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## **The tasks of basic education for adults 2017 in Finland in the light of basic values, assessment and support for learning**

**Zadania fińskiej edukacji podstawowej dorosłych z roku 2017 w świetle programu nauczania. Wartości, ocenianie i wspomaganie uczenia się**

**Abstract.** W artykule przedstawiono przegląd zadań zawartych w Krajowej Podstawie Programowej Kształcenia Podstawowego dla Dorosłych w 2017 r. wprowadzonej w okresie rządów Juha Sippili. Przewidziano skutki społeczne proponowanej zmiany edukacyjnej. Dokument analizuje podstawowe wartości demokratyczne charakterystyczne dla edukacji dorosłych, podkreśla ich wyjątkowość, prawo do samorozwoju i dobrego nauczania. Promuje kulturę różnorodności uczniów, ich filozofię życiową, doświadczenie i światopogląd, przygotowuje do uwzględniania różnych punktów widzenia, udzielania odpowiedzi na pytania oraz podawanie własnych pomysłów. Z perspektywy programu nauczania dojrzałym uczniom są wyposażeni w kompetencje kluczowe i dobrze przygotowani do aktywności obywatelskiej w swojej społeczności.

**Keywords:** zadania edukacji podstawowej, podstawowe wartości, ocenianie uczenia się, wspomaganie uczenia się, edukacja dorosłych, badania programu nauczania, kultura szkoły, kultura oceniania, kompetencje kluczowe

### **Introduction**

The Finnish system of education has not been influenced by market-oriented reforms based on standards of teaching. According to Sahlberg (2015, p. 142) Finnish Way is an alternative approach to the global educational reform movement introduced in the USA and England (Jones, 2003, pp. 3-4; Suwalska, 2017, pp. 99-100). Almost similar attempt named as the Finnish

Model has been developed by Castells & Himanen (2002) and Dahlman, Routti & Ylä-Anttila (2006). Curriculum change is a part of the Finnish Way, which is like a „professional and democratic path to improvement that grows from the bottom, steers from the top, and provides support and pressure from the sides” (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 142).

The article presents an overview of the tasks in National Core Curriculum for Basic Education for Adults 2017 (*National, 2017*), introduced during period of Juha Sippila government, taking curriculum research into account and investigates basic values, assessment with support for learning. This educational change contributes to powerful, responsible and lively professional communities in an increasingly self-regulating but not or self-seeking profession.

The article presents the most important goals of the adults education reform, describing the conditions, the scope of active, curricular educational change and its anticipated social effects. As a result, local education providers (municipalities) and local teachers work on the local curriculum. Moreover, local education providers not only collect the tax money but also decide how to use the money raised for schools. Moreover, this decentralized education system is responsible for equal opportunities for all students. As a result, long-term strategic goals are being prepared at the national level and local plans such as the curriculum and equality plan must be prepared and implemented. I found the inspiration to write this paper during my lectures in the international Erasmus+ programme at the University of Eastern Finland in Joensuu. I take into account research on the curriculum in Finland, on which I have concentrated since 2014.

### **Research questions and methodology**

In order to the tasks of basic education for adults I formulated the following research questions: 1) What tasks are included in the curriculum? 2) What are the strengths of the tasks? 3) What role do basic values, assessment and support for learning have in the global success of Finnish adult education in the twenty-first century?

The main component of my study was an analysis of National Core Curriculum for Basic Education for Adults 2017 in Finland, especially parts considering values, assessment and support for learning. Analysis of the curriculum began with a review of the literature on changes in Finnish curriculum, especially transversal competences. The next step was to concentrate on the curriculum and to identify how issues of adult education were addressed. I employed the problem method including the study of

documents concerning educational change (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2008). The problem method derives from an educational phenomenon which is placed in time and related to society. In this article I aimed at using primary rather than secondary sources.

I took the validity and reliability of the documents into account. I chose representative documents and analysed the meanings presented in the documents along with their intended and perceived contexts. The most important step appeared to be analysis of materials accessed at the library at the University of Helsinki. The next step was the choice of materials for final analysis. This research used sample materials which were the most representative and which provided the greatest support for the project. Analysis of documents were intended to focus equally on documents emphasising „the constructive mechanisms contained in the arguments, ideas, or concepts” (Rapley 2007, p. 194).

### **The preparation of the local curriculum and basic values**

The curriculum contains information how to organise and carry out teaching and learning assessment, guidance, support and welfare of students. Finnish decentralized education system is responsible for equal opportunities for all students. Long-term strategic goals are being prepared at the national level, local plans such as the curriculum and equality plan must be prepared and implemented. The target groups of basic education for adults include those who are older than compulsory school age and have not completed the basic education syllabus or must obtain basic education degree or want to raise grades. The target groups encompasses students with different backgrounds of studies and skills. The groups of basic education for adults include:

- „young people who have arrived in Finland towards the end of their basic education and who have not had the chance to complete their basic education certificate or whose level of skills after basic education is weak.
- those with an immigrant background, aged 17 to 25 years old, who, due to their age, can not attend education offered to pupils and students of compulsory school age but who need a basic education certificate and study skills in order to progress to upper secondary studies
- other adults with an immigrant background who, due to a weak basic education, require introductory-phase basic education, such

as literacy and mathematics skills, or who need to complete a certificate in order to attend further studies

- prisoners who lack a basic education certificate or the study skills required to continue with upper secondary studies
- adult Roma whose basic education is limited or who do not have a basic education certificate
- other adults who have dropped out of comprehensive school while still of the compulsory school age
- adults who study at least one subject as a subject student and/or who want to raise their grades from basic education” (*National*, 2007, p. 14).

My analyses began with a review of the literature on values in education. I took into consideration Berkowitz (1995) and Oser (1996) analyses who investigated values in terms of subjective attitudes and behaviour. Lickona (1991) claims that value education contributes to the reinforcement of values in education. Moreover, he mentions about the transfer of values in education which results from the gradual improvement of the curriculum and the moral climate in school. Berkowitz (1996) states that people do not need values to develop their morality of judgments and actions; people need only set of central values such as justice and well-being. In this light, I perceive that Finnish local curriculum adds the local demands and supplement to the the national core curriculum taking into account the objectives, core content and other elements related to the provision of teaching in basic education for adults. According to National Core Curriculum for Basic Education for Adults 2017 basic values include „the right to good teaching, humanity, education, equality and democracy, the uniqueness of students and, cultural diversity as a richness and the necessity of a sustainable lifestyle” (*National*, 2017, p. 17-19). The curriculum, takes into consideration local conditions, special opportunities and the students’ special needs, institutional self-assessment which contribute to students’ success.

Viewed from the perspective of curriculum, students are better prepared to function as active citizens and members of their communities. It is introduced due to the uniqueness of students and the right to good teaching in which adults as students have the right to self-development in schools which promote the understanding of the students’ identity, their philosophy of life and worldviews as a part of students’ continuous development. Adults have the right to goal-oriented teaching and recognition of each student learning pathways.

Basic education serves the skills and knowledge needed for further education. This level of education supports an affirmative attitude to lifelong learning and students' development. It is popular in schools to use multi-platform communication to explore values which are significant in everyday situations. Schools lead discussions on values and help adults identify and name their own and other peoples' values with critical attitude to them.

In a context of humanity, education, equality and democracy basic education for adults helps support a humane outlook in students, which is related to „truth, goodness and beauty as well as justice and peace” (National, 2017, p. 18 ). In this growth tensions between the goal and reality are inevitable. Educational situations create the situations for students to make decisions based on ethical thinking. As a result, they contribute to wide, ethical perspectives. Students study how to make valuable decisions in life because an educated person looks for the good and strives to do the right thing. Students study how to evaluate the reliability of information due to the different sources. Schools help improve students' aspiration towards self-regulation, development and well-being. Education maintains and strengthens respect for human rights and encourages life's defence. It encourages students to be active in the civil society and promotes democracy. Schools are responsible for promotion of social, regional and gender equality. Teaching is not related to specific religions, philosophies or political parties.

*Cultural diversity as a richness* in basic values plays an important place. It is linked to Finnish diverse cultural heritage. It is continued through the interaction between different cultures and assimilates students into Finnish society, reinforces students' cultural identity and its creation. Teaching adults supports students creativity and the respect for cultural diversity, helps promote links between cultures and sustainable development. As a result of being together adults from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds get acquainted with varied customs, ideas and world views. Consequently, education perceived from this perspective builds true interaction and cooperation. According to National Core Curriculum for Basic Education for Adults 2017 education builds „foundation for a global citizenship that respects human rights and encourages students to promote positive changes in a world of complex interdependencies” (National, 2017, p. 19).

*The necessity of a sustainable lifestyle*, being a part of suggested basic values, promotes a sustainable lifestyle and introduces ecosocial education with its activities. A sustainable lifestyle is perceived by an ecological, financial, social and cultural dimension in Finland. Ecosocial education is supported by „the inviolability of human dignity, the diversity and renewability

of ecosystems while building a competence base for a circular economy based on the sustainable use of natural resources” (National, 2017, p. 19). In a presented light, people are responsible for leading technology in a direction that contributes to a sustainable future for people and environment. Students are able to classify the demands of sustainable development, present problems related to customers’ habits and carry out solutions for modifying our lifestyle. Adults basic education opens up new contexts related to the global responsibility.

### **The tasks of basic education for adults**

Basic education for adults is a part of public education system and provides the opportunity to learn basic skills. It helps obtain qualifications required for upper secondary education. Its main task is to identify students’ strengths and prepare future plans for adults. Basic education for adults promotes gender equality, equal treatment and fairness, which seems to be the main social task of this level of education. In a context of human capital the tasks of basic education involves competence that contributes to individual and social well-being.

As a result of my analyses, basic education for adults creates relationships, interactions, trust among people and builds social capital to prevent inequality and marginalisation. It popularizes the social integration of students and adults with an immigrant background by supporting them with appropriate linguistic and social skills. Basic education for adults underlines the need for working-life skills and on employer connections. The cultural task of basic education for adults is promotion of diverse cultural competence which supports students in creating and preserving their own cultural identity. Basic education extends the cultural diversity understanding and helps identify the past, present and future of cultures. It is perceived as continuums in which each student can participate in.

Adult students need competences that combine different subjects and sets of skills to achieve success at working places. Finland has introduced transversal competences which include skills, knowledge, values, and attitudes. Transversal competences help students recognize and employ appropriate skills and knowledge appropriately in varied life situations. According to National Core Curriculum for Basic Education for Adults 2017 „each subject contributes to the development of competence through its content and methods” (National, 2017, p. 24). The improvement of transversal competences was related to the school culture, trust to teachers’ professional skills and ways of overcoming school problems. The term “pedagogical

love” (Koskenniemi, 1944) was introduced by Matti Koskenniemi, famous Finnish educator to describe Finnish teachers approach to teaching. The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education for Adults 2017 presents the concept of transversal competences which are tightly related to tasks of basic education for adults. According to the document there are important ways how students seek, evaluate and produce information. The first transversal competence is named as Thinking skills and learning to learn (T1) and is related to students conscious reasoning and their personal experiences.

The second competence Cultural competence and interaction (T2) help overcome obstacles related to a diverse world and learning environment in the dimensions of culture, language, religion and worldviews. The third competence, Managing daily life (T3) supports promotion of physical, mental and social well-being, it promotes management of daily life and self-regulation. Teachers encourage students to take care of themselves and consider which skills are significant in daily life. The fourth competence, multiliteracy (T4), encompasses skills indispensable in interpretation, production and evaluation of different types of text to support understanding of diverse cultural modes of communication and building own identity. The fifth competence, ICT competence (T5) is a main part of basic education and daily-life management skills. In basic education for adults, students get the chance to improve their ICT competence, based on their skills level.

Working life competence and entrepreneurship (T6), help adult students obtain a realistic, up-to-date picture of working life opportunities and their responsibilities as members of society. The seventh competence named as participation, involvement and building a sustainable future (T7) encourages students to engage in the active citizenship and promote students’ skills to participate in decision-making. Students deal with conflicts from equity perspectives and are encouraged to think about future from the perspectives of the past and the present. In this light, they are supported to consider the importance of their life choices, lifestyles and living conditions.

As a result of my analysis, Finnish adult students are prepared to perceive different viewpoints, answer for unexpected questions and support own ideas and points of view. Finnish students are able to present topics from varied perspectives, see alternative solutions and compare open-mindedly different points of view. The schools put an emphasis on recognition of students’ personal ways of studying, development of motivation and positive life-long learning.

### **Support for learning in light of the development of the school culture**

A strong cooperation between all teachers, head teachers and the National Board of Education is omnipresent in Finland. They not only consult and discuss together the current problems, but they also work together at many seminars. If they follow the same values, they are free to organize their school work. The Finnish social capital of people employed in the system of education, is based on cooperation, „pervasive feelings of trust among teachers as well as between teachers and those who work in a wider system, and in a collective sense of moral responsibility” (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012, p. 52). In the context of Finnish Model of Educational Change (Sahlsberg, 2015, p. 149), teachers’ work is related to the highest level of collaboration between schools because schools cooperate, help each other and support culture of cooperation between teachers and schools.

The school culture includes all of the schools’s practices, models of behaviour, schools values, and criteria that school work depends on. It reveals at the individual, group and community levels. The school culture presents the approach that develops through historical and cultural development. Conscious and unconscious factors form the school culture and recognise its significance and impact. The study community selects and maintains the values and attitudes used in school culture.

The school culture in basic education for adults includes:

- „the interpretation of work-directing norms and the objectives of operations
- management and leadership as well as the organisation, planning, implementation and assessment of work
- the community’s competence and its development
- pedagogy and professionalism
- interaction and atmosphere, daily practices and learning environments” (*National*, 2017, p. 32).

### **Support for learning and a personal study plan**

Support for learning covers comprehensive students guidance which is shared by the whole educational institutions. Its main objective is to develop the adults’ learning abilities and skills in learning to understand and predict the consequences of life choices and actions. Guidance reinforces the adult’s ability to estimate their own abilities and life opportunities at different periods of studies. The purpose of guidance is to strengthen students independent decisions and choices about their future education and chance for employment. Adult-students also „obtain a comprehensive picture of educational



opportunities, professions and working life to help them plan their future” (*National*, 2017, p. 32).

Support for learning includes different guidance, counselling and information services with main aim to familiarise students with the further education. During personal guidance, students are obliged to ask questions related to their studies, career choices, the future and their life situation. It is really significant that guidance is led individually, in small groups and in larger groups.

On the other hand, a personal study plan must be prepared for all students in basic education for adults. It supports directions for each student’s skills development and estimates duration of studies. The personal study plan is related to students’ abilities, his or her life situation or eventually completed studies and previous learning experiences. Moreover, it clearly states that previously completed studies related to core content of the curriculum must be recognised and the initial competence level of each student must be described. The study plan is prepared together by the education provider and a student and include:

- „any prior education in Finland and/or elsewhere, especially previously completed basic education studies and any work or other experience that may substitute for studies
- Finnish/Swedish language skills and other language skills as well as facility for language studies
- courses and/or syllabi that can be recognised
- starting point in basic education for adults (literacy training phase, other introductory phase or final phase)
- courses to be completed
- any study and/or introductory periods completed in other educational institutions and/or periods of work experience
- estimated duration of studies
- study conditions, methods of completing studies and any special teaching arrangements
- study skills and any need for support
- further education and career plan” (*National*, 2017, p. 44).

Multiprofessional co-operation can be used to plan and monitor the prepared plan. It can provide the process of immigrants’ integration that depends on the needs. An absent student, without a valid reason, can be certified as having dropped out if it is proved that the student will not finish his or her study according to the plan. Students can complete their studies

in basic education for adults or other institutions due to the goal-oriented activities which demand continuous practice.

### **Support for learning and studies**

According to the Basic Education Act (Basic Education Act [628/1998], section 3, subsection 2 – *Basic*, pp. 2-3), teaching must be arranged to the students' age and skills. Teaching and support is organised by taking into consideration varied initial stage, strengths and students' needs. On the other hand, support for learning is based on collaborative solutions, enhancement linked to the learning environment and the individual needs of each student. Students receive the opportunity to learn successfully with possibility to grow and educate from their starting point. This support has the main aim to prevent deeper problems and to avoid long-term support. Support can include such school problems as a linguistic, mathematical, motoric or attention disorder. Students also suffer from health, mental health problems, adjustment to society or traumatic experiences from their past lives.

Support for learning includes differentiated teaching to take into consideration differences among students. These differences include not only the starting points for learning, varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds, but the level of proficiency in the language of education and each student abilities. Main aim of support is to help students understand the objectives and significance of teaching to promote success. This support is reinforced by the school culture, which is developed „to promote cooperation and peer learning between the staff and students as well as between students” (*National*, 2017, p. 46).

As a result of my analyses, support also includes special attention based on the prevention and early identification of learning difficulties. There is led observation and need identification to overcome obstacles. All school procedures and teaching arrangements with their suitability for the student must be taken into account. This information help determine and create pedagogic solutions better suited to the student. The results of previous assessments are used to plan measures of support. Schools take into account each students previous support.

Support includes identification of development needs, learning-related strengths and feedback on the students' progress. Special attention in support is related to students' learning abilities, the learning-to-learn skills and the responsibility for planning studies, setting educational goals and completing the studies. Forms of support include varied instructions which depend on the student's needs, and functional guidance counselling. Basic education

for adults uses various learning strategies and methods of teaching which promote learning. „The required individual support measures and support in different subjects are recorded in the student’s personal study plan” (*National, 2017, p. 46*).

### **The tasks of assessment and an assessment culture**

Teachers are responsible for assessment and feedback they guide and support students’ learning. Students learning and schoolwork must be checked and assessed in varied ways. In this light, it seems really significant to improve an assessment culture in basic education for adults and according to National Core Curriculum for Basic Education for Adults 2017. It should include motivating atmosphere and a positive approach to promote students’ attendance. In this light, an assessment must be fair, diverse and ethical, there must be included the assurance of support to understand learning process. It should include „the utilisation of information gained through assessment when planning teaching and other schoolwork when considering further education and career options” (*National, 2017, p. 57*).

According to my analyses, the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education for Adults 2017 states students’ rights to receive information about the rules of assessment. Long-term discussions between students and teachers contribute to the highest level of trust and encourage an exchange of information about the goals of learning. General principles of assessment are related to feedback which is provided in daily work in the school year. Teachers make observations linked to the learning process and students’ interactions. Peer assessment and self-assessment contributes to students’ independence in school. The teacher’s duty is to plan situations of joint reflection to receive motivating feedback that promotes learning. This feedback, which promotes learning is qualitative and descriptive by nature, it contains the analysis and solving of learning problems.

Teachers analyse students’ ways of learning and identify their progress. As a result, students receive indispensable help and are able to „gradually guide their own learning, set themselves objectives and employ learning strategies that contribute to their success” (*National, 2017, p. 57*). This assessment and feedback help students coordinate the topics which they study and develop metacognitive and working skills. The teacher’s feedback, based on students’ learning process, must inform students what they recognize, understand, what they have already learned and how they can improve their own learning. The other aim of assessment is based on the objectives set in the national core curriculum and specified in the local curriculum. Teachers

are obliged to provide that students understand objectives and assessment criteria. In the introductory phase the goals of assessment with literacy training and the criteria for the final assessment in basic education for adults have been prepared to help the teachers' work and to harmonise assessment.

*The areas assessed* include students' learning and work. All these areas should be observed and documented from different perspectives. Basic education for adults do not assess students' behaviour. Learning assessment focuses on the students' progress and the level of acquired competences. It is closely related to the students' previous competences and the set of objectives. According to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education for Adults 2017 it is significant to „monitor the students' progress throughout basic education to ensure that teaching, guidance and support provide them with the skills required to continue with their studies” (*National, 2017, p. 57*).

## **Findings**

Basic education for adults, being a part of a public education system in Finland, creates interactions and trust among students and teachers to underline the need for working-life skills and to prevent social inequality and marginalisation. It helps obtain qualifications which requires secondary education and extends cultural diversity to enable students to understand better the past, present and future and to achieve success at working places. Basic education for adults promotes gender equality, equal treatment and contributes to individual and social well-being of students. As a result, adult students are well-prepared to function as an active citizens of Finnish society. It is introduced due to the uniqueness of students and the right to good teaching in which adults as students have the right to self-development in schools which promote the understanding of the students' identity, their philosophy of life and worldviews as a part of students' continuous development.

As a result of my study, I claim that Finnish schools put an emphasis on recognition of students' personal ways of studying, development of motivation and positive life-long learning. Additionally, Finnish teachers support culture of cooperation between teachers and adult students, revealing its individual, group or community levels. Adult students acquire needed competences that combine different subjects and sets of skills to achieve success at working places. Students are able to understand the demands of sustainable future development and to introduce some solutions which modify their lifestyles. Besides, adult students obtain support for learning

which includes personal guidance, counselling, career choices and a personal study plan. Support also includes special attention based on the prevention and early identification of learning difficulties.

According to National Core Curriculum for Basic Education for Adults 2017 each subject contributes to the development of competence through its content and methods. Adult students have the rights to self-identity promotion at schools and to goal-oriented teaching with focus on students' learning paths. Finland, which introduced transversal competences, helps students recognize and employ appropriate skills and knowledge in the varied life situations. Transversal competences enable students to be better prepared to unexpected questions, challenges and to see open-mindedly alternative solutions in their lives.

On the other side, students have rights to receive information about the rules of assessment and to be informed about feedback in a daily work. As a result, students understand and recognize what they have already learnt and what they have to study more. Additionally, teachers are obliged by national core curriculum to provide students' understanding of assessment criteria to help adult students more.

### **Summary**

Educational policy of Juha Sippilä's in basic adult education is based on the assumption that adult students build their competences on previous skills, knowledge and life experiences. National Core Curriculum for Basic Education for Adults 2017 honoured traditional pedagogical values based on creating relationship with pupils. Individual learning paths of students are developed flexibly and individually, taking into account previous education and any professional experiences. Effective learning is an inspiring process that lasts a lifetime. Moreover, we perceive the significance of cooperation between teachers and institutions, which build relationships in lifelong learning to take collective responsibility for curriculum development and adults' learning.

The tasks of National Core Curriculum for Basic Education for Adults 2017 popularize the social integration of students and adults with an immigrant background by supporting them with appropriate linguistic and social skills and help students' identify the past, present and future of cultures. Moreover, the tasks of basic education for adults create relationships, interactions, trust among people and builds social capital to prevent inequality and marginalisation. The tasks of basic education take into consideration contemporary European trends and challenges.

On the other side, from the perspective of only two years of implementation, it is too early to write fully about the whole results of National Core Curriculum for Basic Education for Adults 2017 which influence on education practices and its implementation in the contemporary Finnish adult basic education.

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