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Abdication of the Education State or Just Shifting Responsibilities? The appearance of a new system of reason in constructing educational governance and social exclusion/inclusion in Finland

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ABSTRACT *The connections between the new governance in education and new procedures of social exclusion and inclusion in Finland are examined. The main focus is on the emergence of a specific discursive formation constituted by an intersection of the myths of competition, corporate managerialism, an educational clientele and social democracy with images of rational choice makers and invisible clients (pupils) and individual-centred learning professionals (teachers) in a mass institution. The research material is extensive, including national statistical data, education policy texts, interviews with educational actors at the national, municipal and school levels and a survey of pupils. The conclusion of the paper outlines a new system of reason as a historical shift of responsibilities in the national education system.*

Keywords: *education policy; governance; social exclusion; managerialism*

Something is happening here
but you don't know what it is,
do you, Mr Jones?
(Bob Dylan, *Highway 61 Revisited*, 1965)

INTRODUCTION

The connections between two phenomena in education have rarely been seen in relation to each other: the new governance in education and the new mechanisms of

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social exclusion and inclusion. By *new governance* we mean managerialist tendencies in education policy, which have been conceptualised in social theory as 'governance without government', 'governance at a distance' and 'a new way of making education policies from behind' (see for example EGSIE, 1997; Dale, 1999; Lindblad & Popkewitz, 1999, 2000; Rose, 1999). The *new mechanisms of social inclusion/exclusion* refer to practices of introducing market mechanisms into the field of public education (see for example Guthrie, 1997; Taylor *et al.*, 1997; Popkewitz *et al.*, 1999).

The Finnish material we are using in our analysis is extensive [1]. Besides the national statistical data, it includes education policy texts, interviews with educational actors at the national, municipal and school levels and a survey of pupils. The theoretical approach emphasises notions of narrative, myth and discourse. By this we aim to underline the fact that the social world is, in an important sense, *also* constructed by and through the way we speak about it. The stories created by the social actors construct imagined communities (Anderson, 1991) and shape people into knowing, understanding and experiencing themselves as members of a community or citizens of a nation. It is in these discourses, especially those that are authoritative, that the subjects of the field are constituted: who is the successful pupil and who is at risk of being excluded; who is a model teacher and who is thought to have problems in his/her teaching work? Our aim in this report is to reconstruct discursive elements and their relations that constitute something that has been characterised as a *system of reason* (see for example Popkewitz, 1998, 2000). By this we mean a peculiar combination of overlapping, scaffolding and amalgamating ideas. This is nevertheless whole in its dispersion and could be seen as constituting national discursive practices that are essential not only in speaking and thinking but also in acting in the educational field in terms of social inclusion/exclusion.

CONTEXT: RESTRUCTURING THROUGH THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

It is impossible to speak about recent societal changes in Finland without referring to the economic crisis of the 1990s. A number of coincident problems beset the country. The international economic recession, an overheated national economy, the collapse of trade with the Soviet Union, the unsuccessful and badly timed inauguration of monetary policy and, finally, a grave bank crisis, all coincided to bring about an economic crash comparable only with the Great Depression of the 1930s. According to many indicators, the Finnish crisis was the sharpest and deepest among the developed Western countries facing economic problems during the 1990s. In the period 1990–1993 the GNP went down by 7%, the unemployment rate increased from 3 to 16% and unemployment among 15–24 year olds increased from 9 to 34% (Statistics of Finland, 2000).

However, to understand the societal developments in Finland, it is impossible to ignore the astonishing emergence of the country from deep economic recession during the second half of the decade. According to the statistics, the GNP rose by as much as 8% a year. Annual productivity in enterprises grew by 4% and total

productivity by 5% in the years 1993–1997 (Tilastokeskus, 1998). At the turn of the century the Finnish export industry, especially in the vital ICT sector, seems to be running better than ever and the economy is well balanced. The country has achieved EU membership and has entered the first wave of European monetary union. According to various authorities, Finland seems to have effected a successful change of pace as part of the new globalised economy.

We could and should ask, of course, about the price of this economic success story. It is worth noting that the political initiative shifted clearly to the right as early as 1987, when the conservative National Coalition Party achieved leading governmental responsibility after a long period on the sidelines. What is peculiar, however, is that the governments have been assembled on a very broad basis ever since. The last two 'rainbow governments' (Lipponen I, 1995–1999 and Lipponen II, 1999–), headed by a Social Democrat, both included all the main parties from the Right to the Left, excluding only the former agrarian Centre Party. Thus, ironically enough, we could conclude, without any exaggeration, that the political shift to the Right in Finland has happened in accordance with wide societal consensus, at least among the political elite.

Immediately after the depression, many social policy researchers (see for example Heikkilä & Uusitalo, 1997; Haataja, 1998; Hjerppe *et al.*, 1999) hurried to celebrate the fact that the Finnish social security system had stood up well in the hard times. It was noticed (see for example Kosunen, 1997) that the depression seemed to continue in social security and health although it was over in the economy. Only recently has it been admitted that the Finnish welfare state seems to have essentially changed; that it is no longer what it was before the depression (see for example Lehtonen & Aho, 2000). People are more and more coming to the conclusion that the restructuring of the Finnish welfare state was already on the agenda during the late 1980s. The depression created a general 'consciousness of crisis' that made even the most radical cuts and savings acceptable and easy to realise without any political resistance (Suomen Työnantajain Keskusliitto, 1984; Peltoniemi, 2000). In other words, the depression could quite well be seen as Heaven's Gift to those aiming to reconstruct the Finnish welfare state and to make it a model for the new globalised market economy outlined by international actors such as the OECD, the EU and the World Bank.

The essential political shift to the Right has also been realised in Finnish educational policy making during the last 10 years or so. Most of the non-right politicians in our interviews considered this invasion of the Right as one of the most important factors behind the prevailing educational policy. The Social Democratic ex-chair of the National Board of Education characterised the realised policy pertinently as a '*hidden education policy*', which brought a big change through small and gradual steps and shifts concerning funding, the basis of curriculum planning and defining school districts, none of which was ever taken explicitly. It is also curious that none of the politicians we interviewed who supported the new education policy of the 1990s was willing to characterise it as 'neo-liberal'. They rather used paraphrases such as 'the renaissance of individualism', 'the ethos of freedom and free choice', 'market-based thinking', 'liberal optimism', 'dynamism' and 'edu-

cational policy which emphasises the student's responsibility'. It seems important to articulate the Finnish change in educational politics through all of these elements: a shift of small steps to the Right, although in consensus and without using open neo-liberalist vocabulary. A list of the most essential changes in Finnish education politics at the primary and secondary levels during the 1990s must include, at least, the following four: free school choice, building up the extensive evaluation system, budget cuts and moving the decision making power to the organiser of schooling, i.e. to the municipalities.

COMPETITION STATE: A GLOBALISED WORLD WITHOUT ALTERNATIVES

A general notion is that seeing the world without alternatives seems to be embraced by both state- and school-level actors, in both spoken and written statements. The changes in the world appear as the commanding source for transformations that will make the school change too. The changes in the Finnish educational system are seen as 'just a part of global social change'. 'The economic competitiveness' of Finland is the most important thing, 'the connection between economic growth and employment is clearer than before' and the Nokia example will pave the way for education too. It is global competition and demands for economic success that require education to produce a better quality of learning and top skills. There was a strong emphasis on the connection between education and success at work, and thus on the connection with the success of the whole nation. As the former head of the National Board of Education stated: 'tightened global competition in economics demands this'.

It is more than curious that most of the political actors interviewed did not regard the changes in education politics as conscious decisions, but rather as reactions to changing conditions in society and in the world. This was nicely stated by the Chairman of the Union of Principals: 'I feel that this trend has been quite, quite a lot automatic'. Even the most critical voices of the developments stated: 'We cannot stop the increase in competition as such'. Following this logic of unavoidable and inevitable change, it was typical that some informants saw it as a clear consequence of the prevailing system; as a logical development, a next step forward in the comprehensive school system, rather than as a dismantling of it. At the school level, a similar consensus may be found in the general articulation of the 1990s as a story of progress with just a few sceptical, even cynical comments.

As part of this fatalistic story of a world without alternatives, we might perceive a general acceptance of the risk to equality that was formerly so central in Finnish education policy. The danger of increasing inequality and segregation was seen as real by most of the policy actors interviewed. However, the situation of public education in Finland that is free of charge was not considered to be in danger. In a way, it was unanimously considered a civil right that could not be abandoned. Nevertheless, the higher one goes in the educational system, the greater the proportion of the expenses the parents are expected to pay. It was also claimed that business life is taking a more active part in the education market. With the increasing

emphasis on individual choice and local interests, it was thought that the importance of evaluation would grow significantly.

It is fair to conclude that none of the interviewed actors articulated any clear alternative to the educational policy of the 1990s. There seems to be nothing rare in this kind of fatalistic view of diminishing elbow-room for the nation state in the era of globalisation. Let us cite our Australian colleagues here at length:

> The globalisation of the economy has, to some extent, reduced the capacity of individual states to consider their own distinctive policy options. [...] Some politicians have gone so far as to suggest that we have no option but to accept the imperatives of globalisation in thinking about state activities. In this sense, globalisation has become an ideology, proselytised by international organisations such as the OECD and the World Bank in assertions of the need for less interventionist and leaner government and for freer forms of economic competition between nations. (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, pp. 78–79)

This seems to be exactly what Cerny meant when in 1990 he introduced the concept of the '*competition state*'. This highlighted the dominance of market ideologies, which imply the need for smaller and more efficient government and a market economy that is less directed by the state (Cerny, 1990; cf. Taylor *et al.*, 1997, p. 82).

EDUCATIONAL CLIENTELE: FREE AND RATIONAL CHOICES

One expression of the political change, according to many of the state-level interviewees, was the emphasis on the value of the individual, as opposed to the former idea of collective equality. The value of the individual as a social actor has increased, and this can also be seen in educational policy. They felt that highly educated citizens would no longer stand for governance from above, but would insist on making educational decisions themselves. Many actors in educational policy thought that increasing international competition called for increased investment in the education of the gifted. A 'free-the-spearheads' mode of speech has become established in Finnish school administration, according to which the comprehensive school has done its job, in other words raised the educational level of the nation, and now it is time to 'invest in the best'.

The role of parents was rarely mentioned in the state educational discourse of the 1980s and then mostly only as supporting the work to be done at school. In contrast to this, pupils and parents came to be seen as active and rational subjects in the 1990s. They are now characterised as 'users of services' and organising the education is seen as 'a production of services that take into account citizens' needs'. One of the main purposes of evaluation, for example, is to 'increase the parents' and pupils' knowledge of the quality of education and to improve the conditions for making different kinds of choices'.

This concerns the way marketisation discourse has changed the way we speak about schooling. Therefore, we think that one of the most significant innovations of the 1990s was the kind of market individualism that was brought into educational

discourse. In Finland this seems to be crystallised in extensive and fluent use of the concept of the *client*. What, then, are the most essential qualities of this client? From the above analysis it seems that they include free and rational choice making in an educational market place. Australian researchers refer here to the 'new market version of human capital theory, which regarded higher levels of education as necessary for the workforce to cope with rapid technological change' (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, p. 95).

It seems clear that in Finland, too, the former pivotal ideas of educational equality have been replaced by a certain 'market magic'. Education is marketised, at least in the discourse, and made into a product for which the demand may direct the supply in liberated markets. The competitive choices of clients and sponsors influence the activities of educational markets with no strong intervention from the paternalistic state (Lauder & Hughes, 1999, pp. 4–20). The key to understanding this trend in educational policy, which still emphasises the meaning of rearing the new, human capital is to be found in the breakthrough of the so-called theory of rational choice. This kind of thinking can easily be criticised because it looks at children and families as if they were free selectors in free markets and thus totally neglects the social determination of educational choice. The most probable winners of the educational policy game played on the ground of rational choice will be business life as well as the descendants of the middle classes and educated professionals. The losers will be the segments of the population who have socially, economically and culturally weaker starting points (cf. Chubb & Moe, 1990; Whitty *et al.*, 1998; Lauder & Hughes, 1999).

CORPORATE MANAGERIALISM: 'THE DEATH OF CENTRALISED PLANNING'

The belief in central governance came to an end during the 1980s. The heavily centralised planning and steering system in education, which had been under construction in Finland for decades and reached its peak during the rise of the comprehensive school reform, was abandoned by a resolution of the government in 1988 to reform the entire management of the state. The former sector-based planning systems, with their highly detailed and focused steering regulations, were abandoned. Among the many defects of the former sector planning that were listed were its diversity, its unsuitable timetables, the poor implementation of state planning, the bureaucracy, the waste of time and the futility of detailed and inflexible regulations (Kivinen *et al.*, 1995; Rinne *et al.*, 2000a,b).

The changes in educational policy were part of the more extensive changes in Finnish state policy, according to the interviewees. Measures to increase local decision making power had been enacted in other sectors of social policy as well. The reorganisation of the relationship between central government and municipal financing, the so-called state subsidy system, was a primary factor in initiating these changes in 1993. In addition to changing the basis for calculating government contributions, it gave local authorities great freedom to decide how to use funds. Whereas earlier funds received from the state by local treasuries were clearly

earmarked for each administrative sector, municipalities were now allowed to divide the money within their area of jurisdiction as they saw fit. The city or municipality might decide, for example, to save education expenses by laying off teachers.

Behind this massive decentralisation and deregulation seems to be the collapse of the previously almost unshakeable belief in centralised planning and untenable centralised governance. Among all of those interviewed was a unanimity and a strong belief in the superiority of local decision making compared to the older, very centralised Finnish model. Expertise rests in the municipalities and in the schools and it can only be brought out if decision making power rests at the local level, it was stated. The interviewees connected the dissolution of norms and realisation of the proximity principle to the economic depression. Without shifting decision making to the local level it would not have been possible to require the municipalities to cut down spending as much as they have done. At the same time, the central administration was able to transfer difficult decisions to the municipal level.

On the local level this change meant an almost complete break with the earlier government guidance and inspection system or, as one administrator responsible for the educational functions of a large municipality stated in unequivocal terms: 'To put it bluntly, the government officials no longer bother us'. The remarks of the state-level interviewees indicated a strong belief in the superiority of local decision making.

In this new educational governance discourse, evaluation is seen as an essential tool of quality development. While previously it was believed that the goals of education could be achieved by sticking to strict norms, in the 1990s the conviction was that they could be achieved only by setting national core goals, by evaluating achievements in the form of subsequent results and by directing educational institutions to compete with one another. In this rhetoric, the Finnish 'Planning State' had become the 'Evaluative State', attempting to practice educational policy through governing by results. According to the Secretary General of the Ministry of Education, evaluation is seen as a pivotal element in the new steering system since it 'replaces the tasks of the old normative steering, control and inspection system' (Hirvi, 1996, p. 93).

Corporate managerialism has been defined as a 'rational output-oriented, plan-based and management-led view of organisational reform' (Sinclair, 1989, p. 389). Weller & Lewis (1989, p. 1) claim that 'managing for results' best encapsulates the essence of it. According to Yeteman (1987, p. 341), corporate managerialism is about 'doing more with less' (efficiency), 'focusing on outcomes and results' (effectiveness) and 'managing change better'. In the very same spirit, the OECD (1995, p. 8) mentions the creation of a 'performance-oriented' and 'less centralised' public sector. This has the following characteristics: first, a focus on results and efficiency and effectiveness; second, decentralised management environments; third, flexibility to explore alternatives to the public provision of services; fourth, the establishment of productivity targets and a competitive environment within public sector organisations; finally, the strengthening of strategic capacities at the centre of the organisation (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, p. 84).

It is not necessarily an overstatement to say that the idea of managerialism

meant a revolutionary change in Finnish state educational discourse. An office holder in EU relations in the NBE characterised the Finnish interpretation of managerialism as '(...) a distinction made between policy making and implementation, greater latitude allowed to local-level agents and an emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness.' (Laukkanen, 1997, pp. 406–407). According to this statement, the local level, i.e. basically the municipality but also the school if the municipal decision makers think so, seem to be nicely free not only to make their decisions but also to come up with their ideas of what issues are at stake in education. By definition, the local level is definitely an autonomous actor in the educational field. This might be one dimension of the new governance, but it also means so-called 'steering at a distance', in that usual hierarchical forms of control are rejected in favour of some institutional autonomy and self-steering and replaced, for example, with 'ex-post corrections' made on the basis of 'quality of outcomes'. In an extreme case, however, this kind of 'autonomy' has more to do with managing reduced funding at the school site than with anything else: 'asking those being cut to cut themselves' (Ball, 1993, p. 77; see also Taylor *et al.*, 1997, p. 84).

NEO-LIBERALIST EGALITARIANISM: TRANSMUTATION OF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC DISCOURSE

Many politicians described the policy as liberalist or used some other terms which fit this description, such as 'liberal optimism, 'market-based thinking', 'dynamism' or 'educational policy, which emphasises the student's responsibility' or 'the renaissance of individuality'. On the other hand, liberalism does not sound very good in the ears of modern educational policy makers, as one interviewee pointed out, nor do those in the central administration use the term. The respondents characterised the Finnish education policy of the 1990s as 'liberal', 'market-orientated' and 'emphasising individuality', in which 'freedom of choice' and 'quality' are the central features.

Despite all the changes of the 1990s, social democratic egalitarian discourse has not lost all its status in Finnish political rhetoric. When asked, all the state-level actors we interviewed affirmed that they had been alerted to the increasing inequality, segregation and exclusion that were on the horizon due to the recent educational policy and societal developments. The basic idea was, however, that the risk was worth taking; that the pros clearly outweigh the cons. Besides, during the 1990s there were still some practical extensions of educational coverage, in the spirit of social democratic egalitarianism. For example the right to free pre-school education was finally confirmed by law and all handicapped and immigrant children were integrated into compulsory education.

Several of the state-level actors wondered whether the dismantling of norms and the increase in local decision making power had occurred too quickly. Some feared that, in the future, we would have to move back to the old system in which the central government at least partially allocates funds for specific purposes and thus ensures the equal availability of services to its citizens throughout the country.

One problem that was brought up often was regional inequality. The relaxation

of government restrictions on the use of funds produced great deficits for some municipalities. The increase in local decision making power in matters concerning the curriculum, on the other hand, has meant that some municipalities can offer a great variety of courses and others cannot. Some interviewees concluded that we have returned to the situation which the comprehensive school system was designed to eliminate: a person's place of birth is starting to have a great influence on his or her future educational career. Some respondents at the state level stated that if, as a consequence of the new educational policy, there appeared to be too much diversification of schools and education, there must be powerful intervention from above. The means referred to for doing this included a return to 'earmarked funding', giving more resources to schools on the local level and developing the monitoring and evaluation system on the district level.

It has been said (see for example Antikainen, 1990) that the belief in schooling is unusually strong in Finland. We found evidence for this in the interviews with the school-level actors. In connection to this it is fair to claim that there was a quite clear indication of an ethos of caring and social responsibility at the school level. Many Finnish school-level actors spoke for strong safety nets, systematic and comprehensive support and early diagnosis. It could be claimed that this voice was slightly stronger at the school level than at the state level, where the lack of an alternative was so evident. By way of contrast, the story from the schools was one of confidence in the modern and rational welfare state discourse, declaring a belief in solving problems by using well-known means systematically and just more effectively. The same narrative continued as the school-level professionals illustrated their new expertise: innovations involving collective, cooperative and team work in multi-professional networking settings were among the things that were mentioned.

Nevertheless, it seems essential to note that the social democratic discourse still lives in the field of education. What is equally important is that this voice seems to be connected to professionals who are mostly cemented in their tenured posts and are very difficult to get rid of, regardless of the prevailing policy at the national or municipal level. The professional interests of these groups are, of course, well served by the narratives of more seriously ill children and degenerate families. Because of their strong position, special teachers, for example, may stand behind an integration and inclusion ideology at the school level. They might also tend to defend traditional and separate school and classroom forms of special education, referring here to the introduction of special teaching in comprehensive schools that is very flexible in its application.

THE PUPIL: RATIONAL CHOICE MAKERS AND INSOLVENT CLIENTS IN THE MARKETPLACE

In the curricular texts since 1994 each pupil is seen as an active individual whose world of experience forms different starting points for learning new things. There-

fore, the extent to which the teacher is able to direct learning depends on this individual history of pupil experience. It is emphasised that pupils may also proceed individually according to their own study programme. The aim should be towards their having a better and better chance to study the things they are actively interested in. It is also clearly stated that each teacher is responsible for developing the pupil's ability to make independent choices in a world with more freedom of choice and in a school system that is more and more flexible. It is emphasised that this should promote the ability to survive in the future in a world in which there is more and more uncertainty and where the individual is subjected to all kinds of choices and sudden changes. To sum up, the pupil constructed in the Finnish state educational discourse of the 1990s is a lone rider looking for a suitable niche in an uncertain world. This individual pupil sits alone, separated from his/her schoolmates, compared with other pupils through constant assessment and competition rather than through equality, fraternity and cooperation. (Simola, 2000; see also Koski & Nummenmaa, 1995)

Various interviewees at the state level emphasised the fact that the essential division between those who will succeed and those who will fail in the future will be a result of the choices made by those involved. Pupils and their families will need to have a clear vision, to be future-conscious and to have perseverance. Behind the successful student, or one who make the correct choices, is an active family who guided them. Those families who have the skills, capital and resources needed to play the school game and have a vision of what they want will succeed in terms of school. Since the choice now rests with the family, and later with the students themselves, one informant ironically said that the career plans of a child could now be made starting from day care. The same informant pointed out that families from the upper social strata were the most active users of free school choice.

All the material available for this study refers to hardening competition and strengthening divisions in Finnish society during the last decade. A strong discourse of 'vanishing parenthood' and 'degeneration of the family', strengthened by the deep economic depression of the 1990s, outlines the context in which the young are to find their routes towards adulthood. The gap between those dedicated to success and those bound to failure appears to be wider than before. On the one hand, there are the 'haves', pupils and their families willing and able to calculate, invest and choose, and, on the other hand the 'have-nots', pupils and their families having more pressing immediate concerns than being an education consumer (cf. Gewirtz *et al.*, 1995). On the extreme end of this continuum are the immigrant pupils, divided into categories according to the ease with which they integrate into Finnish society. These pupils may be characterised as invisible: no one speaks about them with ease, no one seems to know what to do with them and no one makes any positive references concerning their existence in the Finnish school system.

All this is well known in the international literature on educational choice and devolution. Another side of the parent choice coin is, of course, the opportunity given to some schools to choose their pupils. There is very little evidence suggesting that parental choice would *not* lead to some kind of 'cream skimming': 'schools seeking students who are "able", "gifted", "motivated and committed" and middle

class … [t]he growth of the 'girl-friendliness' of coeducation … favouring those clients who will bring the greatest return for the least investment …' (Whitty *et al.*, 1998, pp. 116–117). On the other hand, no school was eager to see in its intake those "less able" or having special education needs, especially emotional and behavioural difficulties, as well as children from working-class backgrounds and boys, unless they also have some of the more desirable attributes' (p. 117).

Proponents of the metaphor of the educational market place maintain silence on the fact that the market place is always created only for those possessing valid currency: people who are not able or willing to pay do not exist. This means that people who do not fit into the classification of the life-long learner are excluded, by definition, from this educational consumption. An *insolvent client* is no longer a client. In the market place, the individuals who do not meet the criteria of a constant thirst for 'education' and 'development', outlined first of all in the life-long learning discourse, are not consumers or clients, but rather thieves and beggars. They are undoubtedly part of the market place, but not those by and for whom it has been created. This leads us to the dominating narrative of family degeneration: finally, it is up to the numerous families that are no longer able to create a good enough 'learning history', a motivational basis or the right attitude for life-long learning. Thus, the school concentrating on the individual may also find itself in the trap of individualism: There are no resources for going beyond the limits of personal experiences and histories.

THE TEACHER: AN INDIVIDUAL-CENTRED LEARNING PROFESSIONAL IN A MASS INSTITUTION

The Finnish teacher constructed by the state educational discourse of the 1990s ought to be an omnipotent professional combining four dimensions in one and the same person: she/he should be a personal mentor, a truth seeking pastor, a visible score maker and a science-legitimate learning professional (Simola, 2000). The state-level actors described the tasks of the teacher as very demanding. They made it clear that the responsibility for educating the child, as opposed to merely teaching, has shifted, partly from the family to the school system in Finland. This was seen as the result of various social problems that are weakening the family's capability to give and possibility of giving full-time attention to child education. It was seen as necessary that the teacher was able to take on some of the parents' role too. With this shift of responsibility there is a need for teachers who can command authority and a yearning for those who consider their profession a calling.

Although the teachers were amazingly able and willing to use 'politically correct' expressions in the interviews, one cannot ignore the signs of exhaustion, frustration and pessimism. Notwithstanding the predominant consensus of progress, many interviewees continued their talk of change with a series of ambivalent thoughts: there had indeed been positive developments, but these have had their price and also reverse side. One of the strongest narratives here is the story of increasing pressure and a more hectic pace in teachers' work. Many interviewees see

this as the basic change of the 1990s. One reason for this was the moving of the planning workload from the national and local bureaucrats to the schools and teachers. Here was an inherent criticism that the focus of the teacher's work has moved from the 'real' work in the classroom, benefiting the pupils, to a kind of public performance. Another clear criticism concerned the constant flow of top-down reforms and demands to develop projects while the everyday work and grassroots action itself has not been valued or emphasised. School reforms indeed seem to veer towards steady work. There were also many interviewees who considered that the main innovations of the 1990s, related to the new school-based curriculum, were mainly lip service, quasi-innovations that had practically no effect on the everyday level of schooling. There was also strong criticism of and scepticism about the realisation and conception of teamwork and the call for 'real cooperation'.

In our material, both written and spoken, the teacher is constructed of two deeply contradictory elements. On the one hand, there is the omnipotent model teacher in the individualistic 'learning centre' and, on the other, the exhausted and burnt-out real teacher in the obligatory, examination-bound mass schooling. On the sunny side, they seem to be committed to the individualistic but egalitarian aims of the education policy. Here are also the most promising sources of professional self-identity and image, not to mention career advancement possibilities through embracing innovations and upgrading academic qualifications. On the darker side, the teachers are bound to everyday reality where masses of pupils are running through their obligatory schooling to be examined and given a pass to the gates of fully authorised adulthood and citizenship. The silent wisdoms of survival and power are much more vital here than the wishful and well-intentioned humanist vision of what the school ought to be.

It seems more than evident that a clearly unrealistic and over-ambitious load was put on the teachers' shoulders in the state educational discourse of the 1990s. What is essential here is that the teachers seem collectively to accept this task. When we asked them if some of the tasks given to the schools were impossible to fulfil, we received just a very few clear affirmative answers. This might be partly due to professional pride and self-image. There is some empirical evidence that teachers generally tend to accept the idea of reform as part of their professional self-identity, even if they are, at the same time, sceptical about the aims and principles of the innovations (Popkewitz, 1991). This acceptance may, at least in Finland, be partly due to the academic training they (especially primary school teachers) received as the price of their allegiance to the state in the political battle for comprehensive schooling during the 1960s and 1970s (cf. Rinne, 1988; Simola, 1995).

It has been claimed (Simola, 1995, 1998a,b, 2000) that since the 1970s school as a socio-historical, cultural and institutional context of education has disappeared from state educational discourse in Finland. It is this 'decontextualisation' in particular that has made it so easy for the powers that be to make promises and plans for individual-centred treatment and to speak about the school as an individualised 'learning centre'. This 'wishful rationalism' has led one reformer after another to overestimate the power of psychology and pedagogy-based innovations and to underestimate the power of continuity cemented in systems of time, space and

rituals, in a kind of 'grammar of schooling' (Rinne *et al.*, 1984; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

The material used in this study gives evidence of persistency in this silence on the socio-historical context of schooling. None of the education policy texts or interviews with politicians refers explicitly to the fact that all the pedagogical tasks and other obligations are to be realised in an institutional context that includes compulsion of the 'clientele', the mass character of the teaching and constant practices of sorting. As far as the issue at stake here is concerned, i.e. under this heading individualisation and in this chapter social exclusion and inclusion, these dimensions are not trivial at all. Thus it is fair to ask what might be the consequences and effects of this decontextualising silence on the individualisation of educational discourse and, further, on the discourse of social exclusion and inclusion.

There is also international evidence that educational restructuring following which the steering body and the implementation body are clearly separate has tended to create situations in which 'the teacher is increasingly an absent presence in the discourses of education policy, an object rather than a subject of discourse', as has been reported from Australia (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, p. 98) and the UK (Ball, 1994, p. 50). Some interviewees at the state level noted that the role of the teachers' trade union seems to have changed very radically during the period under discussion. While it has been considered to have a central role in educational policy at the national level in the past, its activities and significance have recently focused more and more on protecting teachers' interests at the local level.

TOWARDS A NEW SYSTEM OF REASON: ABDICATION OF THE EDUCATION STATE OR JUST SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITIES?

This final section of our paper concerns what happens when the discursive elements outlined above fall together. The questioning goes like this: what is the specific discursive formation like when the Finnish myths of competition, corporate managerialism, an educational clientele and social democracy *meet* rational choice makers and invisible clients (pupils) and individual-centred learning professionals in a mass institution (teachers)? Some of the essential silences mentioned above are also part of the game. Finally, there are, of course, many other contextual factors we must take into account while tracing the effects of this discursive formation characterised in the heading of this paper as a new system of reason in educational discourse. We venture to conclude that a historical shift of responsibilities in the national education system is taking place.

According to the international literature, the hard core of corporate managerialism is separation between those who conceptualise the policy (elite policy makers and interest groups) and those who execute or implement it ('operatives', i.e. teachers). The head offices tend to develop a tighter and narrower policy focus and an emphasis on strategic planning. What has been devolved to schools is the capacity to manage reduced budgets and 'self-manage' within the frameworks set by head office (see for example Smyth, 1993; Taylor *et al.*, 1997)

The late Finnish Secretary General of the Ministry of Education gives clear evidence for this in his platform booklet on the education policy of the 1990s (Hirvi, 1996, pp. 92 and 108). He crystallises the new result-oriented system as divided into two tiers: first, there is a 'steering unit' that states the goals and addresses the resources; second, there is a 'result unit' that 'produces the services and products'. In the 'result negotiations' between these two parties, 'resources will be distributed, action lines and evaluation will be agreed'. Hirvi then goes on to claim that '(d)etailed norms have been replaced by agreement … , the command structure and, finally, the old control and inspection have been replaced by discussions of goals and results' (Hirvi, 1996). It sounds simple and clear, but what is not problematised at all is the character of the negotiations: the steering unit seems to have all the power, while the result unit must finally yield to the agreement. This is so because, as Hirvi states later (p. 108), 'the (result) goals for education and the principles of resource distribution are set out at the national level'. Thus the steering unit speaks in the name of nationally stated goals and principles of resource distribution, while the role of the result unit tends to be limited to the exposition of how to realise the goals with the given resources.

This separation or dualism may lead to a situation, as has been reported in Australia, for example, where

> … [t]he reforms have been accompanied by talk of self-governing, self-managing or self-determining schools, but all within centrally determined policy frameworks and accountability requirements, as well as reduced resources. Such a situation possibly leaves central bureaucrats with power without responsibility and school 'managers' with responsibility without power. (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, p. 84)

It is exactly this kind of problem that has arisen recently (see for example Heikkinen & Lumijärvi, 1997; Möttönen, 1998) between the Finnish central state administration and regional and local units. The nature of the negotiations was the target of much criticism, as was the setting of objectives and assessment of whether these objectives had been achieved (Heikkinen & Lumijärvi, 1997). At the local level, the vast majority did not see the negotiations as a genuine situation, but rather as a kind of order (pp. 259 and 261).

One could then ask, and with reason, if there is any essential difference between the old top-down ordering and commanding *à la* 'management by norms' and the new, again, top-down ordering and commanding *à la* 'management by results'? Indeed there is, according to the international literature. One essential difference lies in conceptualisations such as 'shifting the blame down the line' and 'moving the responsibility'. (See, for example, Whitty *et al.*, 1998; Dale, 1989 and Smyth, 1993). There are various good reasons why governments seem to be so willing to shift responsibilities down to the grassroots level, to the 'managers'. The most obvious one is the pressure from the 'competition state' to reduce the cost of the public sector. Without exception, the interviewees in this research, at both state and school levels, seemed to believe in decreasing or, at best, maintaining the budget level for public education. It is no wonder, then, that one conclusion of the Finnish researchers on management by results in the public sector was that the nearer the

central administration, the more easily and favourably the result agreement system has been received and, in contrast, the nearer the organiser of the services, the bigger the problems (Heikkinen & Lumijärvi, 1997, p. 259).

Geoff Whitty and his colleagues (Whitty *et al.*, 1998, p. 4) argue that the market-driven and managerialist arrangements in public education and other public services that have been introduced in one form or another in various countries since the 1980s can be seen as new ways of tackling the problems of accumulation and legitimation facing the state in a situation where the traditional Keynesian welfare state is no longer deemed viable. According to Dale (1989), the state has a permanent set of problems that derive from the needs of capital. The restructuring of education can be seen as a state response to these shifting politico-economic demands in supporting capital accumulation, guaranteeing its continued expansion and legitimating the capitalist mode of production. In a context of rising unemployment, increasing gaps between the rich and the poor and growing difficulties in maintaining social cohesion and solidarity, it is not inconceivable that a market-driven education policy could be seen as a dismantling of responsibility by the state. It could also be seen as selective withdrawal from areas in which the state has difficulty in succeeding, such as equality of opportunities (see for example Smyth, 1993, p. 2).

We are not claiming that the Finnish government has withdrawn from the responsibility of education in general. On the contrary, a well-functioning and high quality educational system is seen, in the political rhetoric, as one of the main sources of national prosperity, success and welfare. There is no reason to be suspicious of the sincerity of the statement made by a NBE official when he assured the nation that the division between policy making and implementation has not meant

> … that the central government would have ceased to concern itself with the implementation of education, for the authorities still gather evaluative data on how the targets set to the educational system are being achieved. The system is run by revising national education policies when necessary, but also by various means that directly affect local-level operations. Such means of directly influencing local agents vary from one country to another; in Finland they are mainly based on steering by information. (Laukkanen, 1997, pp. 406–407)

What we are saying, however, is that some parts of education seem to be in danger in a similar way to remote post offices, small schools and unprofitable sleeping cars on Finnish railways. They are not viable when evaluated by simple economic indicators, i.e. effectiveness, efficiency and profitability, and they must go. By this we mean that there seems to be a new kind of rationality that is becoming more and more authoritative and extensive, more and more acceptable and taken for granted, a new system of reason indeed. In this discourse the consumerist notion of the right of individuals to be able to choose in an unconstrained market seems reasonable and demands for citizens' rights in education inconceivable.

The key to understanding the trend in educational policy, which still empha-

sises raising the new, human capital, is to be found in the breakthrough of the so-called theory of rational choice. Individual actors and individual and parental choice in education are seen as elements of the natural rationality of human activity. People make the educational choices that are most reasonable for them in the framework in which they must be made (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997, p. 275).

The prizes in this new educational policy in the 'Winner-Take-All-Society', which encourages competitiveness between individuals, will apparently accumulate more than ever at the top. The playing of the educational game may start to resemble the sports and entertainment industries, where the most important goal is the success of the top stars and key players. Huge numbers of individuals stepping out onto this kind of educational field are fighting for the glittering prizes, but only few will win them. The majority will be out of the running. This could easily result in an enormous waste of money, resources and time as masses of people go through longer educational tubes and tougher competition in labour markets and in life. There is no rainbow's end, only risk-prone, insecure labour markets and never-ending competition (Lauder & Hughes, 1999, pp. 24–25; cf. Frank & Cook, 1995).

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