p. 14). The Nordics created the market economy with the usage of the egalitarian ambitions of the welfare state and successful competition. Finnish society is characterised by the social trust together with security and flexibility not only among citizens, but in public institutions, too.

Finns remade educational theoretical and methodological roots of education and introduced the new rules in the concept of learning and of knowledge. Consequently, Finns gave an introduction into equity in education and developed an equal educational capacity for all students to motivate them to finish secondary education. The equality of educational opportunity means the same opportunity to complete the comprehensive school for children and adolescents regardless of their place of living, gender and social status.

### **The roots of English conservatism and its perspectives in education**

Conservative ideas appeared as a reaction to social and economic changes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Europe. Conservative thought defended the traditional social order and was against liberalism, socialism, and nationalism. Conservative doctrine was found on the principle of hierarchy and the assumption that equality among people does not exist. Consequently, “conservatives divide society into classes and categories, which depend on abilities, skills, and social origin” (Suwalska, 2017, p. 37). As a result, conservatives affect the right of a social group to raise the young generation and advocate the rule of law, a strong state, and a free market.

In the light of the conservative doctrine, political leaders “are responsible for ensuring the integrity of traditional institutions and the preservation of existing social patterns. If they introduce social or educational changes, they implement them gradually. Such changes are usually few and involve elements which do not impact tradition” (Suwalska, 2017, p. 37). According to conservatives, people deprived of the past and their roots feel lost. The cultural context reflects the social experience of centuries and the continuous transformation of the modern world, especially in literature, history, and the national language. Thus the main theme of conservatism is the role of tradi-

tion, which contributes to the continuity of cultural heritage, passed down from generation to generation, and maintains the society.

It seems necessary to mention that the main role of the conservative school is to acquaint a young man with the achievements of previous eras and instill membership in a particular social class. The student is obliged to understand cultural values, develops appropriate behaviour, and respects social norms. The school teaches about membership in social classes and the resulting work, wages, and vision of the past. As a result the roles of church, family, and school are perceived highly as values of conservatives. Some secondary schools in England (such as Eton, Rugby and Harrow) build and educate the future leaders of the political elite, who then successfully study at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and have the opportunity to work in elite positions. The English elite is characterized by high intellectual abilities and qualities of character. Consequently, conservative assumptions about school do not perceive the possibility of social change. The British society observes “strong ethnocentrism and the strict formation of children’s personalities, together with competition and competitiveness at each level of education” (Suwalska, 2017, p. 38).

### **The roots of English neoliberalism and its perspective in education**

Liberalism, which started in the era of the Enlightenment in France, developed in Europe in the nineteenth century along with the emerging capitalist society based on the free market. The concept of ideology was developed by French philosophers, who rebelled against absolute monarchy, educational institutions, and dogmas of the Church. They promoted civil rather than religious values, separation of church and state, and the removal of religion from schools. They underlined the secular nature of education, the task of which was the training of qualified workers. The student was at the centre of liberal ideology, which resulted in a new vision of the school. “Laissez-faire capitalism is thus seen as guaranteeing prosperity, upholding individual liberty, and, as this allows individuals to rise and fall according to merit, ensuring social justice” (Heywood, 2002, p. 33).

As a result, “the followers of the liberal conception of property and economy, particularly the principle of laissez-faire, believed that the government was responsible for the creation of conditions for the development of a competitive economy” (Suwalska, 2017, p. 36). Moreover, freedom of trade

must not be limited by the economy control. The state is responsible working times and conditions, taking care of citizens' health, and providing them with public safety.

Dewey and Spencer, who were theoreticians of liberalism, presented different views on the role of the individuals within the group. Dewey rejected competition in favor of cooperation within a group, whereas Spencer believed that education should be related to competition to prepare young people well for their lives. The school designed by the Liberals took into consideration education, utility, and procedures promoting the attainment of the values they announced. Civil duties appeared in place of religious values. Liberals put an emphasis on the significance of cognitive and emotional aspects. "They instilled a sense of public responsibility, and linked careful fulfillment of obligations related to work with their emotional aspect. The fundamental pillar of the cognitive aspect was the dissemination of social awareness regarding state institutions" (Suwalska, 2017, p. 36).

The economy directly influenced education and its development, especially the knowledge and skills necessary to find work regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic conditions. Consequently, educational policymakers made political decisions with regard to educational policy and programs taking into account centrist tendencies. The principles of liberalism introduced the limits of freedom for teachers and students. Liberals implemented a curriculum which allowed a free choice of profession. Liberal political processes influence the freedom of individuals to make their own choices when electing candidates for public office. This freedom of choice applies to voting for candidates for public office, choosing a college or university, choosing a career, and a range of life options (Guttek, 2009, p. 237).

### **Equality and *peruskoulu* in Finnish education**

Equality means not only the particular rights but duties of people, too (Espinoza, 2007, p. 345) and it is also connected to the power of particular language in the process of building the social reality (Englund, 2005, p. 40). "The notion of equality is not only a tool for linguistic description; it also evaluates and creates different educational realities" (Englund and Quennerstedt, 2008, p. 717). In this light, it makes sense to mention what kind of educational equity phenomenon is represented in the Finnish society. "Because school learning is strongly influenced by children's family background and associated factors, equity of outcomes requires that schools are funded according

to real needs to cope with these inequalities” (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 149). There is an observable relationship “as John Dewey (1916) insisted that educational experience provided the bridge between “self” and society, between self-realization and democratization” (Pinar, 2004, p. 13).

The main idea of *peruskoulu*, was to match existing grammar schools, civic schools, and primary schools into 9-year comprehensive school. All students, regardless of their place of living, socioeconomic situation, or interests would participate in lessons in the same 9-year basic schools led by local education authorities. The people who criticized the new system claimed that it was not easy to create the same educational expectations for children coming from very varied social and intellectual environments.

The National Curriculum for the Comprehensive School managed the content, organization, and ways of teaching in Finland. The structure of comprehensive school was the same for all students in Finland. There were different instructions prepared for different ability groups and personalities. Three levels of study existed in grades 7–9: basic, middle, and advanced in teaching foreign languages and mathematics. The basic study program was related to previously offered programs in civic schools, and the advanced study program was equal to the program of previous grammar schools.

The introduced *peruskoulu* required from teachers who worked in the academic grammar schools or work-oriented civic schools the ability to teach students with different abilities. As Jouni Välijärvi justified the comprehensive school reform was based not only on organizational change but it introduced a new philosophy of education (Välijärvi et al., 2002), which included the statements that all students can learn because of giving them appropriate opportunities and enough support. Finnish schools introduced a relationship which provided the bridge between “self” and society, between self-realization and democratization” (Pinar, 2004, p. 13). In this light, to understand and learn about human diversity is a significant educational goal, for which schools are obliged to function as small-scale democracies, as John Dewey had suggested before. In Deweyan philosophy “democracy will stand or fall with the possibility of maintaining the faith and justifying it by works” (Dewey, 1939/2003, p. 153).

According to Sahlberg (2015, p. 167), it is “understandable that the pragmatic, child-centered educational thinking of John Dewey has been widely accepted among Finnish educators”. In this light, Dewey’s pedagogy is highly related to research-based education of teachers who study in Finnish universities. The main directions of teachers’ professional development in Finland

have been educational theories, research-based teacher education, methodologies and days of teaching practice since the 1970s. Finnish students are obliged to design and implement the most original, exceptional research in theory and in practice of school. Practical training at schools is a main part of the university study of teachers in Finland. According to Sahlberg (2015, p. 117), “all teachers as professionals are able to understand teaching holistically and improve their work continuously”. The key element of research-based teacher education is deep and wide knowledge about the most useful research in their subjects of teaching. They are obliged to understand the theoretical principles of research to introduce them in their classrooms. A research-oriented approach in teaching activities is linked to open-mindedness of teachers and their ability to design conclusions based on different methodological sources used during their lessons. According to A. Suwalska (2018, p. 275), Finnish society „trusts their teachers and heads of schools”. The integral parts of teacher education programs are theory and practice in Finland. Teaching practice involves three main parts: “orientation, intermediate practicum, and advanced practicum, which expand teacher trainees’ responsibilities” (Jyrhämä, 2006). Teacher training schools, which are close to universities, manage students’ practice. They encourage students to work as reflective teachers and critical practitioners. Finnish teachers, who are leaders, prepare their own curriculum which should be accepted by local education authorities. As a result, teachers are authors of needed supervision and regulations which promote success of Finnish students. Teachers do not have to check and test students very often, as it takes place in England and the USA.

### **The roots of educational reform in England**

In March 1976, following the resignation of Prime Minister Harold Wilson and in connection with numerous attacks by the Irish Republican Army, James Callaghan became the Labour Party leader and Prime Minister. However, in the wake of the declining value of the pound sterling against the US dollar the Labour Party lost the elections of May 3, 1979 to the Conservatives. The new leader was the first female Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who developed a strong policy. Thatcher strengthened the economic potential of the UK and created a more stable political situation in the country through reducing the scale of taxes and creating conditions for the development of private industry. She sought to strengthen the central government



at the expense of local authorities and there was a conservative revolution in education. The educational policy emerged under the influence of the so-called New Right, brought together educators, philosophers and economists and introduced Kenneth Baker's Law on Education Reform of 1988. The New Right education policy "was supported by the mass media as well as by trusted advisors to the Prime Minister, for whom education reform was one of the main areas of interest" (Suwalska, 2017, p. 94). Michael Apple (1993) characterised these times as a return to conservatism, with an emphasis on private property.

In the 1970s the party paid attention to standards and values in education. They introduced minimum standards. In the opinion of Christopher Patten, education was preparation for a good life; this could be achieved only through education, which consisted of learning virtue. In addition, Keith Joseph developed the term "effective education," meaning education that not only met the needs of academic minds, but enabled the implementation of pre-vocational preparation. New trends in education contributed to conservative educational policy in the area, as K. Jones puts it, of "unabashed selectivity between and within schools" (Jones, 2003, p. 3).

Visible competition among students was supposed to serve as a preparation for future life. Analysis of the neoconservative elements showed that the best summary of the idea of the philosophy of the New Right was the slogan "a free market and a strong state" (Potulicka, 1993, p. 19). The elements of neoconservatism and neoliberalism were united in presented educational concept. A strong state was obliged to defend the interests of the leading elites and limit social resistance. A market with guarantees was a good solution. In Thatcher's England there were not any forms of welfare state and inequalities in access to social benefits were maintained. Professional organizations and trade unions were inhibited, too. According to Clyde Chitty, neoconservatives, as leaders and controllers of social change, had the greatest influence on education policy.

The primary objective of school education, as stated by the members of the Hilgate Group (Caroline Cox, Jessica Douglas-Home, Roger Scruton), was the inculcation of respect for the family, private property, and all of the authorities of the bourgeois state. They spoke of the new individuality created by the New Right as "easily adapting to and being convinced by the reward of individual enterprise" (Śpiewak, 1988, p. 126). During this period, British education experienced the most comprehensive reform since 1944. Education introduced by neoliberals seems to be "adequate education"; it is

minimal and comparable to training. Well-prepared and full education is reserved for only very few children. The New Right, observing “the necessity for education to accommodate the needs of economic life and to support the workforce, returned to the traditional elementary school and expressed opposition to the idea of universal education” (Suwalska, 2017, p. 97). Consequently, these educational changes named as strategy of top-down reform (Śliwerski, 2015, p. 179) limited the compulsory curriculum and modified the role of teachers to the function of contractors, managed by corporations in educational process. The proposed changes in education in England, offered only the basics of education for all. In this light, neoliberalism should not be perceived as the ideal ideological model.

Zbigniew Kwieciński (1997) precisely described this type of educational change as the strategy of the managed epidemic. Consequently, every teacher and student is forced to accept the change introduced by the education authorities. This contributed to an enlargement of the competence of the Minister of Education in educational programs. The Act introduced the concept of “Key Stages,” marking educational stages in the formal assessment of all students at the ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16. A framework for the compulsory program of education for each of the four stages of education was introduced. The curriculum involved balanced spiritual, moral, mental, and physical development. As a result, students were taught in ways based on their needs, ages, and skills. Individual skills and special needs of each student were taken into account. Due to fast changing conditions in the factories and competitive global markets, education was forced to introduce professional orientation of students with the ability to plan and monitor students’ professional future.

The central government was responsible for the provision of educational services, educational policy, and planning the direction of educational system. In this light, the working conditions and employment of teachers were changed, too. Teachers faced an ultimatum: “either submit to re-education or lose your job” (Jones, p. 43). Firstly, one curriculum for the entire country was introduced in England, but then didactic objectives were also prepared for student achievement at specific ages, along with “specific criteria for implementation of the program, which in turn become an integral part of reforms” (Potulicka and Rutkowiak, 2010, p. 27) in the context of school-leaving exams.

Privatization and centralization were the main pillars of the reform with “neoliberalism characterized by market competition in education and neo-

conservatism in the case of centralization” (Potulicka and Rutkowiak, 2010, p. 95). Privatization in educational policy in England promoted private schools through scholarships for students from poor families. Only people from the middle classes could receive scholarships; they were not granted talented children from the families of manual workers. The 1988 reform made stronger the ideological control of education and accelerated differentiation between schools. New curricula and new exams were introduced, which contribute to neoliberal working methods. Moreover, the work, employment, promotion and dismissal of teachers changed. Teachers were treated as technicians who manage the process of teaching.

The new curriculum in England was overloaded with facts that required memorization. There was no time for discussion or students’ doubts. Students studied in the atmosphere of obedience without understanding of concepts, accuracy, and principles. Teachers reduced the development of students’ personality and killed their critical thinking. In corporate ideology, teachers, as “ideological intermediaries, contributed to the emergence of a labor force that enabled efficient management of the production process by financial potentates” (Suwalska, 2017, p. 101).

As Hayek mentions in *The Constitution of Liberty* in the section “Contract work and independent work.” The hardest part is to convince the masses that it is in the common interest “to maintain conditions enabling only a few people to achieve the positions that to the masses seem unattainable” (Potulicka and Rutkowiak, 2012, p. 75).

## **Conclusions**

This article presents the educational change in Finland and in England in the context of roots of democracy challenges in both countries. Finland has built the welfare state democracy with its consequences in Finnish schools. The article confirms that the comprehensive school reform in Finland was based on a new philosophy of education (Väljjarvi et al., 2002) which enables providing students with appropriate opportunities and enough support. The phenomenon of Finnish educational equity is represented in society, especially when students come from varied family backgrounds. As a result, equity of outcomes requires that schools obtain money to cope with these inequalities. In addition, Finland has got rid of the system of external inspection and improves the quality of teachers’ work. Consequently, Finnish society appreciates high-trust to teachers’ job, teachers follow the same values

concerning the vision of education and they use research-oriented approach in their teaching. The high-trust to teachers' job and the highest quality of education are reinforced by collaboration between schools which support culture of cooperation and equity of outcomes in education.

On the other hand, England incorporated neoliberalism, which was described by H.A. Giroux as "a massive attack on equality and justice" (Suwalska, 2017, p. 98). In the 1970s the Conservative party paid attention to standards and values in education. As a result of neoliberal and conservative ideologies, England introduced effective education for rich and lower quality for poor children of workers and peasants. The elements of neoconservatism and neoliberalism were united in the presented educational concept. Furthermore, schools accepted reduction of education expenditure due to free-market educational policy. It led to a growing gap between school-leavers of general and vocational education. New trends in education contributed to conservative educational policy and to the selectivity between and within schools. Due to fast changing conditions in the factories and competitive global markets, education was forced to introduce professional orientation of students with the ability to plan and monitor students' professional future. There will always be inequalities in England in access to education which depend on abilities, talents, and origin.

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